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Meet the Merchant

Interview by Luke Whittaker lwhittaker@crbizjournal.com

Brim's Farm and Garden Jason Brim, manager

Phone: 503-325-1562**Address:** 34963 US-101, Astoria**Website:** brimsfarmandgarden.com**How long have you been with the business?**

"The three of us (with parents Mike and Linda) built the business. My dad started this place in 1986, when I was 9 years old. I've been here off and on ever since. We've come a long ways. I'm 43 now, so this year is 34 with the business."

What are some of your main responsibilities?

"Everything from scheduling and bookkeeping to sweeping the floor. There's nothing I won't and don't do from pulling weeds to making orders. But first and foremost with a small business is customer service. My number one priority is to take care of the customer."

How many employees are there?

"We have six full-time employees. We've been up to 9 or 10 in the past with part-time people but right now it's six full-time. It's a fabulous crew. They're knowledgeable in different areas, each has carved out an expertise. My mom has been a master gardener a long time. She's like a plant encyclopedia. I've learned a lot just being here."

What part do you enjoy the most?

"Talking to people and helping the customers, really that's what it's all about. It's not work to me helping people problem solve and deal with the issues that arise with having animals. The customer relationships are the best part and why we do it everyday."

Are there any particular customer stories that resonate with you?

"There isn't one particular story per se, just seeing people and being part of the community so long you develop relationships. For example, we have these aerial photographs that have been taken through the years. One thing I find interesting is in one photo from 1997, when I had just graduated high school. The lady whose truck is in the photo is walking out the door with her daughter. Now the daughter is an adult and a customer. We had another picture done years later and the same lady is in the picture. Two of the three years they took the aerial photos they were in the pictures. And she's still a customer along with her kids. It's all about the customer relationships."

You mentioned the business started in 1986, has it changed much since then?

"A lot. In the '90s the plant nursery was very small. When we started we only had one building. My dad was a logger so when Crown Zellerbach



Jason Brim

closed (in 1985), we started this business. The building beside us used to be a paint shop. We've just slowly grown. When we started, there was a business in town called Darigold, the dairy company. They had some farm stores but decided to get out of the business after they were in town about 45 years. It was big for the growth of our business for some of the things we do now, like fencing. Luckily, we're well versed in those things because Tractor Supply will be a box-store competitor, which we've never had to deal with. It's easier to compete with another independent because you're on a level playing field, but it's not a level playing field with a box store. They have some advantages we don't, but then we have advantages too as far as our people. To me the culture of an independent store, when you're working next to the owner, is different."

Can you tell me about the products/services you offer?

"Our advertising has always been 'healthy animals and beautiful gardens.' Fencing and nursery are probably our top two departments. We started out as a feed store. Animal feed has always been our backbone because it's year around. The nursery is mostly spring and summer months and is seasonal like Christmas trees. The feed and hay are weekly. We get a truckload that's usually about 40,000 pounds."

What impact has the covid-19 pandemic had on business?

"From a business standpoint it's been nothing but positive, business is way up. The biggest positive has been all the people growing gardens and raising chickens that haven't been before. During the pandemic we were doing two truckloads (double the average) a week of animal feed because people were stocking up. People were panicking. We've seen about a 30% increase. There were points where the parking lot was full and there was nowhere to park. That happens every spring when there's a big garden push, but I've never seen in all my years of doing this people parked 12 cars deep waiting on the highway for me to come in from the post office with baby chickens. I never experienced a mob waiting at the door to get baby chickens and having to ration them so that everyone could get some."

What do you feel is the biggest challenge facing the business?

"The biggest challenge is keeping up with the product. In retail being out of stock will kill you. It's all about having product on the shelf. Product availability has been very hard. My order today had two tons of a product we didn't get. Baby pig food wasn't available today. That's big deal. I have someone waiting on it. They're either going to have to substitute the product or try to find it somewhere else. The biggest hurdle for us has been keeping up with the demand and requests."

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