



A greener start

ONF scholarships help recipients launch their career in horticulture

Tyler Beasley got hooked on horticulture through a summer job at a local independent greenhouse and learned about the Oregon Nurseries Foundation scholarships through *Digger* magazine. PHOTO COURTESY OF TYLER BEASLEY

BY VIC PANICKUL

America can't be prosperous without young people showing the initiative to learn, grow and enhance agricultural production.

That's why the Oregon Nurseries Foundation (ONF) rewards students for working towards their goals with scholarships. Each year, we profile several former scholarship recipients to provide *Digger* readers with their personal and unique stories of success. If those stories are any indication, then the future of our green industry is very bright.

Tyler Beasley

Horticulture instructor, Spokane Community College.

Spokane Community College, 2009 AAS in Greenhouse/Nursery Management; OSU, 2019 BS in Ornamental Horticulture.

Tyler Beasley didn't grow up on a farm. It wasn't until he was in college that

he developed an interest in horticulture.

"While working on my associate of arts degree, I picked up a summer job at a local independent greenhouse," Beasley said. "When I witnessed the process of greenhouse production and took on more growing roles, the owners noticed my strong interest. She recommended that I pursue an Associate of Applied Science in Greenhouse/Nursery Management at Spokane Community College. The first quarter in the program was my 'ah-ha! moment' when I realized that there is a science to production and an entire industry that revolves around plants."

At that time, he also picked up another part-time position as a nurseryman at another local nursery and became obsessed with trees and shrubs. "Michael Dirr's writings in *Manual of Woody Landscape Plants* became my daily reading. My original copy was utilized so much, it now remains in pieces," he said. »



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Parker Guy (pictured with his son Miles, 3) was fortunate enough to work at other nurseries outside of Oregon and bring back ideas to make his nursery more successful. PHOTO COURTESY OF PARKER GUY



High school teacher Jaimee Brentano teaches a variety of subjects such as animal science, plant science, vet science, introduction to agriculture courses and agricultural leadership. PHOTO COURTESY OF JAIMEE BRENTANO

Beasley learned about the ONF scholarships by reading *Digger* magazine.

"It was a publication that I subscribed to as a horticulture student and continued reading it while I was managing greenhouses," he said.

Beasley didn't receive any encouragement to apply, but was working full-time and trying to start a family. "I did not want any student debt, so I only took the amount of quarterly courses that I could afford along with scholarships," he said. "I graduated with zero student debt!"

After graduating from Oregon State University, he continued to manage the Spokane Community College greenhouses.

"I was completely happy as a grower," Beasley said. "It was then later down the road that the former instructor was leaving his position to move closer to family. I was offered the position as an interim. After the first quarter, I knew that sharing my years of growing experience was what I needed to do. I still miss the

full-time growing responsibilities, but working directly with students and their diverse career goals is also extremely fulfilling."

If he had one piece of advice for students, it would be this. "Passion for any subject is just as important as knowledge. Some of the best lessons I've learned involved hands-on, in-the-field, work experience," Beasley said. "Textbooks, and references are a great tool, but having the discipline and motivation, to take action, goes a long way!"

"If, I was allowed to offer another piece of advice, it would be networking! Put yourself out there and make a name for yourself!"

Parker Guy

Part owner Guy & Sons Nursery
Colorado State University, Fort Collins, 2010 BS
Horticulture with an emphasis in Business
Management and a minor in Business
Administration

As a kid, Parker Guy enjoyed being outside. "It was always fascinating to

watch something grow from nothing into something," he said.

Guy's father, Kevin Guy, spent more than 50 years in horticulture. "I was fortunate enough to learn from some of the most influential people the Oregon nursery industry has seen," he said.

Guy can't remember exactly how old he was when he knew he would go into horticulture and join the family business. "I can't remember how old I was, but I was young," he said. "The people in our industry and how genuine they all were and still are cemented my decision to make this industry my professional career. The idea was to always come back to the family business after college. I was fortunate enough to be able to work for other nurseries outside of Oregon and bring back different ideas to help make our business more successful."

Guy & Sons Nursery in Gaston, Oregon, is a longtime OAN member. Guy

said he became aware of the ONF scholarship from *Digger* magazine. “My parents encouraged me to apply for any financial help that I could get,” he said. “After graduation, I came back home to work at the family business. I think I have gotten to where I am now by constantly learning, treating people with the respect that they deserve and being willing to change.”

Guy’s advice to those in college now is to focus on relationships. “We are a small industry in the scheme of things; relationships mean everything!”

Jaimee Brentano

9-12th grade teacher, Mountain View High School, Bend, Oregon

Oregon State University, 2015, B.S. in agricultural science with a minor in leadership in 2015; 2016, M.S. in Agricultural Education.

Jaimee Brentano is no stranger to agriculture. She grew up on the farm in St. Paul, Oregon, where her family owns Brentano Farms Inc. and **Brentano’s Tree Farm**. “Our farm is a diversified crop farm, but the tree farm produces wholesale nursery stock,” Brentano said. “In high school I worked for both the farm and tree farm, getting hands-on experience in the industry.

“I’ve always taken great pride in my family’s direct involvement in agriculture, and also was heavily involved in my high school’s agriculture/FFA program,” Brentano said. “I got to be involved in the harvesting of crops, maintenance of tree growth, and greenhouse plant propagation/production.”

These experiences helped her develop an interest in learning more about the agriculture industry and she’d always had a stronger interest in the plant sector.

Brentano was researching agricultural scholarship opportunities when her uncle, Pete Brentano, who had served in OAN leadership positions, mentioned the Oregon Nursery Foundation scholarships to her.

“My parents were big advocates of applying to scholarships, and were especially good at helping me seek out scholarships for women pursuing a career in the agriculture industry,” she said. “Because of this, I »

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Growing up Mark Bigej always knew that working at Al's Garden & Home was what he wanted to do. Being in the family business was all he knew and he never wanted to do anything else. PHOTO BY VIC PANICKUL

graduated college with very little debt, so I try to apply that same form of encouragement to my students each year in helping them find scholarships for their postsecondary goals — including ONF scholarships!”

“Receiving the scholarship made it so that I could put my focus on my academic experience rather than worry about the financial aspects of college. I enjoyed the opportunities I got to not only to learn about agriculture at OSU, but also become involved in the many clubs OSU has to offer. Having time for these activities helped me built a network within the agricultural community that I still am a part of today.”

“I was applying for teaching jobs while finishing up my master’s degree, and was hired at Mountain View High School in Bend in July of 2016. So ... I went straight into teaching after I graduated,” Brentano said.

She teaches a variety of subjects for 9-12th graders such as animal science, plant science, vet science, introduction to agricul-

ture courses and agricultural leadership.

Brentano’s advice to college students is to take advantage of all the opportunities available in college. “You never know when it might teach you a new skill, [help you] meet new people, or just create memories. I always tell kids to stop being in such a hurry to grow up. Being a student has so many built-in activities that are harder to come by when you’re navigating adult life. So have fun and go out of your comfort zone while you can!”

Mark Bigej

Co-owner and chief of operations, Al's Garden & Home

Oregon State University, 1994, BS in Horticulture

As a child, **Al's Garden & Home** co-owner and Chief of Operations Mark Bigej loved going to work with his father, Jack.

“Dad always kept all of us kids very involved in the business,” he said. “I loved going to work with Dad. He took us into

the store frequently where we always got to see our grandparents. Either Grandma or Grandpa was always there.”

“Dad always found jobs for us, too, so there was always work to be done and the ability to earn money. We learned at a young age how to run the cash register, sort fruit, sweep floors, weed the nursery and set plants down in straight rows. Dad also started a small container yard at home for Mom and us kids to grow 1–3 gallons. I’ll just say we never lacked for something to do!”

“Growing up I always knew that was what I wanted to do. Being in the family business was all I knew and I never wanted to do anything else. I remember taking a survey in class as a freshman in high school that was supposed to suggest a possible career path for you based on your answers. I answered the questions trying to get the survey to suggest I should be a nurseryman. I think it suggested I should be a garbage man, so not the result

I was looking for, but I already knew what I wanted to do.”

“Dad was very involved in the Oregon Association of Nurseries when I was in high school and preparing for college, so I was lucky enough to be aware of the scholarships and knew to apply,” Bigej said.

As if that wasn’t enough, his dad handed him the application. “Dad said fill this out.”

“In order to pay for college, Mom and Dad started ‘The Little Big E Nursery’ which was a small can yard with my Mom, my three sisters and I being the entirety of the workforce,” Bigej said. “The sole purpose of this nursery was for us kids to earn enough money to pay for college. With us having to earn our college tuition, every scholarship and aid opportunity helped immensely.”

The scholarship and his classes confirmed his path for the nursery industry. “My favorite classes in college were my

horticulture classes. Courses like plant ID, greenhouse management, plug production and research with professors all confirmed my career choice was the right one.”

“Following in my Dad’s footsteps and giving back to the nursery industry, and the OAN specifically, is very rewarding,” Bigej said. “I have learned, and continue to learn, so much from people within the industry. Our business wouldn’t be the place it is without the guidance and support of the great people of the OAN.”

If someone was to ask Bigej what one piece of advice he would have, “I would say to take every opportunity to be involved at your school,” he said. “Whether it’s activity groups, leadership, intermural sports, faith groups, or interest clubs, be active. School is about a lot more than what you learn in classes. The experiences you have, people you meet and relationships you build all have a

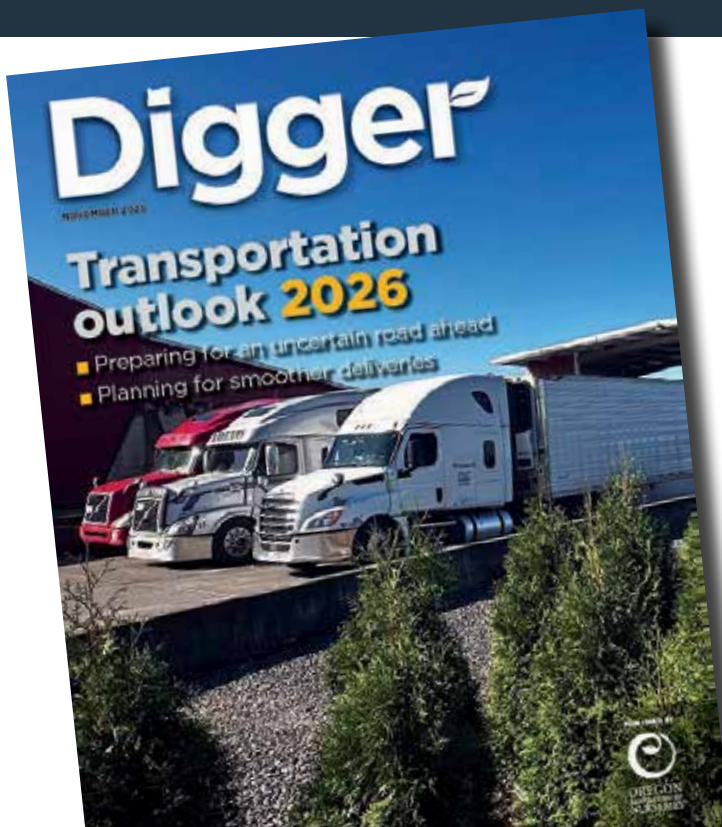
huge impact on forming who you are and will be for the rest of your life.”

When his dad Jack passed away a few years ago, the family endowed a scholarship in his name.

“Establishing a scholarship in honor of Dad was a very easy decision,” Bigej said. “Dad always had a passion for this industry and the people in it. Dad also loved helping people. He was a true entrepreneur at heart and loved to help other people pursue their dreams, take risks and succeed. We saw a scholarship as a way for Dad’s legacy of caring and sharing with the industry to continue.” ☺

Vic Panichkul is publications manager at the Oregon Association of Nurseries and managing editor and art director for Digger. Contact him at 503-582-2009 or VPanichkul@OAN.org.

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