

MEET THE LEADER

The voices of Oregon's nursery industry



PHOTO BY VIC PANICHKUL

WHAT'S YOUR BACKGROUND?

I grew up my early years in Texas, where I played outdoors every day I could. I flipped over every rock in our yard and developed an interest in insects at an early age.

My family moved a couple of times, and I learned quickly how to make friends at new schools. I never let go of my outdoors interest and was lucky to live in Southern California, then Central Florida, where I could continue to spend time outside with sports or friends.

My first job punching a time clock was at a garden center in Ohio. It was the perfect environment for a kid that couldn't sit still and was willing to help any customer that had their hands full. I then worked summers in high school for Kern Nursery, planting bare root shade trees, and operating any piece of farm equipment I was allowed to. There was no task I wouldn't do, but I asked a lot of questions to learn the reasons why we did those tasks.

When asked by the guidance counselor at school what I wanted to study in college, I went straight for the horticulture program at the local land grant university. It was at the Ohio State University that I met my life partner Hillary in an entomology class. We were both majoring in horticulture, and I switched my minor from Spanish to entomology after realizing the increasing impact of pests in our industry.

Propagating woody plant material became a passion and I knew it could >>

Patrick Peterson

**Nursery and greenhouse
crop consultant**

Simplex Turf and Horticulture

OAN member

Since 2000

2023-present

OAN Board of Directors

2019

Research Committee Chair

2015-2016, 2023-2024

Research Committee



**OREGON
ASSOCIATION OF
NURSERIES™**

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be a career. **John Holmlund Nursery** had just built a state-of-the-art greenhouse and was the perfect place for me to start my Oregon career. We built a robust propagation department, and I quickly involved myself in any pest control seminar or plant propagation group.

Through the International Plant Propagators' Society (IPPS), I networked with fellow growers from almost every single operation in the area. IPPS introduced me to all of my next career opportunities. I worked at John Holmlund Nursery for five years, then moved over to the High Forest Farm at **J. Frank Schmidt & Son Co.** for two years.

My first technical sales role as a pest control advisor was at **Marion Ag Services Inc.**, where I worked for 12 years. I then moved to a chemical manufacturer's area representative role for Bayer, working five years as they re-entered the ornamental market, covering 16 states. I had always wanted to work some in the golf market in addition to the ornamental market, so I moved over to the other German chemical company, **BASF**, for a role that covered more products but fewer states.

I worked for BASF until a major family event caused me to consider traveling less, and I now work just in Oregon and Washington for the **Simplot Turf and Horticulture** division based out of Hubbard as a nursery and greenhouse crop consultant.

WHAT'S YOUR GUIDING PRINCIPLE?

Treat all people with respect and fairness, regardless of what their job role is. Some of my favorite customers look a little rough around the edges and are perfectly content working in the field to get the job done as equals to anyone on their staff.

WHAT'S A GOAL YET TO BE ACHIEVED?

Visit all of the National Parks in the U.S. There is so much beauty in the natural history and geology of the United States. I have explored some amazingly remote parts in 33 of the 50 states.

WHAT'S WAS YOUR BEST BUSINESS DECISION?

Setting roots in Oregon to both live and work. The Willamette Valley is an extremely rich agricultural production area, with dream soils, clean water access, and an ideal climate. This area attracts all types of people, and my business has been building relationships with the growers that choose to produce horticultural crops here.

WHAT WAS YOUR HARDEST BUSINESS DECISION?

Leaving the stable and supportive work environment of nursery production to pursue a role as a crop consultant. I had very little knowledge of what was expected of me until I learned how many growers appreciate solid horticultural advice and fair access to the tools needed to achieve success.

WHAT WAS YOUR GREATEST MISSED OPPORTUNITY?

Working in the nursery industry of New Zealand when fresh out of college. In my 30s, I traveled to the North Island, inspired by the invitation of fellow IPPS members and consulting horticulturalist couple, Donald and Hilary McHort. I saw an environment that could have taught me a lot as a young propagator and now know that the experience with their plant palette and production practices are valuable knowledge when consulting in the Pacific Northwest.

WHO WAS YOUR MOST SIGNIFICANT MENTOR?

For nursery production, Mike Reihls showed me how a smart and fair production manager should set goals for employees. For consulting, George Bear showed me the power of sharing with customers how products work, allowing them to make an informed purchase. Amongst peers, Chris Ames showed me how to represent the best virtues of a true Oregon nursery professional. In business, John Hockett showed me what building a business from the ground up looks like.

WHAT'S YOUR BEST BUSINESS ADVICE?

In every job role, be engaged in the process and stay informed of what defines success.

WHAT DO YOU LOVE MOST ABOUT THE NURSERY INDUSTRY?

I like the people, so many amazing diverse people, but I love the plants. I love the humanitarian aspect of horticulture, knowing that plants we cultivate will outlive us and help create critical green infrastructure for both current and future generations.

WHAT IS YOUR GREATEST CHALLENGE?

What is your greatest challenge? Spreading myself thin. There are a lot of great nursery people that I want to work with but only so many hours in the day.

WHAT ARE THE MOST CRITICAL CHALLENGES FACING THE INDUSTRY TODAY?

The rising costs of producing ornamental plants coupled with the decrease in available skilled labor. The introduction of new exotic pests, often accidentally spread by the uninformed public.

WHAT MOTIVATES YOU TO GO TO WORK EVERY DAY?

I get up every morning seeking to learn something new that day. If I can help anyone make an informed decision, then that day is a good day.

WHAT ARE YOU MOST PROUD OF?

In the work environment, a grower once asked me to help with their fertilizer program. After a full review of their practices from irrigation through to pest control, we came up with a moderate overhaul of their production program. That next growing season was one of their best, full of healthy plants and less stress from chasing problems. On a personal level, I have inspired my niece to pursue a similar career working in the green industry. ☺