

GROWERTALKS

Features

5/1/2019

Reaping the Benefits

Jennifer Zurko



Dave and Peggy Dickman, and Bob Dickman:
Dickman Farms—Auburn, New York

Members for more than 30 years (when AmericanHort was known as OFA); Premium Members since 2017

GrowerTalks: How has AmericanHort changed as the industry has changed—especially when it went from OFA to its current organization?

Bob Dickman: OFA basically put on a trade show and that was Short Course. When OFA merged with ANLA, they picked up the advocacy side for the greenhouse

sector ...

Peggy Dickman: ... which has turned out to be a good change, now that immigration and labor is such an issue.

Dave Dickman: Certainly the conversion of OFA to AmericanHort, for myself, has taught me the importance of advocacy really quickly. I really didn't have an appreciation for it before and I suspect that's true with a lot of other folks. Advocacy is important and we need to support it financially.

Also, the educational side. We use Cultivate as an opportunity for us to take employees that might not have as much exposure to the industry as others.

GT: You've been a Premium Member of AmericanHort for three years—what have been some of the advantages to this higher-tier membership?

BD: Last year, we were exploring the H-2A program and we weren't getting the answers we needed, so we called AmericanHort, and through our premium membership, we were able to use the law firm CJ Lake and right away within 15 minutes they were calling us back. Any question we had, we had answers immediately.

PD: It would have cost thousands of dollars [without the premium membership]. Craig [Regelbrugge, AmericanHort's VP of Government Relations] was my first contact and he put me in touch with Chris Schulte [an attorney at CJ Lake]. This was during the government shutdown of November 2017 and both of them got back to me right away and were in contact all weekend. It was invaluable. They guided us through everything. I was probably on the phone with them for two weeks straight every day and they gave me undivided attention.

GT: What are the other benefits of being a member of AmericanHort that people in our industry may not know about?

BD: We have 17 people on our staff that are registered members of AmericanHort and every month they receive information from American-Hort's Take 5 newsletter about management practices, different business processes, what's going on in the industry ... and that's going out to all of our employees.

They also have informational webinars specific to our industry, which I don't think a lot of people are taking advantage of. If your company is an AmericanHort member, you can register any employee you want to sign up to get that information.

DD: And not only is it good information for your employees, but it makes them feel like they're part of the industry.

PD: You also get other perks, like first dibs on hotel accommodations for Cultivate and access to educational opportunities. But it's not just discounted tickets—it's an organization that's there to help, where you can pick up the phone and ask them a question if you need something. We didn't have the Premium Membership originally, but when Bob came back from an AmericanHort board meeting, he said we needed to do it. I think maybe it's simply you don't know what you have until you're a part of it.

GT: What would you say to an industry professional who's not a part of AmericanHort why it's important to become a member?

BD: Advocacy. It's what American-Hort does best. The thing that people don't realize is that, if you're not a member of AmericanHort, you're not paying into the system. That's where the money comes from, so Craig and Tal [Coley, AmericanHort's Director of Government Affairs] can go to Washington to fight for issues on the Hill that are specific to our industry. Farm Bureau has a lobbying group, and a bunch of other industries, too, that have a large support system. With our industry, we have to fight harder for our issues. That's why I think it's important to be a member of AmericanHort. People need to realize that there's no one else doing that work.

DD: Another benefit is networking with other people in this industry. I mean, we've met people who we would never have had occasion to meet that we talk to from time to time about all sorts of different issues. It kind of gives you a bit of a team spirit feeling when you're a Premium Member of AmericanHort with some other great greenhouse operations around the country. We talk to other owners who are members all the time and we share information freely back and forth. And the more that you do it, the more you're inclined to pick the phone up and call someone you've never talked to before.

That's why it's important to not only be a member of AmericanHort, but a Premium Member. It's a short-sighted approach to not be involved or do the minimum to support our industry.

BD: It also helps with continuing your education because this industry is forever changing and at a high rate of speed. The education that AmericanHort puts out—whether it's through webinars, the Plug & Cutting Conference, Cultivate, CareerUP—those are the opportunities that help you change your business.

DD: It's an opportunity for greenhouse owners to grow their people by being able to send them to these different events and all of the information they can access. To be able to send them there, so they can sit in seminars and understand what our industry is about is invaluable. It's more than just a benefit to the owner; it's a benefit to the entire staff in the greenhouse on all levels. And it's a great way to inspire your workforce.

PD: If you have a question, pick up the phone and call AmericanHort and they will direct you. No inquiry is too small—wages, the new H-2A changes—if you're interested in becoming more involved.

To contact AmericanHort, visit AmericanHort.org or call (614) 487-1117 (OH); (202) 789-2900 (D.C.). **GT**