

A gathering of community



Jeff Stone
OAN EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Our nursery industry community is special. This will be my 19th year celebrating our annual gathering at License to Grow: The 2024 OAN Convention.

Mark Krautmann and Kathy LeCompte were easy choices to serve as honorary co-chairs on November 15–16 at Salishan Coastal Lodge in Gleneden Beach.

Changing of the guard

At convention we celebrate the year that was, and peek of what is ahead for your association. We take care of some association business, and we recognize a plethora of individuals who have distinguished themselves in service to our industry.

It is bittersweet to bid adieu to board members exiting the stage, while welcoming a new cohort of servant leadership that will take us into 2025 and beyond. The members voted and I am excited to welcome Sam Pohlschneider, Jason Burns, Vladimir Lomen, and Noah Fessler to the OAN Board of Directors.

A farewell for their service

Joe Dula, Jay Sanders and Todd Nelson are concluding their service to the board. I must say this board has been visionary. It challenged old assumptions of what the industry is and what it should be, and helped guide the association through the COVID pandemic.

Not all heroes wear capes, but Joe and Jay have a servant leadership that is humble and impactful. Thank you. There is not enough ink to talk about my dear friend Todd. He is a strong leader who made everyone around him better — most of all me.

Charting the future

We are blessed to have a talented and dynamic board that puts industry before their own company self-interest. Our returning lineup of board members, each representing an industry segment, includes: Patrick Peterson, Dave Daniel, Blake Nelson, Sam Barkley, Andrea Avila Aragon, and the curtain call for Gary English.

Your leadership is a strong group: President Ben Verhoeven, President Elect Patrick Newton, Vice President Darcy Ruef, Treasurer Jesse Nelson, Secretary Chris Robinson, and Past President Amanda Staehely. Tyler Meskers is moving up to the Executive Committee as the Member-at-Large.

Ben Verhoeven will be an excellent president. He is inclusive and makes sure everyone's voice is heard. I am excited to see his gifts bloom during his term.

When I think of Amanda Staehely and her time as president, I admit I mist up. Nobody has carried the mantle of leadership, business challenges and family commitment like her.

The industry and the OAN are strong

Convention is a place where the family talks about family/industry business. The state of the association is strong — financially, programmatically, politically and looking to engage a greater portion of our membership to enhance the many benefits of our industry partnerships.

This year's convention meeting agenda includes the conclusion of a two-year member discussion, survey outreach, and board preferences on the recommendation of the Revenue Restructuring Task Force, chaired by Todd Nelson. Two issues have made it through the decision-making process involving category expansions for both growers and associated members.

The rapid pace of regulatory changes in the employment and policy arenas require a plain-spoken breakdown of what these changes will mean to members in 2025. We have the perfect expert in Pete Hicks, attorney with Jordan Ramis P.C.. 2025 is an enormous challenge and opportunity for OAN's legislative agenda.

We are going on offense in 2025 during the Oregon Legislative Session. The OAN's top priority, fixing the agricultural overtime law, was filed by State Rep. Ricki Ruiz (D-Gresham), a member of the House BIPOC caucus. State Rep. Mark Owens (R-Crane) has put in the association's policy on making water transfers more accessible to the industry. Lastly, the OAN wishes to exempt all green goods from the commercial activities tax (CAT). This bill was filed by State Rep. E. Werner

Reschke (R-Klamath Falls). The OAN's final priority item, providing adequate funding for the Oregon Department of Agriculture's Japanese Beetle Program, will be done through the budget process.

We have leaders that have risen in the ranks at the state and national level, and I could not be prouder of the commitment to our industry. Leigh Geschwill (is the chair of the Horticultural Research Institute and is bringing our state and the West's perspective to funding priorities for research needs of the industry.

Josh Zielinski is completing his first term on the Oregon Department of Agriculture Board of Directors. Having a nursery voice on this board is critical and the OAN is seeking that Josh be reappointed for his second and final term.

And after a long drought, the OAN once again has a member on the AmericanHort Board of Directors. Past president and industry titan Tom Fessler is serving his first year on the national board. We will hear from these leaders as they share their experiences.

Raise a toast and celebrate

The association has a lot of positives to report this November, and we are excited to share them with you. But with the good, there are the challenges, and I will be urging us to talk about the substantial challenges barreling down on the industry. Together, we will work together and succeed. See you at Salishan. ☺