

Yakima nursery thrives in improved economy

By ERICK PETERSON
For the Capital Press

YAKIMA, Wash. — Having purchased his nursery

late last year, owner Bryan Johnson wanted to get moving quickly. He re-opened Russell's Nursery for the holidays, selling Christmas trees,

and he has been on top of things ever since, he said.

His enthusiasm is expressed even in the slogan for his company: "Come grow with us." It is an invitation to customers, a calling for people to be part of a fun endeavor. He is excited, and he wants his customers to be excited, too.

That is his way, Johnson said. He describes himself as a go-getter who began his work in the industry prior to attending the University of Nevada Las Vegas and obtaining a degree in landscape architecture.

His career progressed upon graduation, and he worked in the industry as a manager before leaving it to become a restaurateur.

He explained that business ownership was a passion of his, and there were better opportunities in Las Vegas to own a restaurant than to own a nursery.

Though he feels he was successful in restaurant ownership over eight years, he missed working with plants.



Erick Peterson/For the Capital Press

Bryan Johnson, owner of Russell's Nursery in Yakima, Wash., stands on the grounds of his nursery. He moved from Las Vegas to get back into the nursery business.

Some nursery owners inherit their businesses, or have things simply given to them.

"That's not us," he said.

When he and his wife, Cheryl, looked around for an opportunity to get back into nurseries, they had to cast a

wide net. They considered many locations before deciding on Yakima, a city in an agricultural region where people have a passion for gardening and landscaping.

In a fashion typical of him, he said, he picked up his fam-

ily and relocated to Yakima within a single week. He did not want to waste time; he wanted to get growing.

So far, the big bet to move to Yakima and re-open the nursery has paid off. He reports that the nursery is extremely busy and the market is favorable to nurseries. He began the season early by stocking up on drought-resistant plants, as he expected Central Washington's water scarcity to worsen. And customers have responded well.

"It's been extremely tough to keep some of our plant material this year," he said. "We're doing the best we can, getting in as much as we can at the beginning, but it doesn't seem to be enough."

He said that several nurseries closed when the real estate market collapsed, thinking that the economy would not rebound. When the economy did improve, and people started buying houses again, demand returned.

"I'm just trying to keep up with it," he said.

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Demonstration garden offers inspiration

By GAIL OBERST
For the Capital Press

INDEPENDENCE, Ore. — Inspiration for gardeners sometimes comes from unlikely places.

For years, the strip of land along Ash Creek's south fork was home to Mt. Fir Lumber Co.'s log landing, until the mill closed in the late 1980s. The company donated the 7.3-acre east side of the creek to the City of Independence, and the "park" land became a jungle of blackberries, Scotch broom and other weeds.

The Luckiamute Watershed Council made the first attempt a few years ago to restore the creek by removing the millpond dam and planting native shrubs and flowers.

Online

For more information about the Master Gardeners, visit OSU Extension's website, <http://extension.oregonstate.edu/mg/>.

To help with the Inspiration Garden, email Bill Leedy, b.leedy@mineffiber.com.

But the most dramatic transformation has been at the hands of the Polk County Master Gardeners. In 2012, a dedicated handful of the group's 150-plus members began clearing weeds and developing what is now the "Inspiration Garden" at Mt. Fir Park, a demonstration nursery that aims at educating and inspiring visitors in their efforts to plan, plant and maintain gardens and yards.

"That's our mission: to teach sustainable gardening practic-

es to the community," said Bill Leedy, who led the effort to create a demonstration garden in Polk County. Oregon State University's Extension Service offers a master gardener course to students who are willing to pay for their education in volunteer hours. Many of the volunteers at the Inspiration Garden are also Master Gardeners.

Leedy said the greatest gift was the city's cooperation: The Master Gardeners were allowed to landscape the park, and were

also allowed to construct a greenhouse and a building for storing equipment and conducting small meetings.

Today, paths that border the creek take visitors through landscaped areas that range from natives to exotics. Entering from F Street between Seventh and Ninth streets, visitors walk past a new wetlands area along the creek, planted with native trees and shrubs. Moving south past the community building, the perennial gardens and then the rain garden (taking advantage of the city's storm drain ditches to the creek) lead into the vegetable garden — a display of edibles in raised beds, all placed to demonstrate some of the latest horticultural and sustainable practices developed at OSU.