

# BONZAI

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knowing he wanted to apply his studies to bonsai someday. While traveling through California learning from people who had bonsai, Neil met his future garden director, Troy Cardoza. When Neil returned from Japan and began his nursery in St. Helens, Troy was one of his first students.

"Bonsai was always a hobby of mine. Now it is my job and I love it," Cardoza said. "I have a very personal connection to it."

Neil said there is a big misconception about bonsai with many people believing a part of it is "torturing" trees.

He added that the materials used at Mirai Bonsai come from very harsh environments where they are considered garbage among the rest of the trees. When a tree comes to Mirai Bonsai, he said it is pampered with water and



Janae Sargent/Capital Press

Troy Cardoza, garden director, wraps the branches of a bonsai tree with wire to manipulate the way it grows.

good conditions and encouraged to thrive.

Mirai Bonsai's focus on Americanized bonsai is intentional. Neil said it is a vehicle to discuss what the origin of American culture is.

"To me, the origin of our culture is our landscapes. They can form people. Living in the Rocky Mountains formed who I was, what I did and what I aspired to

be," Neil said. "In this world where there is no limitation to what we can do or where we can go, losing our connection is like losing our foundations."

Neil said his dream for Mirai Bonsai is to be considered at or above the level of a professional operation in Japan and to expand people's knowledge and understanding of bonsai as an art form.

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