



# A lasting impact

Peter Gregg grew up not far from Iseli Nursery, where he now works as shipping manager. PHOTO BY VIC PANICHKUL

## Looking back, ONF scholarships made a big difference in launching the careers of winners

BY VIC PANICHKUL

**T**he Oregon Nurseries Foundation has given 588 scholarships since its beginning, totaling just over \$530,000. The scholarships have helped the recipients complete their education and start their careers.

*Digger* caught up with five former scholarship winners to see where they are now and how they're doing.

Their stories provide an inspiration for the industry and reinforce the value of the ONF and contributions to the foundation from members.

### **Peter Gregg** Shipping manager, Iseli Nursery

*Oregon State University, 1998*

Gregg grew up on a 5-acre farm just south of Iseli in Eagle Creek and was involved in FFA and showed pigs at the fair, so he was no stranger to agriculture. But it was his interest in Bonsai that ended up drawing his attention to horticulture.

When he was at OSU, he had good advisors and he asked one of them about tapping his passion in Bonsai for a career and the advisor recommended



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**Iseli Nursery**, which had a bonsai program at the time. So he applied for an internship there his senior year and got it. "I worked with Propagation Manager Paul Halladin as his assistant. I loved propagation and wanted to stay on." As it happened, his 3-month internship turned into a 9-month internship and in the end, he was offered a fulltime job after graduating.

"It paid to apply for scholarships as I had very little debt to manage after gaining my degrees," Gregg said.

Working in the industry pretty much reflected his expectations. "I love being outdoors so working in the cold, rain and heat ... it's what I expected. It's what I enjoyed about it. Even though some days now I work in the office, I still want to go out and touch the plants," he said.

For Gregg, giving back is important. "Stephanie [Collins] found me at the Farwest Pub Crawl one year and invited me to be on the ONF scholarship committee and I thought it was a great way to give back, so I said yes."

"We need more people in the green industry to fill the holes .... There's a whole

generation of nurserymen who are retiring."

For students and those new to the profession, Gregg said having a mentor is key. "Paul Halladin was a great mentor to me. Try to glean as much knowledge from them as you can."

"Things in the nursery business can turn around so quickly. Every year is different. The weather, the economy. Know that there will be ups and downs in the industry," Gregg said. "We thought Covid was going to deal a blow to the industry but it turned out to be the exact opposite. People stayed home and put their energy into their homes and gardens and the industry benefited from that."

Gregg has an eye towards being a production manager or general manager someday. He stays involved, giving talks at Clackamas Community College and OSU. He teaches a grafting class at OSU and a conifer cutting class at Clackamas.

### **Crystal Cady** CEO-designate, Northwest Nursery Buyer's Association

*Mount Hood Community College, 2004*  
*Oregon State University, 2006, 2013*

Crystal Cady got bitten by the nursery bug at an early age. Her family lived





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next to Drake's 7 Dees in the Gresham area. "After school I would go drop my backpack at the house and go walk over to the garden center and hang out," she said.

"I would go wander around and look at the plants or look at things in the gift shop or the koi pond. Sometimes I'd spend my money on a little plant or trinket from the gift shop. I would just volunteer to help box plants as the cashier would be ringing up the customer."

For years Jerry Gross, who was the manager at the time, said "The day you turned 15, you've got a job here," Cady said. "And sure enough, the day I turned 15, I had a paid job there."

Cady ended up attending Mount Hood Community College and then OSU for a bachelors and master's degree.

"Receiving an ONF scholarship helped me greatly because I worked full time," Cady said. "My folks didn't help with college. I moved out at a young age because I graduated high school early and my parents made too much money for me to qualify for any federal student aid."

"So I had to apply for a ton of scholarships. The scholarships really helped me and minimized my debt burden. It was a lot of work going to college full time and working full time," she said.

While in college, she started working for retailer **Garland Nursery** (Corvallis, Oregon). "I just loved plants and I really loved the people," she said. "That's when I really saw what the industry was about, because the Powells were really involved in the Oregon Association of Nurseries Retail Chapter. That's when it really solidified things for me and showed me this is how it can be in the industry if you get involved."

While in college, she also met and married her husband, who's also in the nursery industry.

"When I finished college, I had more free time so I put that free time and energy into volunteering for the association and seeing where it would take me and my career. And it's just organically led to where I am today."

While she was at Garland and started working on her master's degree, she launched a business of her own, Sunflower



Receiving an ONF scholarship helped Crystal Cady greatly because she worked fulltime to put herself through school. PHOTO COURTESY OF NORTHWEST NURSERY BUYERS ASSOCIATION



For Tatum Temple, who worked at nurseries during college, scholarships covered tuition, so all she had to do was pay for books. PHOTO BY VIC PANICKUL

Acres Farm and Garden, a retail nursery. She grew plants at the nursery but sold at farmers markets and several large plant sales. She ran the nursery for five years and it was starting to show a profit when

she got pregnant with her first child and decided to put her business on hold and focus on raising a family.

She left Garland and started working for the OAN part time on events and

education and the job quickly became full time. It wasn't long until Skagit Gardens noticed her and poached her from the OAN to work as an account rep. It was during her time at Skagit Gardens that she was visiting one of her accounts, who was also involved with the **Northwest Nursery Buyers Association**, and heard that the NNBA was looking for a new CEO. That's how she ended up as the CEO-designate of the association.

It's all about building that network of relationships. "There's no way I'd be here in my career if it wasn't for that."

"That's what leaders do, is they build a network. People will come to me and say, hey, Crystal, I'm looking for this type of information or connection or I'm looking to fill this position and I'll look to my network to help them. It's not just about me moving forward, it's about me moving other people forward too. Having that big network of trusted people that I've built strong relationships which helps all of us move forward and grow a stronger industry."

**Tatum Temple**  
**Manager, Ryan Creek Nursery**

*Clackamas Community College 2014-2016*

Tatum Temple grew up in Bend and got the nursery bug when working in high school at **Landsystems Nursery**. She learned about OAN and the ONF scholarships from Gary English, owner of Landsystems. "The people in the industry are what got me into it," Temple said. "I remember walking around Farwest Show with Gary and meeting all these people who were really encouraging."

Temple moved to the Willamette Valley and began studies at Clackamas Community College in the horticulture program and got a part-time job at **Evans Farms** in 2014 while taking classes. She took another part-time job at **Ryan Creek Nursery** in 2015. When she was finished with her studies and got an associate's degree in horticulture, she started working fulltime at Ryan Creek.

"Scholarships helped so much," Temple said. "It helped me get through school with the classes I really needed like plant ID and technical classes. The >>>

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Jimmy Reyes remembers following his father around at Palmer Creek Nursery when he was 5 years old. PHOTO BY VIC PANICHKUL

scholarships paid for tuition so the only thing I had to pay for was books.”

“Working in the nursery industry has been great. I wouldn’t trade it for anything. People in the industry really want to help me grow.”

When she started at Ryan Creek, she did potting and plant inventory and then grew into her role here. She got to learn everything. Now she’s nursery manager, responsible for inventory, entering and processing orders, everything but accounts payable.

While still working at Ryan Creek, she started her own nursery in 2018, Little Leaf Liners. She propagates ornamentals and perennials. “I was always fascinated by propagation, and I saw a market for it and just jumped in. I started it on 60 acres owned by my boyfriend’s parents.”

They eventually purchased the property, located in Beaver Creek near Oregon City.

Temple met her longtime boyfriend, Kyle Laminack, while they were at Clackamas Community College. They were studying horticulture together. “He works for an arborist now,” Temple said. “We joke that I grow ‘em, he cuts ‘em down, and we burn ‘em for firewood.”

Temple said her dream is to have her own fully established wholesale nursery.

### **Jimmy Reyes** Sales and inventory manager, Palmer Creek Nursery

*Oregon State University, 2022*

You could say that the nursery industry is in the blood of Jimmy Reyes. He grew up on the nursery helping his father. “I remember following my dad around at 5 years old and seeing what he was doing,” Reyes said.

In 1995, Reyes’ father, Rufino, started the nursery in the backyard of their suburban house with one small greenhouse and a big dream. Today, **Palmer Creek Nursery** is located on the outskirts of Dayton, Oregon with 16 acres.

“It’s a lot bigger now than it was then, and I have more responsibilities now, a lot more work,” he said. The nursery just purchased an additional 30 acres in Dayton.

At one point, when he was in high school, Reyes thought he wanted to be a pilot and looked into schools. “I actually still have my pilot’s license,” he said. “In my last year of high school, my dad was pushing me to work in sales and I discovered that I like it. I like working with people and I liked more responsibility.”

Reyes decided to attend Oregon State University and study agriculture. “I applied for scholarships and really appre-



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### **Join the ONF Committee**

The ONF Committee is comprised of OAN members who serve a five-year term, with their fifth year as chair. Each year, we look to add a new OAN member to the committee.

If you are interested in being on this committee, please contact Stephanie Collins at 503-582-2001 or [SCollins@OAN.org](mailto:SCollins@OAN.org).

For more information about the ONF, please visit [www.OAN.org/ONF](http://www.OAN.org/ONF).

ciated the ONF scholarships,” he said. “It really made a difference.”

Now, Reyes is primarily focused on customers and inventory, he’s the external face of the nursery. He’s always working the booth at Farwest and MANTS in Baltimore, Maryland.

“My dad will always be here ... be involved. But I think he wants to take a step back and let me run it when the time is right,” Reyes said.

“In five years I want to be growing 75–100 acres of nursery stock and take over the business,” he said.

### **Xavier Tacker** Fungal genetics intern, Oak Ridge National Laboratory National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship and GEM Consortium Graduate Research Fellowship, University of Florida

*Oregon State University 2024*

Xavier Tacker is a first-generation college student. He comes from a single parent household, crediting the adversity of his youth and resilience of his fam-



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The scholarships he received allowed Xavier Tacker to focus his time on research in the laboratory. PHOTO COURTESY OF XAVIER TACKER

ily for his determination to succeed as a student and scientist.

“I was afforded my first formal research experience entering my senior year in high school, through Portland-based “Apprenticeships in Science and Engineering (ASE)” investigating conifer seed germination techniques under the Bureau of Land Management,” Tacker said. “I was hooked!”

Tacker completed his degree from Oregon State University this year after studying the genetics of poplar and eucalyptus trees.

Now he is spending the summer as a research fellow at the Oak Ridge National Laboratory, the institution made famous by the Manhattan Project, a top-secret atomic weapons program. Now the institution is famous for its biotechnology research.

“I’m working on a project to improve plant yield and eradicate disease,” Tacker said.

The project focuses on the fungus *Sphaerulina musiva*, which attacks poplar trees. “I’m working to mutate a gene which we believe will reduce the ability of the fungus to attack trees,” Tacker said. “Now I’m working on the fungus that infects poplar instead of the poplar tree itself, which is exciting,” he said.

After he completes his research fellowship at Oak Ridge, he’ll be heading to the University of Florida as a dual Ph.D. fellow supported by the National Science Foundation and GEM Consortium. There, he will be working in the Institute of Food and Ag Sciences (IFAS).

“I’ll be using modern genomic tools to improve flavor quality in strawberries,” he said.

He hopes to develop a robust tool kit through his Ph.D. preparing him to tackle the climate crisis in his professional career focusing on plant improvement.

Tacker is thankful for the scholarships he received while at OSU, which allowed him to focus on research instead of working a job to pay for tuition.

“I’ve looked at it as hours that I don’t need to work at a minimum wage job to pay for school. It is an opportunity to continue being in the lab, learning skills that are directly related to the science I came to OSU pursuing,” he said.

“Without scholarships from ONF there would have been hundreds of hours that I would have worked. I had the blessing to put my heart and soul into research instead. I could focus on why I went to school to — gain skills.”



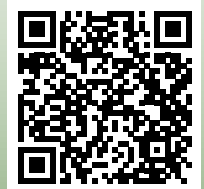
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The Oregon Nurseries Foundation (ONF) makes scholarships possible for students preparing for careers in horticulture and related fields. Awards can be sponsored by individuals and OAN chapters. Thanks to the generosity of donors, \$35,000 in scholarships were awarded in 2024. Your support and contributions help the students who will become the next generation of the green industry.

For more information on sponsoring a scholarship, contact Stephanie Collins at **SCollins@OAN.org** or 503-582-2001.



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“I was fortunate to graduate debt free through scholarships like ONF. Neither my fellowships nor current Ph.D. would have been attainable if I hadn’t been able to spend all that time in the lab. Scholarships funded the experiences I needed to get to the next level.” ☺

*Vic Panichkul is publications manager at the Oregon Association of Nurseries and managing editor and art director for Digger. Contact him at 503-582-2009 or **VPanichkul@OAN.org***