

## 2025-2026 EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

|   |  |
|---|--|
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| <b>Andrea Avila-Aragon</b><br>MEMBER AT LARGE | Smith Gardens<br>23150 Boones Ferry Road. N.E.,<br>Aurora, OR 97002-9461<br>Andrea.Avila-Aragon@<br>SmithGardens.com<br>503-678-5373 |

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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| <b>Patrick Peterson</b><br>ASSOCIATE MEMBER       | Simplot Turf & Horticulture<br>Patrick.Peterson@Simplot.com<br>541-214-5802   |
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# The importance of the NexGen-eration

**The nursery industry has never been short on hard work, long hours, or people willing to get their hands dirty.**

What we are short on these days is something just as important: clear succession plans. Too many good operations are one retirement, illness, or burnout away from uncertainty. That's why the next generation matters so much right now.

In Oregon, we're fortunate to have a young group of professionals stepping up and taking ownership of the future. They've organized themselves into a group called NexGen, and recently I had the chance to attend their annual meeting at Langdon Farms. Walking into that room was a breath of fresh air. Not because everything was perfect or polished, but because it was full of energy, curiosity, and people who actually want to be here.

There were 30-40 young nursery professionals in attendance, with about 150 people on the email list overall. The average age hovered in the mid 20s, with a few folks in their 40s or older sprinkled in. That mix matters. It shows that this isn't just a youth club — it's a bridge. A place where experience and new ideas can meet without ego getting in the way.

What impressed me most was the fact that these young people are making time for each other. In an industry where spring doesn't wait, weather doesn't cooperate, and labor is always tight, carving out space to connect is no small thing. That tells me they're serious. They're not just showing up for a meal and a drink. They're showing up because they see a future worth investing in.

For years, we've talked about succession planning like it's something that happens naturally. The truth is, it doesn't. It takes intention. It takes mentorship. It takes creating environments where younger employees feel welcome, heard, and challenged — not just told how things have always been done. Groups like NexGen help fill that gap. They give young professionals a sense of belonging



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and a network to lean on as they grow into leadership roles.

Social connections are critical. Relationships are the backbone of this industry. Whether it's between growers and customers, employers and employees, or parents and kids trying to figure out how to pass the torch, trust is built face-to-face. A group focused on the future creates those connections early, before people drift away to other industries that seem easier or more predictable.

The nursery industry in Oregon has a strong history, thanks in part to organizations like the Oregon Association of Nurseries. But history alone won't carry us forward. The next generation will. They'll bring new ideas, new technology, and new ways of thinking — while still respecting the grit and work ethic that built this business in the first place.

If you're reading this and thinking about the future of your own operation, here's a simple step: get involved. If you have a son, daughter, employee, or young manager who's hungry to grow in this industry, encourage them to plug in. And if you would like to attend a NexGen social event or learn more about upcoming gatherings, contact NexGen at [NexGenHort@gmail.com](mailto:NexGenHort@gmail.com). The future of our industry won't build itself. It starts with showing up. ©