

# Gray's makes a comeback

By ALIYA HALL  
Capital Press

EUGENE, Ore. — A staple of the Eugene and Springfield, Ore., area since 1940, Gray's

Garden Centers are often simply referred by community members as: Gray's. The retail nurseries are considered an institution among area gardeners and landscapers.

That's why, after the centers closed in 2013 in the wake of the recession, the Eugene location was shuttered for less than two months before former owner Scott

Bocci bought back the assets and reopened. The Springfield location reopened after about a year.

The recession hit the nursery industry particularly hard since it is closely tied to the housing and construction industries. As construction ebbed, so did the landscaping business.

Bocci also hired back veteran staff members, and general manager Stuart Leaton was among them.

Leaton got his start at Gray's 12 years ago, and worked in the tree and shrub department before taking over the buying.

"To many hearing about the closure, of course there was sadness related to that, but a lot jubilation to know it was going to be reopened by some staff who had been here formerly," he said. "It was kind of rounding up the troops and bringing them back in."

Leaton said it was these "highly skilled individuals" who helped get Gray's back to its former level. They wanted to recover as fast as possible, and now they are in a period where they expect to grow, he said.

Gray's is one of the biggest nurseries in the area, allowing for a large selection of plants and products that are used to keep plants growing and healthy, as well as garden tools and decorations.

"Landscapers who traditionally don't pay full retail price on products will end up at Gray's locally because we do have so many products to help take care of plants, and bright-colored annuals and perennials," Leaton said.

Some of the newer product lines grow multiple re-blooms in one season: hydrangeas on old and new wood, azaleas in spring and fall, lilacs that bloom three times a year and blueberry bushes that produce



Photos by Aliya Hall/Capital Press

Gray's Garden Center Manager Stuart Leaton says with a laugh that his favorite plant is "the one that sells the fastest."



Along with plants, Gray's also carries fountains and other garden items.

two crops in one season.

Leaton estimates that Gray's has 125 vendors, almost all of which are in Oregon.

One of the new developments since the reopening is the nurseries' partnerships with other businesses in the area.

The Springfield center has partnered with McKenzie Feed and Pet Supply and the Eugene center has partnered

with the Beergarden.

"Both of these give you a chance to have customers and clientele that you're not spending advertising on," he said.

"Both of us play off each other; they're happy to have Gray's because Gray's draws a multitude of people, and we feel we've matched ourselves well to draw customers and clientele from other places. It's a unique dynamic."

## Blueberry Plants



**OREGON  
BLUEBERRY  
FARMS AND NURSERY**

*"We are dedicated to your success!"*

Offering a full selection of  
**Commercial Blueberry Nursery Stock.**



Call or visit us  
online today. (503) 873-1200  
www.oreblueberry.com