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A year of challenges but also successes

As the countdown to Christmas is here, it is always nice to take a step back and look at the year behind us, as well as the year ahead.



Darcy Ruef

You can't look at 2026 without looking at what happened in 2025. The Oregon economy was headed in the direction of a recession. It was a difficult year for families. Food was expensive, electricity went up, insurance costs rose, and both health care and housing were more expensive.

As a result, more of us based our spending decisions on needs, rather than wants.

Housing and business construction are main drivers of nursery sales. With interest rates staying high, and housing costs rising higher than ever, we have seen a slowdown in the housing market. This in turn affects nursery sales.

As an Oregon business in 2026, my business (**Al's Garden & Home**) started looking at efficiencies in tasks and using tools to make our employees' jobs easier.

As a grower-retailer, we renewed our customer focus. Our typical customers have nice houses, but with small yards. We asked ourselves important strategic questions: What will our new customers come to our stores looking for? What is the trend or style they will like? How are we going to adapt our business to fit their needs?

But despite the economic challenges, not all of 2026 was bad. We also need to look at what we accomplished as the Oregon Association of Nurseries. We successfully, on several fronts, defended an important and economically vital industry.

As of the most recent year tallied, Oregon booked $1.3 billion in nursery sales annually. Some 75% of our material is shipped to other states, meaning we bring close to $1 billion in revenue back to the Oregon economy each year.

Taking it further, we employ 10,423 workers each year. Our businesses provide $370,077 yearly (give or take) for industry-funded research.

Did you know that our plants provide clean water, clean air, increased property values, stress reduction, crime prevention, improved public safety, better human health and better neighborhoods?

Research has shown that our products do all of that, and we are friends and colleagues on top of it. This year's Convention, held last month at Sunriver, only helped further the feeling of community.

The awards were all well-earned and celebrated. The announcements have been made, and are covered starting on Page 9 of this issue, but I think the awards deserve another mention.

Among my favorite were the Honorary Life memberships. Listening to all they've done is amazing. Congratulations to David and Kristin VanHoose, Pete and Wendy Brentano and Jerry and Roberta Simnitt! (I'm quite sure none of them are old enough for this award!)

A special award, The Clayton W. Hannon Distinguished Service Award, went to Patrick Newton for fighting for us on the Japanese beetle from day one of his presidency.

Bill Patterson took home the OAN Outstanding Service Award, the Emerging Leader Award went to Elizabeth Brentano, and the Distinguished Member of the Horticultural Allied Trades Award went to the folks at Marion Ag Service Inc. Thank you for all you do!

Merry Christmas, Happy New Year and many blessings to you and your families. In the January issue of Digger, we can talk about what 2027 will bring!

Darcy Ruef