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A favorite 'holiday'

Growing up in a typical American household, we had all the usual holidays, such as New Year's Day, Easter, Independence Day, Thanksgiving and Christmas. We celebrated birthdays too, just like many of the rest.



Josh Zielinski
OAN PRESIDENT

But growing up in an Oregon nursery family, there was one more "holiday" — the Farwest Show.

As far back as I can remember, every year towards the end of August — usually in the middle of various farm crop harvests — we more or less dropped what we were doing and loaded a van full of plants, patio furniture, decks, pavers, Styrofoam pillars, booth displays, catalogs, and lots of other random things and went to the big city of Portland.

Once there, we set up our display and then invited in guests that ranged from total strangers to longtime friends. Some were literally family. It was, in essence, just like most other holidays: put out the decorations, let the people in, engage, have fun and celebrate the season.

This year's Farwest Show was special for us, as it was our 40th year in business. We changed up our display to mark the occasion with a "throwback" to our original booth display. For example, we incorporated lots of apple boxes. The nursery was built on what was primarily an orchard, so the boxes were readily available then — just as they are now, ironically.

No one can readily pinpoint the first year we were at the Farwest Show, but we're all sure it has been more than 30 years.

Lots of things have changed since then. After all, our business has continually grown throughout its existence. But for Alpha Nursery's entire "adult life," for lack of a better term, the Farwest Show has been a constant — just like those holidays we celebrate year after year.

While designing and building the new display prior to the show, I had to wonder why that was. Was all this effort really worth it?

Within minutes of the show starting on Wednesday afternoon, I was promptly reminded why being at Farwest is an invaluable investment.

Yes, we wrote orders. Those are really tangible reasons to be there.

But we did so much more than that: we expressed gratitude (in person!) to our visiting customers, several of whom have been stopping by the booth every year we have been there.

We met lots of new folks with interest in our products. That is always exciting.

We had face-to-face conversations, exchanged ideas and forged relationships that could change the shape of some parts of our business forever.

We had a lot of fun, too. It turns out nursery people are pretty good at that!

We learned a bit with speakers and experts in the house as well. I found the keynote from Ali Noorani, a national leader and D.C. insider on immigration law, to be very insightful and enlightening. I heard lots of others rave about seminars, especially the ones that piqued their personal interests and passions.

We've heard some people say trade shows are "dead." Farwest was definitely anything but. It was invigorating, and I can't stop thinking about going back again next year for more of the same — but likely with some new twists that will keep it as relevant as ever. ☺