



FOUNDED
1968

OWNERS

John Holmlund, Nathan Holmlund, Angie Holmlund

KNOWN FOR

Shade and flowering deciduous trees

PEOPLE

Vladimir Lomen, General Manager
Scott Field, Sales Manager
Mike Reihs, Production Manger
Terry Brown, Farmer at Large
Cooper Tucker

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It's a team effort that keeps John Holmlund Nursery humming: (from left) Production Manager Mike Reihs, owner Nate Holmlund, Sales Manager Scott Field, General Manager Vladimir Lomen, Cooper Tucker (John Holmlund's grandson), owner Angie Holmlund, and Farmer at Large Terry Brown. PHOTO BY VIC PANICHKUL

John Holmlund Nursery

BY VIC PANICHKUL

NESTLED ON A GENTLE, picturesque slope between Boring, Oregon and majestic Mount Hood, **John Holmlund Nursery** has built a solid reputation of exemplary customer service and quality shade and flowering deciduous trees.

The company's people-centric focus for customers as well as employees stems from a recognition that founder John Holmlund had a lot of help from others.

"My dad's focus has always been on people," second-generation co-owner Angie

Holmlund said. "Dad always said 'The spouting whale gets harpooned,'" meaning that you don't call attention to yourself because others made you who you were. "He recognizes the fact that there's a wide range of people that's made us the success that we are today."

Angie and her brother and co-owner, Nathan, are carrying on their dad's vision for the business with the help of a long-tenured team of managers as their father has taken a step back.

The business is known for its stability and



Since its establishment in 1968, the operation has grown to more than 600 acres. PHOTO COURTESY JOHN HOLMLUND NURSERY

for the quality of the products.

“We grow a quality product and provide great service to our customers,” Nathan said. “We have a lot of old established relationships.”

“We go beyond what customers expect from us,” Angie said. “Since I’ve come back (five years ago), I’ve made a point to get to know our customers. Many of our customers have stories about how Dad helped them.”

Angie recalled a story of how her dad arranged an affordable payment plan for a longtime customer who was in a cash crunch. “There’s a lot of depth in our relationships with our customers,” she said.

“I had a call from a customer who had problems with a product and it wasn’t the nursery’s fault,” said Sales Manager Scott Field. After talking with him about it, John decided to give the customer a \$20,000 credit for their order. “When I called the customer back, he couldn’t

believe it,” said Field.

“When customers have a problem and bring it to our attention, we take care of it,” General Manager Vladimir Lomen said. “We want to create customers for life.”

The longevity of the management staff also lends stability to the company.

“The managers here have a lot of experience — 30-40 years is not uncommon,” Angie said. “A lot of people have stayed because we have a really good working environment, and people enjoy working here. A lot of families work here together.”

Lomen has been with the company for 20 years and Field has been there 50 years. Production Manager Mike Reihls has been there 31 years and Terry Brown, the “farmer at large” who seems to handle everything in the fields, has been there for 40 years. Nathan was the GM from 1990 to 2005 when he left to start his own business.

“Some of our salesmen were originally customers,” said Angie.

Self-made, with help from others


After working with Daniel C. Hanna at Hanna Enterprises, a manufacturer of car-washing equipment, for 10 years, John Holmlund decided to strike it out on his own, but not without help from friends.

“I was used to thinking of dad as a self-made man, but really a lot of people contributed to his success,” Angie said. “He had a lot of help from people to break into the industry.”

One of Holmlund’s friends, Darrell Belcher at Powell Valley Nursery, encouraged him to plant trees. Holmlund took the advice.

Since its establishment in 1968, the operation has grown to more than 600 acres. It produces more than a million trees annually.

“Mom was planting trees when she was pregnant with me,” Nathan said.

“We had a two-acre field next to our 



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John Holmlund Nursery



John Holmlund Nursery now produces more than a million trees annually. PHOTO COURTESY JOHN HOLMLUND NURSERY

house that he first planted.”

In 1972 another friend, David Tillstrom, owner of Tillstrom Nursery, sold John his inventory and leased him his farm so that he could get the nursery started, Nathan said.

As the business got off its feet, Belcher mentored Holmlund and taught him farming practices. Belcher gave him access to his Tennessee customers to approach them with a different line of products, Nathan said.

In 1974, Robert Taylor, a mentor and friend, sold Holmlund 20 acres at a very favorable rate. He only had to make interest payments for the first year, Angie said.

A big boost came in 1987 when **McHutchison**, a horticultural distributor, wanted to expand their business and invested in John Holmlund Nursery. The investment allowed John to purchase the current property in Boring and grow to about 180 acres.

A successive string of purchases in subsequent years added to the operation.

In 1997, the old Moller's nursery was purchased and 80 acres in east Gresham, Oregon, was added. In 2000, another purchase added 350 acres in Molalla, Oregon.

The nursery also began innovating and changing.

In 1977 the company made a change from container-grown to field-grown material. “John saw a lot more opportunity and profit,” Field said.

“Container and ball and burlap was more of a local market and bare-root and field-grown was more of what East Coast customers were looking for,” Nathan said.

Now, the mix is 20 percent container-grown and the rest is field grown, Lomen said.

“In 1998, we started propagating our own plants,” said Production Manager Reihls. Now the nursery propagates 35-40 percent of the plants.

In 2002, they hired a software developer to help them come up with a computerized system for managing their inventory, allowing them to better manage their growth, GM Lomen said.

Then, in 2008, the recession hit and John consolidated the nursery to half its original size to stabilize the business and stay afloat. “He held the business together for all of us,” Angie said. “It's taken a long time to build the business back to what it is today.”

Staying ahead of changes

To keep growing, the business is trying to keep in step with trends and get ahead of them.

"We try to read the crystal ball the best we can," Field said. "We have to be open to where the market is going," Angie said. "We want to adapt."

"The needs of customers have changed," Field said. "More variety is what they're asking for, so we have to change and add more diversity in products."

"We still have our mainstays, but containerized production has allowed us to be able to broaden our offerings," Lomen said. "We have to be willing to take some risks with new products and to step out from what we've known."

"We have to be looking down the road 3-5 years. Everything we plant today won't be ready until at least 3 years down the road," Lomen added. "We may hit a home run, but we may not."

"Maintaining the culture and relationships also means that there will have to be others coming along the pipeline," Angie said.

It's why Angie was nicely surprised by her son Cooper Tucker, who expressed an interest a year ago to move to the Willamette Valley from Central Oregon and work in the family business.

"When I was younger, I came and worked at the nursery in the summertime. Back in my head I thought I'd end up back here one day," Tucker said. "I got to travel, and I missed my family, I missed my home, I missed being on the farm."

"Hopefully I'll be the third generation that gets to carry on the family farm when that time comes around."

Vladimir said he asked John Holmlund what changes he'd like to see for the future. "John said what he doesn't want to change is our focus on people, our customers and our employees." ☺

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