

MEET THE LEADER

The voices of Oregon's nursery industry



PHOTO BY VIC PANICHKUL

WHAT'S YOUR BACKGROUND?:

I have worked at **Eshraghi Nursery** for 17 years. Prior to that, I was a retail nursery manager and plant buyer for a landscaper in New Jersey. I graduated from the University of Vermont with a Bachelor of Science in plant and soil science.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE?

“Integrity is doing the right thing, even when no one is watching.” — C.S. Lewis

All leaders should aspire to the ethical integrity encapsulated in this quote. This sentiment, when approached with compassion, creates champions in the realm of leaders. Often, conventional leadership advises us to maintain a professional distance from folks we work with. I have heard that from many of my colleagues as well. But that is not me. My inclination to care deeply sets a different path. I firmly believe that empathy is a skill frequently undervalued in leadership. Admittedly, navigating complexities of employees' personal lives can be arduous. Introduce integrity and the principle to always do the right thing, even when it's hard, guides leaders to be very effective. >>

Christopher Lee

Manager

Eshraghi Nursery

OAN Member

Since 2007

2019-2022

Research Committee chair

2014-2022

Research Committee

2016-2019

Government Relations Committee

2010

Climate Friendly Nurseries project

Meet the Leader: Christopher Lee

GOAL YET TO BE ACHIEVED?

I have a goal to create a legacy of continuous improvement. That requires working with a motivated team that likes being the best at getting better. Celebrating this kind of ethos makes it contagious. However, making it stick often necessitates a shift in workplace culture. Making it stick will lend unending excellence. Making it stick is the legacy worth the effort.

BEST BUSINESS DECISION?

My best business decision was made my sophomore year at college. I decided to switch my major to plant and soil science. Little did I anticipate the remarkable career trajectory that followed. Soon after, I was selected as an intern at **Bailey Nurseries** in Yamhill, Oregon, for the summer of my junior year. It was here that I met my future wife, Elizabeth. It was also here that I knew an industry was aligned with my future. As chapters unfolded, it was evident that our paths would lead back to the Nursery State. We have now been in Oregon for 17 years. It's noteworthy that my oldest daughter, Bailey, is now 16.

GREATEST MISSED OPPORTUNITY?

I have always been dedicated to this specific career path. Selecting a singular missed opportunity is a challenge, as I am sure numerous possibilities have slipped away due to my career's single-mindedness and tunnel vision. Some of those external opportunities could have been more lucrative financially. However, I doubt that these opportunities would have been as rewarding. The commitment to my chosen path has provided professional fulfillment that extends beyond financial gains.

MOST SIGNIFICANT MENTOR?

My journey has been marked by three noteworthy individuals, as each of my employers have left an indelible mark:

Glenn Jacobsen of Jacobsen Landscape Design and Construction (Midland Park, New Jersey) stood for diligence and consistency. Consistent hard work is the foundational bedrock of leadership.

J. Clark Brisby from Hedgewick Gardens (Mahwah, New Jersey) gives value to being direct and fair. He embraced honest and transparent communication to vendors (especially growers) and customers. This is important for fostering professional respect and achieving success.

Linda Hockersmith-Eshraghi from Eshraghi Nursery (Hillsboro, Oregon) inspires by navigating the complexities of leadership with grace. Learning from her example, our company has navigated recessions, pandemics and some of the toughest weather events, all while providing customers with the value they deserve. Her resilience and insight have taught me to be open minded and adaptable to any variable.

BEST BUSINESS ADVICE?

Always do your best. Pursue your passion and commit to

becoming the absolute best in your chosen field. Observe and learn from others who excel in a similar field, and from those insights, become more proficient. But the journey does not end there. Surpass your benchmarks, keep embracing your passion, and keep bettering!

WHAT DO YOU LOVE MOST ABOUT THE INDUSTRY?

The dynamic nature of the industry is captivating. You can never just fall into dull routines. Nursery work makes you think, and I like that. Every year, month, week, and day unfolds something new and unique. Each challenge requires thoughtful consideration. The sense of accomplishment accompanying each triumph with our team is what we love. And, oh yeah, the people. I love the people in this business ... we all do ... they are the best ... you already know that.

WHAT IS YOUR GREATEST CHALLENGE?

Adapting to change remains my greatest challenge. While I appreciate consistency, I also relish the challenge. Establishing a set pattern for growing plants would be straightforward. However, there are no consistent routines here. The dynamic nature of our environment, both literal and economic, necessitates continual adjustments. Creating consistent crops amidst variable conditions keeps those synapses firing.

WHAT MOTIVATES YOU TO GO TO WORK EVERY DAY?

Continual improvement drives me out of bed each day. It is important to recognize that as I am present and engaged in the work, there are others doing the same thing. The collective desire to excel is motivating fuel. Working alongside like-minded colleagues fosters a shared commitment to excellence and the future.

WHAT ARE YOU MOST PROUD OF?

I take pride in following my dream. I had a dream of pursuing a career in horticulture and raising a family in the beautiful state of Oregon. I had a dream of being a part of something special. I have that in Oregon at Eshraghi Nursery. I hold my chin high while working with amazing folks growing quality plants for the best customers in the world.

WHAT ARE THE MOST CRITICAL CHALLENGES FACING THE NURSERY INDUSTRY TODAY?

The most critical challenges facing the industry today are most certainly political. The perennial environmental threats and a diminishing workforce are accustomed challenges. However, when these tests are compounded by misguided political decisions, the impact is a heavy harrow. Here in the fertile Willamette Valley, we tread the most productive and farmable land in the world. It's a cruel irony that political regulations can mitigate their potential. ☹️