

From little ones to leadership

The Oregon Association of Nurseries Convention is coming up at beautiful Brasada Ranch in Central Oregon.

Convention is our chance to bring the nursery and greenhouse family back together. Two years ago we went to gorgeous Maui (we will be back). Last year at Skamania Lodge, we enjoyed tree house hospitality suites and engaged in axe throwing! This gathering will make its own great memories. Come join the fun Friday–Saturday, October 27–28.

Family is the center of convention

The cornerstone of our industry is closely fixated on family. I've said that many times over the past 18 years I have served at the OAN.

When I started, my blonde girls were 4 and 6 and they were instantly welcomed into the fabric of nursery families. Now, one is a senior nursing school major at Washington State University and the other is a college graduate in education.

The care and love of the nursery community made them into the people they are.

There are many examples of yesterday's convention kids becoming today's OAN leaders. I've heard stories like Mark Bigej being a responsible caretaker for a young, and I'm assuming rambunctious, Kyle Fessler. There is a story when Tom Fessler was being sworn in as president, his newborn son Noah was handed to the Bigej family to look after.

In more recent years, teenage Bigeys, Stones, and Niemis took over the kids' programs at convention, taking care of the little ones of the Robinsons, Staehelys, Simnitts and a plethora of other grower families.

Today, family is just as important as ever. You can see that at other OAN gatherings too, including chapter Christmas parties, the Farwest Show, and a gathering of OAN leaders we held at the Tillamook Creamery in 2022.

Holiday spirit

The OAN Chapters do a phenomenal job of bringing out the joy of Christmas. Two chapters stand out for the purpose of this column: Mt. Hood and Clackamas.

The Mt. Hood Chapter gathering is a tradition that spans decades, embracing the wonder of children at Christmastime. Little ones growing up in that chapter include names like Ekstrom, Kinen, and Nelson who have risen to become leaders.

The Clackamas Chapter creates its own magic, with carolers and an appearance by Santa. So many of our association's leadership has sat on the lap of a Santa and I would be remiss if I didn't mention the Stones would watch carefully when the Simnitt family tree would go up. It was not Christmas until a Simnitt child cried on the lap of their relative (Jerry).

Christmas is a treasured opportunity to take stock of the blessings, and witness the holiday joy of young and old.

Farwest Show

The OAN continues moving forward with a board of directors that includes several sons and daughters of industry titans. They recall running around at the trade show and connecting with fellow families, collecting as much candy as a kid under 100 pounds could possibly eat.

The 50th anniversary of Farwest was no different, only the names have changed. It was amazing seeing Wayne and Amanda Staehely's crew run with Kyle and Mollie Fessler's kids around the trade show floor, using the OAN booth show as a home base. The sight of them jumping into the plane/motorcycle at Leonard Adams and going full Top Gun was quite something to witness.

A weekend in Tillamook

In spring 2022, the OAN Executive Committee held a retreat out in Tillamook to meet with the dairy industry and do some mutual planning.

First there was pizza and arcade night with all family members. It was a cocophony of sound, soda (for the kids) and suds (for the parents). With every game one could think of, quarters were flying out of parents pockets to satiate the frenetic desire to play, compete and achieve top scores.

Carolyn Rose, my Washington State Cougar, was there along with the likes of the Robinsons, Fesslers, Verhoevens, and Staehelys. The group did ice cream tasting and several of the crew were deemed "super tasters." It was awesome.



Jeff Stone
OAN EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Inclusion makes memories

Kase Meskers, 6, joined his father Tyler (Oregon Flowers) at an OAN open house where staff member Tana Klum prepared a plethora of elite sweets for everyone to share. Sugar was in full bloom.

Young Meskers was an easy mark to amuse and I would get permission from his father to get yet another cupcake. He was a polite eater and was not expecting me to jam the entire thing in my mouth to make him laugh. Tyler tells me that Kase still mentions that event and believes that EVERY event his dad goes to is just like he experienced.

Not so little anymore

This generation of leadership at the OAN has been shaped by ups and downs in the industry, the hard work and love for what they do, and the strong family connection between growers and the community they belong to.

This year, I would be remiss not to mention that we have a past president in Josh Robinson, a son of the industry, leaving the board. His contribution cannot be measured and I love this man like my own brother.

Amanda Staehely is our new president. Her father, Jerry, and her uncle, Jim, both served as presidents of the association. Amanda becomes only the seventh female president to serve the association. However, she is the first to be a daughter of a past president.

Because of the community and family connections this industry demonstrates on a daily basis, we are in excellent hands in 2023–24. ©

