

MEET THE LEADER

The voices of Oregon's nursery industry

TELL US ABOUT YOURSELF

I grew up on the 40-acre farm east of Gresham. My dad, Harry Park, bought the land in 1947 and grew various vegetables. After dabbling in rhododendrons and azaleas, he converted the nursery to B&B production by the mid-1960s. I quickly had a hand in helping with the work. As the third generation to grow up on a farming operation, I learned how to drive a tractor by the time I was 5.

After graduating from Oregon State University in 1977 — the year the Blazers won the championship — with a degree in horticulture, I returned to work on the family nursery. The business primarily focused on conifers at the time, and I eventually took over the business for my parents.

I met my wife Joy back in 1980 in Portland and were married two years later. It will be our 40th anniversary this August. Settling down, we purchased the home farm and bought some adjoining land. Today, Park's Nursery specializes in mature root-pruned plants.

Openings became available on the State Board of Agriculture, and I served two four-year terms in 1992 and 1996. Later on, I was elected three times to serve on the Metro Council from 1999–2011.

For the past 10 years, we have been in the process of “right sizing” the operation.

WHAT'S A GOAL YOU HAVE YET TO ACHIEVE?

I'm still trying to learn how to relax. I had neck surgery in 1997 and the neurosurgeon advised me to reduce the wear and tear on my body, or I'd be back on the table again — and the next time, there won't be enough left to fix. This was a game-changer for me. I had finished my service on the state board, and with words of encouragement from the then-mayor of Gresham, I ran and won an election for Metro Councilor in 1998. I became an advocate for long-term, well-coordinated infrastructure plans for the metropolitan area, talking particularly to those who make land-use planning decisions. I was elected again in 2006 and after my



Rod Park Owner

Park's Nursery
OAN member since 1986

OAN roles/positions:

- Young Nursery Person of the Year (1986)
- OAN President (1991)
- Political Awareness Award (1996)
- Pacific Coast Nurseryman Outstanding Service Award (1998)
- Clayton W. Hannon Distinguished Service Award (2006)
- Honorary Lifetime Membership (2019)
- Service positions on the OAN Awards, Convention, Finance, Government Relations, Nominating, and ONPAC committees

12-year-term-limit reached an end, I ran in an open primary for my senate district, which didn't pan out. However, being at Metro allowed me to find another purpose for my life, in addition to being a nurseryman. Hopefully, my efforts have benefited the region.

WHAT'S YOUR GUIDING PRINCIPLE?

Quality over quantity. It's been a business model that has served us well.

BEST BUSINESS DECISION

Retaining a good CPA (certified professional accountant) and following their

advice has been an excellent move for the nursery. For me, his financial insights led to knowing when to expand and when to diversify our assets.

HARDEST BUSINESS DECISION

In the fall of 2011, Joy fell ill with lymphoma cancer. Frankly, it was a diagnosis that she was not expected to survive. The threat to her health changed our perspective on what was important in life. Unfortunately, shortly after her recovery, my father and her mother both passed away. We decided to temper expansion plans for the business and opted not to buy additional land to expand the nursery's footprint. At this time, we've almost completed the downsizing of the company. We will be a 15-acre operation which will allow me to keep a hand in the nursery business but give us more time to travel and relax. That said, it was also one of the best personal decisions I have ever made, because my wife and I have been able to spend more time together.

WHO IS YOUR MOST SIGNIFICANT MENTOR?

Collectively, I would have to say the industry — as it is — is the greatest learning resource available. Every grower I've met with has a wealth of experience and a love for their work. It's a business community where nearly everyone is willing to talk about what they've tried and what's worked. One just needs to listen, filter, and then apply it to your own business.

BEST BUSINESS ADVICE:

Listen to yourself. It is better to be wrong from doing it your way and living with it, rather than suffer because you tried it someone else's way. You're the one who must make peace with your decisions.

WHAT DO YOU LOVE MOST ABOUT THE NURSERY INDUSTRY?

Every morning is a new challenge with its rewards.

WHAT IS YOUR GREATEST CHALLENGE?

It's difficult to resist the urge to



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expand and grow more plants just because the demand exists. However, I've learned how to manage my own expectations. I do what I can.

WHAT ARE YOU MOST PROUD OF?

I'm most proud of being able to give back to the industry as those before us did. That's why I spend my time and energy lobbying various government leaders, lending a helping hand to a colleague, sponsoring an OAN event or sharing helpful information with others. I'm willing to give back. There are people out there who did all this for us when we were younger, just so we could participate. I'm returning the favor.

INVOLVEMENT WITH OAN:

Since 1986, I've been active in OAN's advocacy efforts. My family farm is within

the city limits of Gresham and many government officials routinely make decisions that impact the whole business community. Whether you're there to comment about it or not, policymakers are moving forward with changes that affect most of us every year. It's essential to sit at the table to help elected leaders avoid making bad decisions.



IN YOUR OPINION, WHAT ARE THE MOST CRITICAL CHALLENGES FACING THE NURSERY INDUSTRY TODAY?

I see challenges as opportunities because overcoming a difficult problem means you have made progress in some way. When facing a labor shortage, upgrades for mechanization are an improvement. By retaining container water runoff — an environmental challenge — growers have reduced fertilizer costs and made more water available to grow more plants.

So, the real critical challenge is overcoming the mindset of people who do not have faith that the industry has the ability or commitment to find solutions on their own. Each generation of the nursery industry will face an issue and will make positive changes as they continue to grow. ☺

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