

# GROWERTALKS

## Features

7/1/2019

## A Club Worth Joining

Jennifer Zurko

**Brad Batson—GreenForest Nursery, Inc.,  
Perkinston, Mississippi**



*GreenForest has been a member for over 30 years (before with the American Nursery & Landscape Association, then when they merged with OFA when it became AmericanHort); Premium Member since 2016*

**GrowerTalks:** How has GreenForest Nursery been involved with the organization?

**Brad Batson:** My dad [Dan Batson] has been heavily involved with AmericanHort. He was on the board and he was involved when it was ANLA. So it's been a passion project for him and is a torch that's being passed along to me a little bit. I'm currently on the Nursery Connector Committee of growers that meet with the board to talk about what we're seeing on our side of the industry and the things that would benefit us the most for AmericanHort to focus on.

**GT:** Since your company was such a large part of ANLA, what was the reaction when ANLA and OFA merged to create a new organization? Was it positive or was there skepticism?

**BB:** I think there were probably some questions of how it was going to work when you include all of the market segments. But after the initial merger, it was positive—bringing all of the different types of businesses together and bouncing ideas off of each other helps you learn from them. It's really been beneficial to us to meet all of these people from all around the country.

**GT:** Many growers have said that one of the biggest benefits to come out of the OFA/ANLA merger was having a stronger advocacy team. Would you agree that it's more important than ever for our industry to be represented in Washington?



**BB:** Absolutely. I think that is the biggest plus to the merger, having that advocacy in D.C. and having people on the ground who are lobbying and listening to help us make our businesses better. Having that voice there is a great tool that I don't think many people either know about or they don't seem to care how it affects them and it does. It's the type of thing where they're going to want it when there's an issue and they're probably going to turn to AmericanHort for information if they run into a problem. It is a hurdle for some people to contribute [with an AmericanHort membership] financially, but with the industry's support, they can continue to advocate for

us.

**GT:** Do you think some growers feel like they don't have to worry about what's happening in government, maybe because they feel they're too small so it doesn't affect them, or that they can handle their labor issues themselves?

**BB:** That's probably true. You have a lot of smaller businesses that probably could benefit [from the advocacy], but don't necessarily want to take the time and energy to take that next step. Many of them don't have the resources or even need to take advantage of programs like H-2A. But through AmericanHort, they can show you how to find the right tools to help your business. You'll never know if you don't educate yourself.

I do see a lot of nurseries who couldn't be the businesses they are today without the H-2A program and that's certainly true for us. Joining and becoming a member provides the educational tools that you need to find out which programs would work for you.

**GT:** What AmericanHort events do you attend? Do you think more people should take advantage of the programs and events they offer?

**BB:** I try to attend as many as I can, especially when they're in my area. I've also been a part of the CareerUP program, which I think is an awesome tool that showcases the young people in the industry. It left me feeling passionate about my business. A lot of times, being a young person in this industry, you can feel kind of alone because there aren't a lot of people in their 20s and 30s that go into horticulture, much less a nursery business.

**GT:** What are the specifics on CareerUP?

**BB:** It's the Saturday before Cultivate starts where you get to sit down with young people from all areas of the industry and a lot of students attend, too. You get to network with different young people and then you listen to speakers, usually older professionals who come in and tell their stories. You really get to see how the industry is changing, even if you may not see it from your neck of the woods, and how it continues to grow and evolve.

**GT:** I know AmericanHort has worked very hard the last few years to try and develop more programs and ways for young hort professionals to meet and share ideas with people who've been a part of this industry for a while and with each other.

**BB:** Absolutely. If you want to learn anything—from public speaking to how to manage people to marketing your business—CareerUP gives you a little taste of everything and you realize that we're all working together toward a common goal. Even though you have a very different career path, you all share the same passions and struggles.

**GT:** As a young professional who's heavily involved in the industry, what advice would you give to someone who's just starting their career on why they should be a member of AmericanHort and participate in their programs and

events?

**BB:** First, I would say that they would benefit just from the education. We have a booth at Cultivate, and though we are probably one of two or three nurseries who show there, we still have a presence because we also want to take advantage of the educational sessions that go on while the show's happening. I'm amazed at the number of programs they have there, and even if you have no interest in the trade show, paying to go there and attend classes all day is still definitely worth it. Every class I've attended has been beneficial.

**GT:** Do you think that being a part of AmericanHort and participating in CareerUP makes you more empowered to share ideas with the organization or make suggestions on other things they could do to help young professionals?

**BB:** I've always felt that suggestions and ideas are heard—especially by board members, who are always so open and welcoming and want to hear my ideas because that's how they help the industry try to be successful. They want this to be an industry that young people want to join. **GT**

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