

MEET THE LEADER

The voices of Oregon's nursery industry



PHOTO BY VIC PANICHKUL

Vladimir Lomen

General manager

*John Holmlund Nursery,
Boring, Oregon*

OAN member

Since 1976

2024-present

Board of Directors

2024-present

Government Relations
Committee

WHAT IS YOUR BACKGROUND?

I was born in Yugoslavia and emigrated to the United States in 1974. Grew up in Duarte, Southern California and graduated from the University of California Los Angeles with a bachelor's of science in biology and Reserve Officer Training Corps in 1990. United States Army officer from 1990–1995. Co-owned a mortgage finance company with my brothers from 1995–2003. Married my wife Lisa in 1996 and we have three kids ages 27, 21, and 18. Moved to Oregon in January of 2003 and started working for John Holmlund Nursery in February 2003. We attend Good Shepherd Community Church in Boring, Oregon.

WHAT'S YOUR GUIDING PRINCIPLE?

“Choose for yourselves today whom you

will serve ... as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.” (Joshua 24:15) As a Christian, my guidance comes from the Word of God seeking, by the grace of God, to be obedient to its directives.

WHAT'S A GOAL YET TO BE ACHIEVED?

As a kid growing up and into my college years, I spent a good number of summers back in Yugoslavia. I really want to visit my homeland with my wife and kids so they can see where/how their backwoods, simple, and at times, too cheap husband/dad came from.

WHAT WAS YOUR BEST BUSINESS DECISION?

Participating in the EAGL (Executive



Meet the Leader

Academy for Growth and Leadership) class for nurseries because it caused me to dive deep into analyzing the nursery in multiple aspects to drive better value, profit, and reputation for JHN. The class gave me tools I needed to better understand our business and industry in order to help me make JHN even more successful and properly plan for the future.

WHAT WAS YOUR HARDEST DECISION?

Spending marketing dollars to get the most from it because marketing, in my experience, doesn't tend to correlate to immediate or exact results. Lots of research, analysis and planning lead to the best marketing decisions. In our world, spending marketing dollars in regions where we have the best opportunity for return and growth is what guides our decisions.

WHAT WAS YOUR GREATEST MISSED OPPORTUNITY?

Not going to U.S. Army Ranger School during my time on active duty.

WHO WAS YOUR MOST SIGNIFICANT MENTOR?

I've not had a single mentor, but have had several folks over the last 40 years that have impacted my life. Some in ROTC, several on active duty, a fair amount in my working career, and a good handful in the 45 years of my Christian walk/life, including my dad.

WHAT'S YOUR BEST BUSINESS ADVICE?

Treat every dollar spent like it's coming out of your own pocket. This basically means to me to think, plan and spend like this is my personal business that I want to make as efficient and profitable as I can. Everything has a cost to it and if I/we aren't careful and prudent with our spending decisions on every expenditure, things will go downhill real fast.

WHAT DO YOU LOVE MOST ABOUT THE INDUSTRY?

The friendly open approach all nurseries have toward one another including competitors. Whether it's in our neighborhood in Boring or across the country and

Canada, we have great relationships within the nursery industry that have proven to be helpful year after year with advice, ideas and even sharing of materials/tangibles. Additionally, we learn from one another's processes and "lessons learned." This is not common in other industries.

WHAT IS YOUR GREATEST CHALLENGE?

Taking a farm industry niche into modern ways of business while maintaining profitability. Conducting business today is different than it was yesterday, and it will be different tomorrow. The biological processes involved in growing plants hasn't changed, although we always learn more about those processes and how we can maximize healthy growth while controlling costs. What has changed noticeably over the last couple of decades is "business" itself which includes types and varieties of inputs, costs of everything, regulation, labor availability, and of course technology. The nursery industry is a "niche" within agriculture and has its own peculiarities that have high and even additional costs which if not controlled and leveraged will make profitability difficult.

WHAT ARE THE MOST CRITICAL CHALLENGES FACING THE INDUSTRY TODAY?

Young/new people entering the horticultural industry with a plan/desire to pursue it as a career. From my research and many discussions across the country, young people that are showing any interest in horticulture in the college level are predomi-

nantly not entering production nurseries but rather pursuing other interests. We need young people to become the next mid- and upper-level management, including owners.

Cost of labor outpacing ability for nurseries to keep up through profits, and automation not existing yet to supplement the labor at hand. As we have noticed in the last 4–6 years the cost of labor has increased faster than useful automation and technology has been developed that could be used to supplement processes that manual labor normally does.

Regulations restricting or diminishing profitability. Regardless of what the regulation is, by far the vast majority come at a cost to the business that cannot be passed on the customer. The math is simple, cost that isn't recovered in price equals less profit.

WHAT MOTIVATES YOU TO GO TO WORK EVERY DAY?

To work on, progress and bring to completion the ideas, plans and projects that we started. Nothing is more encouraging and enticing about my work than seeing the group of folks at John Holmlund Nursery working together to accomplish the plans that result in achieved goals we have set. In the memorable words of Colonel Hannibal Smith of the "A Team" TV show, "I love it when a plan comes together!"

WHAT ARE YOU MOST PROUD OF?

That Lisa and I have raised three awesome kids that believe in and follow Jesus Christ. ☺



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