

Fessler Nursery branches out

By **BRENNA WIEGAND**
For the Capital Press

The modest azalea nursery Ken and Marie Fessler started on their Woodburn, Ore., farm in 1960 has grown to over 500,000 square feet of greenhouse space with 35-45 employees.

Though the azaleas upon which Fessler Nursery was founded will be cut from production this year, lush fuchsia plants and baskets are still a mainstay at the second-generation business. Some 20,000 fuchsia baskets leave the gates each year.

Ken and Marie's sons Dale and Marvin run the nursery; sister Debbie Farrell heads propagation and Katy Fessler manages seasonal retail and special projects.

Though "retired," Ken is there nearly every day planting, pruning or irrigating.

The linchpin of the nursery's staying power is its diversification and mastery of four distinct markets — hanging baskets, bedding plants, houseplants and propagation.

In addition to their own veg-

etative cuttings, the nursery receives up to 100,000 cuttings in a day from Selecta One, a subsidiary of Ball Horticultural Co. and a leader in breeding, producing and marketing vegetatively propagated ornamental plants. The cuttings come from all over the world.

"We stick over 3 million cuttings," Katy Fessler said. "It's hard to say how many plants and baskets we sell; Marv estimates around 700,000 4-inch pots and about 80,000 baskets a year."

The nursery has also become a wide area's go-to for plant sale fund-raisers, whether Mother's Day hanging baskets or Christmas poinsettias.

Last year the nursery added a new section of greenhouses dedicated to the spring fund-raiser baskets.

Poinsettias join the vast array of tropical plants the Fesslers propagate and grow in more than 30 greenhouses. The houseplants are shipped all over the Western United States.

April through June Fessler Nursery opens its doors to the public, generating a brisk retail

trade that includes a crush for Mother's Day hanging baskets.

"Since we are the grower and reseller, we can charge less and sell in mass quantities," Katy Fessler said. "It's a Costco model: low margin, high quality, low price, self-service for the most part and a high volume of product. Where else can you go and find 10 full beds of geraniums?"

Retail season ended June 30 and with the premises clear staff is redoubling its improvement efforts, starting with replacing old greenhouse siding and roofing with more energy-efficient materials.

The nursery is also continuing its five-year exploration into the use of beneficial soil

microbes and predatory insects toward cleaner and more specific pest control.

"Our baskets are on drip and fertilizer injectors," Katy Fessler said. "A new flat-filler sticking line improved efficiency in our cutting division and a programmable watering boom lets us custom water our cutting beds.

"Though managing labor, keeping up and putting up with government-mandated regulations and finding the family-work balance is a continual challenge, we love being able to provide a product people really enjoy," Katy Fessler said.

"We also like being able to stay close to home — there's no commute."



Brenna Wiegand/For the Capital Press

Debbie Wiesner of Silverton, Ore., gathers flowers for a summer landscape. The flowers are among 700,000 4-inch annual plants Fessler Nursery produces per year.



Swanson Bark & Wood Products, Inc
Delivering Excellence

Bark and Mulch for all your Ag needs

**bark mulches
playground materials
rooflite™ green roof media
bagging & baling services
custom soil mixes & growing media**

360.414.9663 swansonbark.com

N16-2/#8

HORTICULTURAL PERLITE

• PROPAGATION, SOIL MIX AND PLUG GRADES •

- 100% natural
- light-weight
- in bags or bulk



- aids drainage
- and aeration
- holds moisture

SUPREME PERLITE COMPANY

for distributor information call

www.perlite.com (503) 286-4333 info@perlite.com

N16-2/#8

A TRAILER FOR EVERY NURSERY'S NEED



Brands and models to provide your trailer solutions..



GREAT NORTHERN

IRON PANTHER

BANENS

EBY

DPAGS

LOOK Trailers

Diamond Trailer Sales

Your All Service Dealer

541-369-2755 • 541-953-7548 • 541-740-5135 • Halsey, OR

OVER 350 UNITS IN STOCK!

View our entire inventory: diamondksales.com

N16-4/#5

Max Yield From the Ground Up

Soil preparation equipment from TG Schmeiser is engineered to provide maximum productivity per acre. Versatile implements till, mulch, cultivate and firm the soil for optimum seed germination.

Better Soil Prep For a Higher Yield



30' Till an' Bedder™
Seed Bed Maker

T. G. SCHMEISER®

1-800-288-8128 • www.tgschmeiser.com

N16-4/#18