

MEET THE LEADER

The voices of Oregon's nursery industry



PHOTO BY VIC PANICHKUL

WHAT'S YOUR BACKGROUND?:

Instituto Tecnológico de Costa Rica, where I studied engineering in agriculture and business.

My first position in the industry was with Follages Tropicales, where I worked my way up to general manager of the company and worked there for 13 years. At Follages Tropicales we supplied tropical cuttings to the Netherlands and United States.

Then my family and I made a massive demographic change and moved to the United States – Oregon, to be exact.

My husband was offered a job opportunity that we could not say no to. And from there the rest is history for me. **Smith Gardens** was the first company I worked for once moving to the U.S. I started out as the selecting supervisor, was promoted to shipping manager, and finally now I am the site manager at the Aurora facility. I have always loved being part of a team, especially one focused on the horticulture industry, so joining the Smith Gardens team was definitely meant to be. >>

Andrea Avila Aragon

Site manager

Smith Gardens, Aurora facility

OAN Member

Since 2005

2016

Greenhouse Chapter Board Member

2016-2017, 2023-present

OAN Board of Directors

2017

Retail Chapter Board Member

Meet the Leader: Andrea Avila Aragon

GUIDING PRINCIPLE?

My guiding principle is focused on my team. How do I inspire people to focus on implementing and improving processes that are both safe and efficient that lead to the continued shipping of quality products to our customers?

GOAL YET TO BE ACHIEVED

As an avid runner and someone focused on health both mentally and physically, running a marathon is a challenge I have at the top of my list. Running 26.2 miles consecutively in a competitive environment is an opportunity for me to work on and build my mental and physical strengths. Distance runs are highly focused on mentality and training your brain that anything is possible. Pushing myself past boundaries is something that I strive for every day.

BEST BUSINESS DECISION

Moving to the United States. So, the context to this is that we had never thought of moving from Costa Rica. The “American dream” was truly not my dream. Working in the horticultural business in Costa Rica was a true challenge, and even though I enjoyed my professional field, I struggled every day to juggle work and my family life. The farm, and all farms for that matter in Costa Rica, were far away from where I lived and from where my kids went to school and from where my whole support system was — my parents who could help out. My commute was 2½ hours on the best day each way, so I basically got home when my kids were ready for bed or already asleep.

My husband’s commute in Costa Rica was equally bad. When he got the job offer to come work in Oregon, we chose it not thinking about my career but thinking about our personal life and having the chance to see our kids more often.

Then I came to Oregon and found Smith Gardens completely by chance. I applied to a supervisor position that I knew would get me in the door and then from there on Smith Gardens has given me the opportunity to learn and grow and get promoted to my current site manager position. It ended up being a very good business decision. My commute is 35-45 minutes and I get home to have dinner with my family every night. My kids are not home anymore but we have a strong relationship, in part because of those years when I was able to be with them.

HARDEST BUSINESS DECISION

Well, as you can probably guess, because I left my family and beautiful Costa Rica behind, that is also the hardest business decision I’ve had to make. I see my family in Costa Rica often. We travel there a couple of times each year and they also come to visit yearly. But my parents and my grandma are not getting any younger and it’s tough not being there for that part of their life, not to mention lifelong friendships that are now long-distance.

GREATEST MISSED OPPORTUNITY

I do not focus on missed opportunities. If an opportunity arises and I choose to pass, it is not a missed opportunity, it is a decision I have made to open up other opportunities and allow focus on my current opportunities.

MOST SIGNIFICANT MENTOR

My dad. He is a legend and a grower himself. He taught me everything I know about plants and that is the reason I have deep roots in the industry.

BEST BUSINESS ADVICE

Listen to your team, give them a chance to get more knowledge and education, and inspire them to have faith in themselves. Get them involved. Encourage their ideas, help them grow and then watch as your business grows. You’ll grow personally as well.

WHAT DO YOU LOVE MOST ABOUT THE NURSERY INDUSTRY?

The people, and by that, I mean, my team members. While I am their leader, I look to them for advice in all aspects of the business. Involving my team on all levels has a massive impact for me personally, as a manager, and how the facility functions as a whole.

WHAT IS YOUR GREATEST CHALLENGE?

Meeting crop deadlines. We all know that weather changes by the minute. I am constantly consulting and working with my team to mitigate these challenges and finding solutions when we are faced with unexpected temperature changes.

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

Simply put: Increased/and continually increasing costs of products and climate change. Increasing costs to run a business create a ripple effect across all facets of my facility. Climate change makes predicting finish dates for crops and ship dates a great challenge that we must work through every day.

WHAT MOTIVATES YOU TO GO TO WORK EVERY DAY?

My team and how every day is different. I look forward to working with everyone and discovering ways to do even better than yesterday.

WHAT ARE YOU MOST PROUD OF?

The work we do as a team, the ideas we bring to the table, and the continued improvements we implement to create a safe place to work. Watching my team grow and win every day is incredible. ☺