



**Byline: Don Robinson For The Register-Guard**

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Partners at home and at the office, Oren and Susan Posner have built Lane Forest Products together.

The Posners take their jobs seriously. When asked what they do for recreation, Susan said, "Work, and we're not joking." The company is open seven days a week. But she added, "We like what we do, we enjoy what we do."

And the "expectations" page of a company video for new employees concludes with the exhortation: "Most of all, enjoy what you do."

This company began life in the early 1980's as Lane [Firewood](#) Forest Products, selling firewood from a yard at Highway 99 and Prairie Road and from the Mozzama Mill in Creswell. It was run by Oren, a South Eugene High School dropout who defied any negative stereotypes.

His earlier venture was a one-man house-painting business, but he moved into the firewood business for a simple reason: "I had a truck and a chain saw."

In 1987, Oren and Susan met in Calgary, Alberta, where she had been working for 10 years after emigrating from her native Scotland. They were married, and two years after they had set up housekeeping in Eugene she became a partner in the business and began to apply her expertise in marketing and business management.

"We were doing quite a bit of business, but the huge growth happened after we moved from our location on off Highway 99 to the new location," Susan recalled.

That was in 1992. They were more or less forced out of the original site by the landlord only offering a 30 day lease, leading to the fortuitous purchase of 4 bare acres at the present location, Belt Line and Prairie roads.

By the time of the move, the company had expanded its product line from firewood to a variety of landscape materials. "Firewood" was dropped from the name in the late '80s and has declined relative to other products, although it's still available. "We

have customers today who still purchase the four-cord load of unsplit fir firewood in the big rounds, and they process it themselves," Susan said.

Since the move, the company story has been one of diversification and growth. The site itself expanded in two steps to its current 18 acres. The firm also added a retail yard on 42nd Street in Springfield.

One big break occurred soon after the move. Willamette Industries asked if Lane would be interested in serving as the site for a wood recycling plant that Willamette wanted to build. The Posners said yes, so "that put us in the wood recycling business," Oren said. When the machine was paid for in 1995, the Posners tore most of it down and "rebuilt it on our own dime," increasing productivity. But they remain grateful for the leg up from Willamette Industries.

The couple say they like innovation. Susan describes the landscape supply industry as one in which "not everything has been created yet to solve problems. "Which is kind of nice in a way because you get to be very creative."

As an example, when they wanted to start blowing bark mulch and other yard products, satisfactory trucks were not available. So they designed and built their own truck blower boxes and sold them to a variety of other businesses as well as using them for their own purposes. Eventually, they sold the manufacturing rights to Peterson Pacific Corp., a national manufacturer on Airport Road.

Another example: They had trouble getting all of the contaminants out of compost, especially light things such as plastic bags, Styrofoam cups and pop cans. So they designed an "airlift separator" for this purpose. As the compost (made from yard debris) is screened, it is run over a conveyor belt. The separator is a vacuum system that sits on top of the conveyor belt and extracts anything lighter than the compost.

They use these machines in their business and sell them to others as well. They have sold about 60 units.

The company's broad specialty is recycling. It started accepting yard debris and making compost out of it in 1993. Lane uses 90 percent of this material for compost, which also goes into the firm's planting soils and soil amendments. A little bit of the

debris goes for boiler fuel and some, including sod, asphalt and used concrete, is used for fill.

The urban wood waste recycling operation continues, taking "anything from pallets, crates, old fences (to) cabinet shop waste." The wood is sorted, ground and screened. Nails are removed by magnets. The resulting wood fiber goes to particleboard, hardboard and fiberboard plants as well as pulp and paper mills.

"Both of these recycling opportunities (yard debris and urban wood waste) are truly win-win situations," Susan said. "You know, the community wins, the environment wins, and we win, so it's well-balanced."

Oren agreed, noting that successful recycling must be financially self-sustaining. "If the government has to subsidize it, that's a problem."

The list of products sold by Lane includes bark mulch, soils, soil amendments, fertilizer, decorative rock and wood fiber. Its services include home delivery of materials, with blower service available for many. Oren is proud of the company's versatility, saying, "You can come in and fill up a 5-gallon bucket of material or we can deliver a 300-yard rail car."

There are some lesser known aspects of this multifaceted firm, however. It hauls commercial garbage (Action Drop Box), picking up 30 cubic-yard Dumpsters for business or small industries. And it sells landscaping materials wholesale to nurseries and other landscape-related firms, including customers in California.

The California market is served by rail. But three years ago, the railroad said it would no longer supply gondola cars to its shippers. Lane would have to buy its own. Which it did. "We now own a train (about 60 cars)," Susan says.

The garbage business and the California sales help even out seasonal dips in the company's year. "Yes, our business is seasonal," Oren said, "but there's always a season (for something)." Internally, he said, the staff has a saying: "Just don't add water. Anytime there's no water, we're busy."

One of Lane's larger services is "brown field remediation," which entails removing material from industrial sites and treating it for reuse.

Lane Forest Products also provides marketing services to other businesses that have been impressed with its work. The biggest marketing client, another landscape supply firm, is in Texas.

On the organization chart, Susan is company president and Oren is vice president.

Is it difficult for a married couple to run a corporation? "We have had some challenges, but nothing that was insurmountable," Susan said.

Lane Forest Products

Address: 2111 Prairie Road, Eugene

Owner: Oren and Susan Posner

Founded: Began in the early 1980s as Lane Firewood Forest Products

Number of employees: 110; 145 at peak times

Annual revenue: Not disclosed

Secrets of success: Hard work and innovation