

On the receiving end

Communication with the destination will help plants arrive without disruption

Carl Michael with Mainland Floral unloads his truck at Al's Garden & Home in Sherwood, Oregon. PHOTO BY VIC PANICKUL

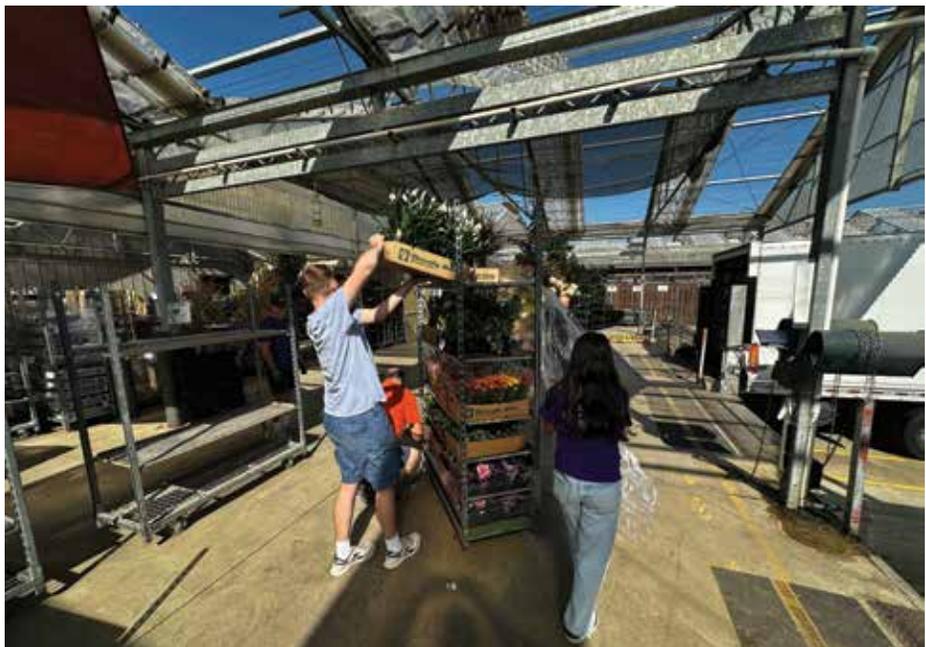
BY MITCH LIES

Keeping to schedules is a key element to meeting customer needs in the complex world of nursery shipping. And often the receivers, the independent garden centers, wholesale nurseries, landscapers and others, play a critical function in keeping schedules on track.

Joel Mandel, West Coast operations manager for **Northland Express Transport** in Portland, Oregon, said one of his first steps after getting an order is always to call the receiver.

“We will call right away once we have an order in hand to verify a couple of things with the receivers,” he said. “We’re asking to confirm their address, what their receiving hours are and if there are any special directions into their facilities.”

“We are also checking to see if the driver is going to be unloading at a dock or just a parking lot,” Mandel said. >>



Counter clockwise from left: Carl Michael, Ben Kaufman and Stephanie Avila unload plants from a delivery rack at the loading dock at Al's Garden & Home in Sherwood. PHOTO BY VIC PANICKUL

On the receiving end



Kendall Swaneveld unloads plants from a delivery truck using a forklift at Al's Garden & Home in Sherwood. PHOTO BY VIC PANICHKUL

“And if it is a parking lot, do they have equipment such as a forklift or a pallet jack ready to go. And we are coordinating the delivery time to give them an idea of when to expect the driver, and also to know the optimal hours for them to accept a delivery. If it's an independent garden center, for example, you don't want to interfere with their busy times, especially if it's just a parking lot that they (offload in).”

Matt Frederick, logistics coordinator with **K&M Distribution** in Rogue River, Oregon, said in cases where a delivery is scheduled early in the morning, he'll ask if the receiving location is near a truck stop where a driver can spend the night.

And he will check if any logistics have changed since the last time he talked to the receiver: Some receivers start working earlier in the day in the heat of summer, for example, and quit earlier in the day. That's the kind of information that can keep trucks on schedule.

John Miller, freight broker for **Rosewoods Transportation** out of Washougal, Washington, said that he will ask receivers if there are any unusual circumstances a driver should be aware of, such as road closures due to construction or other information that can help a driver get in and out of a facility quickly.

Often, Miller said, an experienced driver who has delivered to the same site

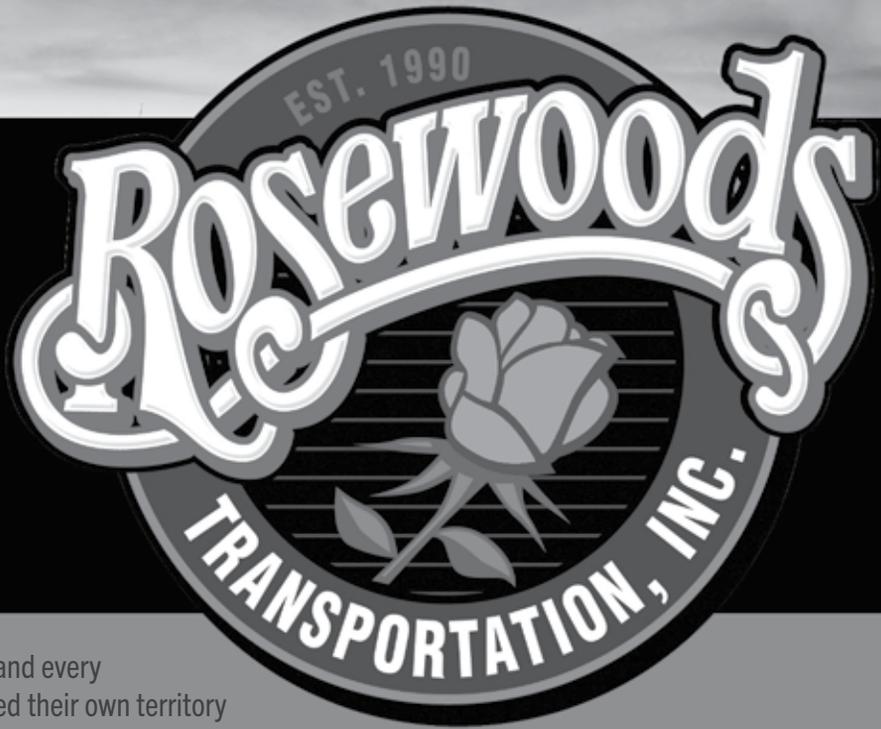
year after year will be operating on autopilot. “They might not look on Google Maps until they're literally heading there on their next stop.” At that point, it may be difficult for a driver to reroute in the case of construction.

Mandel will also ask a receiver if there are any impediments to getting in and out of a receiving station.

“We ask if there is a gate involved, and if so, is there a lock for that gate and is there a combination for that lock that we can provide the driver? Any number of those things is what we're checking on in an initial phone call with the receiver,” Mandel said. “And then we're updating our notes and our systems so that we have that available»

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On the receiving end

so we can make it a little bit easier the next time we deliver to the company.”

Receivers can help

Miller said he believes the responsibility is on him to ask the right questions of a receiver and relay that information to the driver. But, he said receivers can help ensure their needs are met by providing information upfront, by letting shippers know of any unusual circumstances surrounding the shipment and informing them of any preferred hours of delivery.

“The receiver needs to tell somebody what they’re wanting,” Miller said, “and then the shipper can pass that along to us. And it’s extra helpful when the shipper is able to pass that information along to the driver during the loading process. That way it’s coming straight from the horse’s mouth, so to speak, and they’re not relying on me to pass that information along.”



Clockwise from bottom, Portland Nursery's Juan Andres Manuel and Jay Hutchison help Schiedler Family Nursery's driver Dennis Hagenauer unload a delivery of plants at the Stark St. location. PHOTO BY VIC PANICKUL



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In general, receivers are easy to work with, according to Miller. And in general, nursery shipments come off without a hitch. Problems can arise, however, when communications break down.

“The worst-case scenario would be if no one tells the driver what needs to be done and the driver picks up the load and just shows up unannounced,” Miller said. “Then there might not be a crew there to unload them. Maybe they’re not open or maybe they can’t take you at that particular time, and the driver is going to have to sit and wait until they’re ready for you. And the driver might have multiple deliveries to make that day, but then everyone else that is expecting that day is going to have to sit and wait until the next day, as well.

“It’s not just the receiver or the driver that gets negatively affected in that,” Miller said. “It affects potentially the shippers and the other customers on that truck.”

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— John Miller
FREIGHT BROKER
Rosewoods Transportation

Communication is key

The key to ensuring deliveries run smoothly, according to brokers, is regular communication, starting from the time a shipper receives an order and continuing until a shipment arrives at the receiving station.

Frederick said he will give an approximate time of delivery in his first contact with a receiver and keep them abreast of any in-transit issues as the load gets closer.

Having that information can be critical, particularly for wholesale nurseries that move crews from an operation to a loading dock to load a truck and for commercial landscape crews that depend on a shipment to keep busy.

“The biggest difficulty is with the labor,” Frederick said. “If you have an eight-man crew sitting around for two, three, four hours and nobody’s gotten a hold of you to let you know that a delivery is delayed, then you’re pretty much burning daylight and wasting man hours.”

Frederick said that K&M Distribution sends drivers tracking links to their phones which they activate, enabling receivers to track their location, helping eliminate scenarios where crews are waiting for a delivery or where a driver arrives at a dock and no one is there to help unload. “We get the receiver’s



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On the receiving end

email addresses and then we'll send them a tracking link so they can see the truck in motion," he said. "And then we'll call daily and update each customer as per how the in-transit is going."

In most cases, according to Miller, receivers expect to get a call informing them of an estimated time of arrival at a minimum of 24 to 48 hours ahead of a delivery. "That way, they're ready," he said. "They know you're coming. They can make sure there's a crew there."

Big box stores are more particular, Mandel said, often preferring to schedule precise delivery times well in advance. "They are very appointment sensitive," he said. "We have to get actually scheduled delivery appointments, making sure we have piece counts and purchase order numbers from the shippers so that we could schedule those delivery appointments."

Communication preferences

Freight brokers said they also like to know a receiver's preference for communicating. Some prefer text messaging, others prefer phone calls, still others prefer communicating by email.

"We know whether receivers prefer a phone call, a text or an email, who to contact. We know their cell phone numbers," Miller said. "And we need to have that type of thing. It's not what it used to be, as far as the trucking business goes. There is a lot more communication required."

It also helps to know how often a receiver prefers to be contacted, Miller said. Some don't like to be bothered with regular updates. Others prefer that.

Jon Karsseboom, owner of retail nursery **The Garden Corner** in Tualatin, Oregon, said that he generally is able to receive trucks whenever he is open. "We believe that when the shipper sends it, we

"Generally the drivers will call and say, 'Hey, I'm 30 minutes out' or 'I'm an hour out.' And we appreciate that. They check in so then we can get all prepped."

— **Jon Karsseboom**

OWNER

The Garden Corner

should be ready to catch it," he said. "We usually have someone here who knows how to drive a forklift, and rarely has there been an occasion where a truck is here and we can't unload it."

Still, Karsseboom said he appreciates getting text messages or phone calls when a driver is nearby. "Generally the drivers will call and say, 'Hey, I'm 30 minutes out' or 'I'm an hour out,'" he said. "And we appreciate that. They check in so then we can get all prepped."

One issue that receivers should be aware of, according to Mandel, is to document any issues with a load before signing a bill of lading.

"Generally, if everything goes well, a receiver is just signing off on a bill of lading," Mandel said. "But there is always the potential of damaged goods, and with live goods, it could be frozen, it could be that branches got broken. It could be that it got too hot. So, it is really important to notate any discrepancies on bills of lading."

Years ago, before cell phones, text messaging and the like, it was more common for delivery issues to crop up in the complex world of nursery shipping, according to Miller. With the communication tools available today, even with traffic jams and mechanical failures, brokers and shippers are able to provide receivers up to the minute updates on when a shipment is arriving.

And garden centers, wholesale nurseries, shippers and freight brokers are better off for it. ☺

Mitch Lies is a freelance writer covering agricultural issues based in Salem Oregon. He can be reached at MitchLies@Comcast.net



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