

A gateway to the future

The annual spring meeting of the Nursery & Landscape Association Executives of North America (NLAE) provides tremendous value to the OAN and our sister associations across the states and provinces.

For two days, we gather and collaborate, problem solve, and build long-term relationships to serve our great industry.

The NLAE began in 1947. Oregon has hosted the event previously. This year we were in the Gateway City of St. Louis, Missouri.

A symbol of westward expansion

The Gateway Arch is the signature symbol of St. Louis. It highlights a city that provides quality barbecue, major sports venues, and the awe-inspiring Cathedral Basilica. To answer a question — yes, we went up inside the arch to the top. Built as a monument to the westward expansion of the United States and officially dedicated to “the American people,” the arch, commonly referred to as “The Gateway to the West,” is a National Historic Landmark.

Coming together

Stephanie Collins (formerly Weihrauch) of OAN and I represented Oregon. NLAE’s president this year is a dear friend and one of my favorite execs in the industry, Cassie Larson from the Minnesota Nursery and Landscape Association (MNLA).

A big focus was member engagement. Sessions led by Florida, New Jersey and Landscape Ontario provided an effective perspective paired with renowned keynote speaker Amanda Kaiser, who gave strategies for creating a thriving member community. The OAN is undergoing its own member engagement effort under the direction of OAN Marketing Director Beth Farmer and Marketing Coordinator Tess Chapman. I am excited to take some lessons learned at NLAE and plug it into our own efforts in 2024.

Many of the state associations are examining their revenue streams, including the OAN. Over a two-year period, the

OAN Board has pushed for a wholesale examination of how we pay for the highly regarded programs and services available to the membership. The OAN Revenue Restructuring Task Force, chaired by past president Todd Nelson (**Bountiful Farms**), will make recommendations to the membership at the annual convention in Salishan (November 15–16, 2024).

Andrew Bray, senior vice president of government relations and membership for the National Association of Landscape Professionals (NALP), outlined how they are differentiating between member types and crafting a scalable dues structure.

Wes Trochill of Effective Database Management took NLAE into the deep bowels of data management and provided 10 tips to make sense and streamline the myriad of information sources deployed within any trade association.

Inside the belly of the OAN, this is a big undertaking and is something the membership will see improvements over time. We are also in the midst of retooling and relaunching a significant upgrade in our online **NurseryGuide.com**. NLAE’s program will directly assist us in these efforts in 2024.

One industry, shared political issues

I was asked by NLAE to craft and moderate an international discussion on legislative and regulatory challenges. I was joined by Victor Santacruz (executive director of the Canadian Nursery and Landscape Association), Matt Mika (vice president of advocacy and government affairs of AmericanHort), and the above-mentioned Andrew Bray from NALP. I wanted to shorten the perceived gap between national and individual state/provinces political challenges and demonstrate that we have far more in common than we may think. It was a success.

National updates: CNLA, AmericanHort and NALP all provided their national perspectives. Labor, environmental issues, and business climate quickly rose to the top of the list. **Outcome:** When your national association requests a fly-in on issues, it is a call to action for engagement and it is important.

Many voices and common ground: In order to get everyone talking, I split the



Jeff Stone
OAN EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

groups into the West (ish) — we count Texas — led by Matt Mika; East (big time ish), led by Andrew Bray; and the provinces, led by Victor Santacruz. **The West:** Top Issues: labor and workforce (current, future flow, H2A and H2B, cost, understanding). Environmental and water regulation (state/federal; EPA; overreach, local regulations) and business climate (gas to electric policies emerging through the states, plastics, over restrictions). **The East:** Common themes included labor (cost and availability), invasive species and the regulatory environment, and real time impact of policies enacted of conversion of landscape and production agriculture equipment from gas to electric. **The Canadian Provinces:** Common concerns include labour (the spelling is for you my Canadian friends), environmental issues — such as snow, pest and diseases and water policy, and economic policy and inflation.

Outcome: Over the coming year, Oregon will work with NLAE to engage in specific policy discussions and work together on solutions.

Training and engagement: Oregon is known for its advocacy training program and will train any state or province that is willing. Telling your story is the most effective tool any member has at their disposal and NLAE will also provide tools toward media training for execs and members during 2024-25. **Outcome:** Become effective and make a difference through training.

As an industry we can take great solace that there is a huge effort to coordinate, collaborate and make a difference for the industry, from the national level to the smallest state or province. ☺