

Rocky Mountain Nursery: Paratore Family 'bleeds green'

By GAIL OBERST
For the Capital Press

INDEPENDENCE, Ore. — Cody and Kyle Paratore, third-generation nurserymen, saw their father off as he headed for his second fishing trip in a month.

Rocky, owner of the wholesale Rocky Mountain Nursery in Independence, stopped long enough to insist that vacations are now part of his plan, then returned to a leisurely chat with a young family filling a wagon with trees and shrubs. The wholesale nursery is open to the public for self-service, but the nursery's main business is to supply or connect local retail nurseries and landscapers with the products they need.

Like his father, Ross, 97 years old and still living on his nursery property



Gail Oberst/For the Capital Press

Cody, Rocky and Kyle Paratore of the Rocky Mountain Nursery.

in California, it's unlikely that Rocky, 55, will actually retire.

Still, now that sons Cody, 26, and Kyle, 21, are willing and able to handle the business, Rocky has found more time for his second job: luring scaly monsters from the

depths of western waters.

Fishing is what brought Rocky to Oregon in the first place. That, and land along the Willamette River was cheaper than California's farmland in the early 1990s.

There was a time, not so long ago, when Rocky and

his wife, Kristy, considered selling the business.

"I didn't want the boys to be stuck," Rocky said. "But they've changed my mind."

Apparently, nursery roots run deep in Paratotes. Cody returned home in 2017 from Oregon State University with a degree in business administration and went to work — "home," because the family's place is actually on the nursery land. Cody took over his mother's job as the nursery's bookkeeper, freeing her after 17 years to pursue her love of tennis and pickleball.

Kyle is home this summer from OSU, where he is a junior, working on a finance degree. The Paratotes' daughter, Katy, 24, is a certified nurse assistant studying to become a registered nurse.

Their grandfather, Ross



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Cody Paratore writes up a customer's order at Rocky Mountain Nursery in Independence, Ore.

Paratore, moved to California with other Italian relatives after World War II, working at fruit stands and teaching school until he landed in the nursery business in 1959. He raised a family in the nursery industry around Saratoga, Calif., operating a retail nursery for years before selling it and moving to Santa Cruz, where he operated a nursery on the land where he still lives.

"The nursery was where I grew up," Rocky said. "I never considered doing anything else."

After working with his father for 18 years, Rocky traveled to Oregon during a fishing trip and found the 20 acres of Willamette River frontage property that would become his family's legacy.

In 1994, Rocky began growing nursery plants in

the ground, switching to container-grown plants in 2001. Today, about 8 acres are covered with thousands of container plants ranging from groundcovers to gigantic palm trees, and 21 small greenhouses full of young plant material. The selection includes perennials, evergreens, conifers, ground covers and selected ornamentals.

"I learned most it from my dad," Rocky said. "Now, it's my home, my hobby and a living."

Rocky said his nursery is small, but he has expanded his sales by brokering wholesale nursery products.

"It's not an easy business. It takes years to learn," Rocky said. Rocky and Kristy wanted their children to have choices, insisting they all attend college before working at the nursery.

"If you don't like your job, you'll hate going to work," he said. "But I guess we bleed green."

Rocky Mountain Nursery is at 6920 Corvallis Road just south of Independence and is open weekdays to the public year-round. Summers the nursery is also open on Saturdays.

Check the website, www.rkymtnnsy.com, or call 503-838-4222 for more information.



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