

www.nmpromagazine.com

NMPRO

# Nursery

## MANAGEMENT & PRODUCTION

May 2009

Greenleaf Nursery

**PROGRESSIVE**

*Plans*

An organized business model  
includes conservative growth,  
proactive marketing. p.16

# Briggs Nursery

Modern tissue culture, production facilities inspired by the determination of Bruce Briggs

## Briggs Nursery

**Founded:** In 1912 by Orson Briggs.

**Location:** Elma, Wash.

**Production space:** 400 acres.

**Crops:** Woody ornamentals and perennials.

**Specialty:** Rhododendrons.

**Market:** Wholesale growers across the globe.

**Employees:** 150.



The late Bruce Briggs, second-generation owner of Briggs Nursery, pioneered the production of woody plants in tissue culture.

The late Bruce Briggs is credited as a pioneer in tissue culture advances for woody ornamentals. Briggs and Washington State University researcher Wilbur Anderson started experimenting with rhododendrons in tissue culture more than 50 years ago. The pair's vision was realized by the early '60s. By the 1980s, Briggs Nursery was selling liners created from the tissue-culture lab.

How do you honor a legacy that has reshaped the nursery industry? "Keep building on that vision," said Dave Jarzynka, CEO at Briggs Nursery, who also calls Briggs a mentor to the industry.

## High-tech facilities

In 2006, the nursery moved from Olympia, Wash., to Elma, giving the company the chance to build a state-of-the-art tissue-culture lab and 51,000-square-foot Conley's greenhouse range.

The gutter-connected house has a polycarbonate skin and concrete floors. Its primary purpose is to

acclimate and root tissue-culture plants from the lab. At capacity, it will hold more than 3 million plants, said Will Cain, sales manager at Briggs.

It's also equipped with Argus environmental controls. The mist system and the roof and side vents are computer-controlled to maintain a constant temperature. Shade curtains help moderate light and heat in the summer. And under-bench heating is provided by Duo-Fin heaters. Benches travel on rails and roll onto trailers for transportation to the next growing stage, Cain said.

The tissue-culture lab provides separate growing chambers and a research room. The lab is equipped with a secure power system and backup emergency power. After plants leave the tissue-culture lab, they're planted in soilless media and moved to the Conley's range.

These facilities are the culmination of the work started by Bruce Briggs, who built his first tissue-culture lab in his family's kitchen.

## Premium plants

Briggs Nursery ships plugs and liners primarily to wholesale growers worldwide. Briggs is one of the largest woody ornamental nurseries in the Pacific Northwest and is one of the largest rhododendron producers in the world.

Briggs Nursery's mission statement, "To Improve the Quality of Life Through Plants," rings true with its continued commitment to seek superior plants through tissue culture.

The nursery also introduces a wide range of plants to the trade.



**Rhododendron 'PJM Elite.'**

Next year Briggs will deliver the first "substantial" crop of heat-tolerant rhodies, "which will help us expand into the Southeast United States," Cain said.

## New ownership, new opportunities

In February 2008, Jack Hesse and a group of investors purchased Briggs Nursery from Gary Briggs (Bruce's son) and Jarzynka. Gary, who became CEO after his father died in 2000, retired in 2008. Jarzynka stepped in as CEO.

"This transaction brought additional capital into the business, which will allow growth in areas that will take advantage of Briggs Nursery's expertise," Jarzynka said.

**For more:** Briggs Nursery, (800) 444-1515; [www.briggsnursery.com](http://www.briggsnursery.com). 🌿

**- Kelli Rodda**