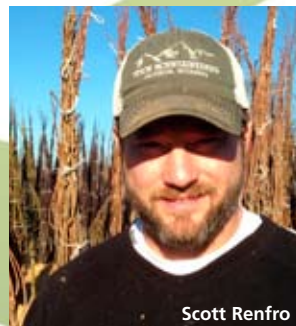


A new crop of leaders

These young guns of Oregon's nursery industry represent the future



Some are carrying on the family business. Others are starting first-generation nurseries from the ground up. Regardless of how they began, these future leaders of Oregon's nursery industry are proving that they've got the vision and ambition it takes not to just survive, but thrive. We asked them to answer some questions so we could better understand their perspectives on the industry. Here are their replies. ►

ANTHONY KINEN
29, owner/manager,
Kinen's Big & Phat
Special Plants,
Gresham, Oregon



Why did you choose a career in the nursery industry?

I am more of an accidental nurseryman. My background is in international business and marketing. My father Norbert Kinen passed in 2011. I decided to take over the nursery. Thus far, it has been quite the learning experience.

What could the nursery industry do today to better prepare for conditions and opportunities five years from now?

I think the next five years are going to be busy for the nursery industry. As America continues to pull out of the recession and new construction con-

tinues to grow, the demand for quality nursery stock of all kinds will increase. Because no one has created a way to get a plant to market overnight, we need to focus on being prepared for an increase in demand for plant material.

What does leadership mean to you, and why is it important in guiding the nursery industry forward?

Leadership is always looking forward for opportunity, weighing the possibilities of all paths to determine the best plan of action, and having the right people in the right places.

A good leader needs to possess the ability to pick up after they fail, learn from failure, and continue to the end goal. For Oregon's nursery industry, we all need to be leaders in innovation, and we need to keep people interested in trees.

Who have your mentors been in the nursery industry and what did they teach you?

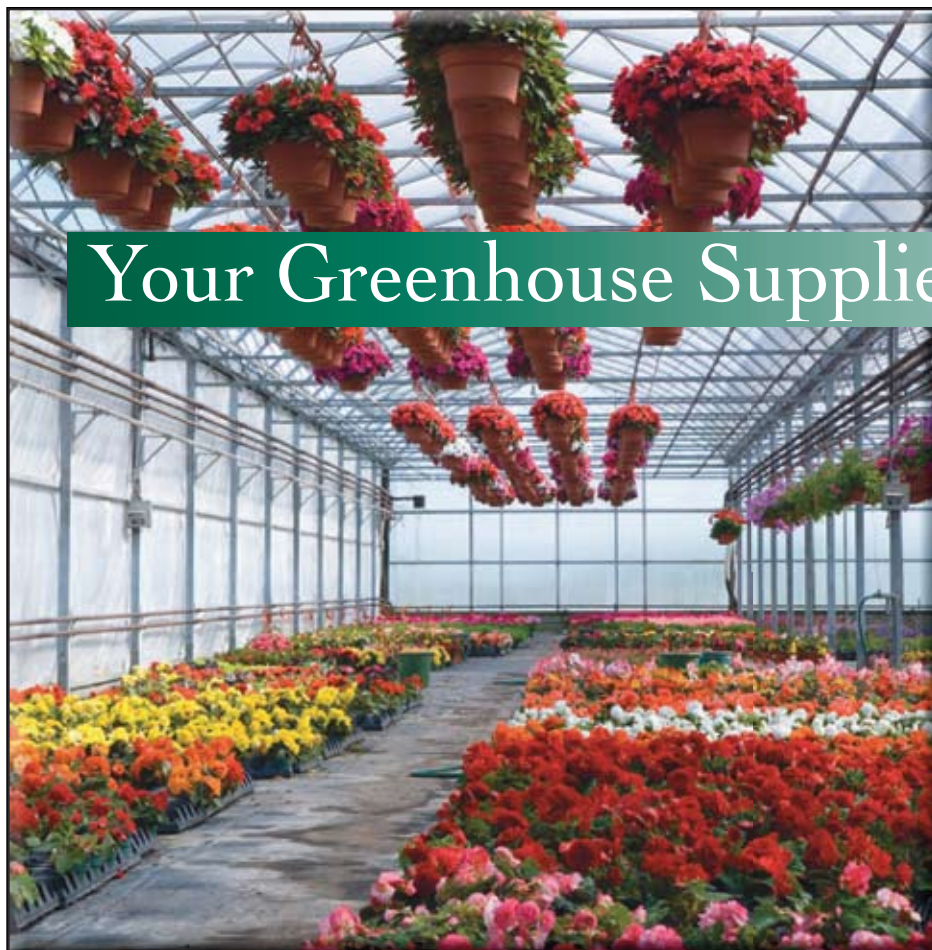
My customers. Many are willing to take some extra time and do some teaching on the side.

BEN VERHOEVEN
30, owner/president/
general manager,
Peoria Gardens Inc.,
Albany, Oregon



How are you helping to change the nursery industry for the better?

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What is the most important lesson you have learned in the last two years?

The last two years have shown me the importance of balancing thinking ahead with thinking on your feet.

What could the nursery industry do today to better prepare for conditions and opportunities five years from now?

Social media is important. Websites are important. Technology is important, and certainly to be embraced. But if we, as an industry, get caught up obsessing or competing with the latest gadget or way to reach a consumer, we might miss an opportunity to present a contrast to the ever-busy world. Much like the slow food movement, maybe there should be a slow gardening movement. Take a break from your phone, and plant something.

What is the most satisfying part of your job as a nursery professional?

The plants we grow here at Peoria Gardens provide good Oregon jobs for our employees as well as good health for our gardeners and their communities. What could be better?



CHRIS ROBINSON
30, manager,
Robinson Nursery,
McMinnville, Oregon

Why did you choose a career in the nursery industry?

For as long as I can remember, I have always wanted to work in the nursery industry. When my brother and I were younger and all the kids were playing cowboys and Indians, Josh and I were playing nursery workers.

I started working at the nursery the summer before high school and began working half-days by my senior year. I decided that I didn't want to attend college and went straight into the nursery. A few years in, my dad told me that if I ever wanted to manage the company I would need to get a business degree, so I got my degree at Linfield College. ►

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Kathy LeCompte

Kathy LeCompte,
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OAN Past President, 2008



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What is the most important lesson you have learned in the past two years?

To make sure that you are always nurturing the culture of your company. In order to make great things happen in your company, you must first make sure that your company's culture is healthy and thriving. If you can make this happen, anything is possible.

Also, make sure that you are meeting, if not exceeding, the expectations of every stakeholder in your company — employees, customers, vendors and competitors.

What does leadership mean to you, and why is it important in guiding the nursery industry forward?

Leadership is creating a vision. Without it, we are lost at sea. I have learned there is a difference between managing and leading. Leaders inspire their employees to bring life to the vision.

Who have your mentors been in the nursery industry and what did they teach you?

My greatest mentor is my father. He has taught me that it is possible to be stern and compassionate at the same time. He has also taught me the importance of going through your day with intention and keen observation.



SCOTT RENFRO
37, nursery sales
agronomist, Wilbur-Ellis,
Woodburn, Oregon

What is the most important lesson you have learned in the last two years?

Don't let operational decisions override horticulture science or basic plant physiology. The two should be in a constant state of parity, but horticulture

should always triumph. If you're under pressure to rush plants to market, you can't possibly guarantee quality. Plants shouldn't be forced to a size or shape that is unnatural to the species. The top may be beautiful but it'll deteriorate in harsher conditions. If the roots are acclimated to a broader temperature range, you will produce a more resilient plant with a high survival rate.

The other lesson I have learned is to not only grow plants but, more importantly, grow people. To be a good manager, it is important to grow the people around you with the same dedication and nurture as you would grow the plants you are producing.

What could the nursery industry do today to better prepare for conditions and opportunities five years from now?

We have to raise prices. It is nec-



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essary in order for people to make a living. One way or another, labor and energy costs will eventually be reflected in the prices of our products.

We also need to start developing and documenting the successes and failures of biological pesticides. This can only be accomplished by an open and ongoing collaboration among nurseries that are currently exploring this type of alternative. It is definitely achievable, but one nursery cannot develop the entire program alone.



TROY YOUNGBLOOD
43, owner,
Youngblood Nursery
Inc., Salem, Oregon

How do you see your role evolving with your company from now into the future?

Getting our business started involved working long hours and doing many of the work duties ourselves as a family business. With the passage of time and the growth of our business, it has become very important to hire key employees and allow them to take on more of the responsibilities. This will allow Youngblood Nursery to grow in the future as a company and continue to provide better services to our customers and the industry as a whole.

What is the most important lesson you have learned in the last two years?

It is extremely important to have customers you can count on through the easy times and especially when times get a little tougher. Our close connection with our customers and their willingness to communicate their needs and wants in a timely manner has helped us to provide the right products during a changing business climate.

What is the most satisfying part of your job as a nursery professional?

Seeing the plants grown successfully and having them find a permanent home in a landscape somewhere. Traveling up and down the Willamette Valley I often-

times happen upon plants in a landscape which I know originally came from Youngblood Nursery. Especially when they were rare offerings of varieties we helped make readily available to the mainstream retail customer and seeing them used and enjoyed always puts a smile on my face.

Who have your mentors been in the nursery industry and what did they teach you?

The industry as a whole is full of people who are willing to help with good advice, friendship, and even providing a good example. Oregon has a great nursery association (OAN, of course), which has been a vital part of learning the industry and providing a great climate for our nursery to be successful.



JOSH ZIELINSKI
31, assistant manager,
Alpha Nursery,
Salem, Oregon

Why did you choose a career in the nursery industry?

I went into the nursery industry after a brief stint in marketing (at Quiksilver Clothing) and ad sales (for a small fitness magazine). I grew up on the farm and I missed that connection associated with creating a crop, tending to it from start to finish, and then selling it. A great sense of pride comes out of that when you compare it to pushing paper around and selling ads that don't even yet exist. I loved the outdoors and I found myself well suited for the job with my degrees in business and Spanish. I also get to work with lots of great folks and I am faced with new challenges every day, so it's never dull.

What is the most important lesson you have learned in the last two years?

I've learned the importance of listening to customers and sales, delivering value, paying attention to details, and going the extra mile. After a few tough economic years that involved

some creative solutions and a lot of hard work when it came to dealing with inventory gluts, it seems things have begun to turn for the better over the past couple years. It'd be easy to kind of relax a bit but now it is more important than ever to stay focused and put in the extra effort that will set our nursery apart from competitors going forward. New products, excellent quality, good value, the right amount of material at the right time, and superior service — we have to do it all.

I've also learned to better balance my workload with other outlets in life: I got married and took up competitive long-distance running.

Who have your mentors been in the nursery industry and what did they teach you?

My mom and dad, who founded the nursery over 35 years ago, have shown me the importance of working hard, being fiscally balanced, and being good teammates. Other influential people who have taught me a good deal about this industry include R.J. Tancredi, the entire crew at Alpha, and many local nursery industry leaders. All of these folks demonstrate passion for what they are doing and it shows in how they cultivate both crops and relationships.



JASON HUPP
31, owner, Western
Evergreen, Silverton,
Oregon; production
manager, Drakes Crossing Nursery,
Silverton, Oregon

Why did you choose a career in the nursery industry?

Working with plants has always felt like second nature. I really enjoyed the production side of the industry from an early age working on the family nursery and Christmas tree farm.

As I learned more and more about the ornamental side of the industry, I really fell in love with the plants themselves. It's an amazing feeling to create something so beautiful with your

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▲ A NEW CROP OF LEADERS

own hands, and then guide it towards its full potential. In what other industry can you have so much fun and earn a living at the same time?

How do you see your role evolving with your company from now into the future?

Over this past year, my roles have changed significantly. With my own nursery, I have focused on marketing, label programs and nursery software to become more organized and efficient. It's clear I will have less and less time to devote to pruning, grafting and moving plants around. With the nursery growing so rapidly, I spend most of my time taking orders, sending confirmations, invoices, pulling orders, and arranging shipping.

With the family nursery, my role has evolved into making more production decisions with seed planting and product offerings, while trying to expand into new markets.

What is the most important lesson you have learned in the last two years?

The need to be flexible. When my wife and I started our nursery 10 years ago, we had a different vision for what we wanted to grow and sell. With the recession, being flexible to grow what our customers were asking for kept us going.

Another is the value of a consistent, high-quality product. Keeping our standards high has helped earn repeat customers and a strong reputation for quality.

Who have your mentors been in the nursery industry and what did they teach you?

I would often trade free delivery to other nurseries for a tour of their farm and a chance to pick their brains about nursery production. A few include Talon Buchholz (Buchholz & Buchholz Nursery), Larry Stanley (Stanley and Sons Nursery), Jim Boyko (Boyko Nursery) and Paul Halladin (Iseli Nursery).

But my most significant mentors have been other family members. My grandparents, my uncle and aunt. They all encouraged me to plan for the future and to keep quality and customer service as the top priority. ☺



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