

# REMEMBER

BY KATE PENN

# the FLORIST

Floral Management's  
17th Annual  
**Marketer  
of the Year**

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See how a San Antonio shop got in the heads, hands and hearts of residents — and won Floral Management's 2010 Marketer of the Year Award.

**PIN-UP GIRL** After a lifetime of collecting medals at San Antonio's famed Fiesta, which celebrates the heroes of the battles of the Alamo and San Jacinto, Oralia Espinoza, AIFD, TMF, wanted to give San Antonians a medal worth collecting.

PHOTO: MARK SOBHANI

➤ If its cars, money, homes and hair don't have you convinced that "everything is big in Texas," then plant yourself in San Antonio during the third week of April, when "big" takes on new meaning. You'll find yourself amidst what even those outside of Texas say is the biggest community fundraising celebration in the world, Fiesta San Antonio (just "Fiesta" to a Texan). The event boasts parades — 11 of them, including the world's largest illuminated night-time parade; pageantry — kings and coronations, queens donning \$15,000 gowns with 12-foot trains; matadors and military observances, endless parties and an emotional pilgrimage.

The only thing small about Fiesta is how it might make a local mom and pop shop feel. The battle for attention at San Antonio's Fiesta is as fierce — and pardon the Texas-sized cliché — as Texans' fight to keep the Alamo from falling to the Mexican Army in 1891.

Spring Garden Flower Shop founder Oralia Espinoza, AIFD, TMF, and her husband and co-owner, David, discovered a prize piece of ammunition for standing out amidst all the noise, and it came in the form of a one-inch piece of metal. Their ability to rise above the din was enough to net them a healthy new slate of event work and Floral Management's 2010 Marketer of the Year award. Here's their story.

### Party with a Purpose

To understand the magnitude of this accomplishment, you first need a sense of the event's rich history: Fiesta's roots stretch back to 1891, when a group of local women decorated horse-drawn carriages, paraded in front of the Alamo and pummeled each other with flowers as a mock battle and tribute to the heroes of the Battles of the Alamo and San Jacinto. The "Battle of the Flowers" parade became an annual tradition along with several other events added to the line-up in subsequent years: balls, a carnival, coronations of "royalty" and even more parades. Today, Fiesta lasts 11 days and includes more than 100 different official Fiesta events, each produced by a local non-profit organization and their more than 75,000 volunteers. That's where its "party with a purpose" reputation comes in: the funds generated by those events go back into the community through scholarships, grants, health services, education, ministries and more.

### Roped In

One look at Oralia's shop is a quick indicator that she is no stranger to Fiesta. The walls showcase colorful, commemorative Fiesta posters — as a memento of her most treasured event of the year. "We grew up going to Fiesta," said the San Antonio native. "We love it."

Since opening the shop in 1990, Oralia's role in Fiesta changed from spectator to participant, as the shop was chosen to do flowers for the occasional party and parade float during Fiesta week, which begins the third Thursday in April. Just three blocks from the parade route, Spring Garden is also a convenient spot for participants in the Battle of the Flowers parade to pick up their requisite floral tribute to place at the Alamo.

When David retired as a police officer in 2005 to join the business, he identified event work — both during Fiesta week as well as year-round — as an area of growth potential for the shop. At the time, the shop was doing a hefty sympathy business — 70 percent of total sales — servicing 12 of the funeral homes in town. David had attended an SAF convention and discovered that many florists were seeing growth in event and wedding work.

"So we started going to wedding shows, advertising in wedding publications," he said, which helped the shop gain some wedding clients.

But by April 2008, event work only represented about one percent of their total sales — growth in the category was not what the Espinozas had envisioned. The crash of the financial markets that year meant that it would be even more challenging to obtain.



PHOTO: MARK SOBHANI

**PEDALS, MEDALS** Fiesta medals, like those of florist Oralia Espinoza, AIFD, TMF, are highly coveted during the annual event — which is exactly why her shop made its own in 2009.

**CROWNING ACHIEVEMENT**  
Getting an audience with Fiesta's royalty, including the Fiesta Flambeau Parade Queen, pictured, was key to Spring Garden's success in making its name known.



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They knew that one event that would still take place during even the deepest of recessions is Fiesta: What else could they do to capitalize on the presence of 3.5 million partygoers and some of the city's biggest luminaries and organizations, who most certainly have events throughout the year?

**In it to Pin It**

The answer was sitting on the lapels, shirts and banners of those very luminaries. Among the most treasured traditions of Fiesta week are pins, or Fiesta medals. The tradition started in 1971 when "King Antonio XLIX," put 200 royal coins on ribbons and distributed them at Fiesta events. Before long, nearly every organization represented by Fiesta royalty or sponsoring one of the Fiesta events was creating its own pins, usually a new one each year.

If Fiesta attendees aren't buying pins to add to their collection, then they're trading the ones they have for a "better" pin. "You see one you like, and you barter for it," David explained. "When you're trading, (you) want a pin in return that will be (just as nice)." Many of the

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organizations, no strangers to the supply and demand dynamic (remember Beanie Babies?) deliberately limit production, upping its intrinsic value for the lucky Fiesta-goer who manages to acquire one.

"Some organizations will go all out and have these gorgeous looking pins," David said, "but they'll only have a handful of them."

Oralia's collection of Fiesta medals includes at least 100, with some going back more than 20 years. Motivated by the drop in sales, the recession-fueled light went off for the Espinozas as they headed into 2009 Fiesta: Why limit their pin involvement to just wearing them? Why not stick Spring Garden right into the pin frenzy? Amidst all of the visual (and literal) noise of Fiesta week, the pins are the one Fiesta souvenir with staying power. For Spring Garden Flower Shop, it could be the ticket to getting the shop's brand in the hands of those 100-plus key organization leaders involved in the week's event.

"With the pins, you give them out, you trade — you come in contact with the recipients," David said. "It's not just a flyer or postcard that might get thrown away."

### Getting Pinned

If creating a pin seems like an obvious thing to do during Fiesta, it's not — none of more than 275 florists in the city had a pin, and the few businesses that do usually sell them. The most coveted pins are those created by the nonprofit organizations, especially the ones represented by Fiesta royalty.

Knowing they'd be competing with royalty, the Espinozas wanted to design a pin that had folks clamoring to add it to their collection. So late in 2008, after the couple came up with the idea of a pin, they challenged Spring Garden's nine full-time and one part-time employees to weigh in on the pin's look. The shop, working with a local medal designer, opted for a daisy-like die-cut design, with alternating petals.

They had 700 pins made, just in time for the 2009 Fiesta, and the employees were charged with dispersing them to the community during Fiesta week: to recipients on deliveries, to other party goers at Fiesta events. "One of our drivers even gave some out to couples com-

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## WHAT MAKES A MARKETER OF THE YEAR?

When Floral Management launched the Marketer of the Year Award in 1994, we hoped to draw attention to some of the industry's outstanding marketing efforts — and inspire the rest of the industry with their ideas. Floral Management invites, retailers, wholesalers and growers to take part in the contest, luring them with the prospect of a \$5,000 cash prize. For the 17th year in a row, that cash prize is sponsored by Design Master color tool, Inc.

### THE CRITERIA

What constitutes an outstanding marketing effort? The judges are charged with reviewing the entries and rating each entrant in the following four categories: effectiveness of campaign, originality, professionalism and overall excellence.

### THE JUDGES

We know that only experienced marketers with a track record of success are qualified to judge other marketing efforts. So, each year we choose a panel of seasoned professionals within and outside the floral industry.

**Paul Bachman**, president, Bachman's Inc., Minneapolis

**Rick Canale**, co-owner, Exotic Flowers, Boston; Floral Management's 2008 Marketer of the Year

**Kathy Dudley**, co-owner, The Bloomery, Butler, Pa.; chair, Floral Management Advisory Board

**Tom Hofeditz**, director of marketing, Baisch & Skinner, St. Louis; Floral Management's 2007 Marketer of the Year

**Danielle Mackey**, marketing director, Ogilvy Public Relations Worldwide, the agency that handles the consumer relations campaign for the Society of American Florists.

### HOW TO ENTER

Want to be an entrant in Floral Management's 2011 Marketer of the Year?

Call, fax or e-mail a request for an entry to Kate Penn, at Floral Management, (800) 336-4743; fax (800) 208-0078; E-mail [kpenn@safnow.org](mailto:kpenn@safnow.org)

### PAST WINNERS

**2009** BJ Dyer, AAF, AIFD and Guenther Vogt, AAF, Bouquets, Denver

**2008** Rick Canale, Exotic Flowers, Boston

**2007** John Baisch, Baisch & Skinner, St. Louis

**2006** Lyn and Skip Shipman, Brenda's House of Flowers, Woodstock, Ga.

**2005** Frances Hopkins, Under A Foot Plant, Co., Salem, Ore.

**2004** Marty & Jane Lopnow, Waukesha Floral & Greenhouse, Waukesha, Wis.

**2003** Scott Carlson, Florabundance, Miami

**2002** BJ Dyer, AAF, AIFD, and Guenther Vogt, AAF, Bouquets, Denver

**2001** Andrew Manton-Zamora and Rutger Borst, Apisis Group, Miami

**2000** Southern California Plant Tour Days

**1999** Greg and Heather Katz, Al Manning Florist, Kansas City, Mo.

**1998** Bill Cutting, Kuhn Flowers, Jacksonville, Fla.

**1997** Brooks Jacobs, Greenbrook Flowers, Jackson, Miss.

**1996** Sylvia Nichols, AIFD, The Window Box, Cheshire, Conn.

United Floral Exchange, Carlsbad, Calif., and Denver.

**1995** Mary Dark, Broadmoor Florist, Shreveport, La.,

Greg Royer, Royer's, Lebanon, Pa.

**1994** Mary Lore, McFarland Florist & Greenhouses, Inc., Detroit

Tom Aykens, AAF, Memorial Florist & Greenhouses,

Appleton, Wis.

ing out of the courthouse” after getting their marriage licenses, Oralia said.

David admits he went into the first year of pin production with some doubt. “I didn’t think people would want ours, I thought they’d only want the ones from royalty,” he said. (A quick primer on Fiesta royalty: To be involved in Fiesta is to be involved in a kind of temporary kingdom of celebration, where kings and queens once again rule public opinion and name-dropping titles isn’t uncommon for those who manage to snag a pin from one of the royals.)

He was pleasantly surprised to learn that he was wrong: The pin supply was quickly depleted before Fiesta was over, and customers — new and old — were coming into the shop asking about the pins, and ordering flowers. They quickly became known as “the flower shop with the medals,” Oralia said. “That first year, we realized people were actually asking for the pins, so the pins were getting people to come to the store.” The spike in Administrative Professionals Week business, which falls during Fiesta each year, showed customers were there for more than the pins. They also managed to be the chosen florist for El Rey Feo. What sounds like a moniker of dubious distinction (it translates into The Ugly King) is in fact a big deal by Fiesta Honors: Each year, several San Antonian men compete for the title, which goes to the individual who raises the most money.



**SHOW OFFS** Spring Garden invited its Facebook fans to show off their Fiesta medals by posting them to the shop’s Facebook page, which would qualify them for a drawing for a \$75 gift certificate to the shop.



**PIN PRESSURE** After two years of creating a Fiesta Medal, the Espinozas are already thinking about what the shop’s 2011 medal will look like.

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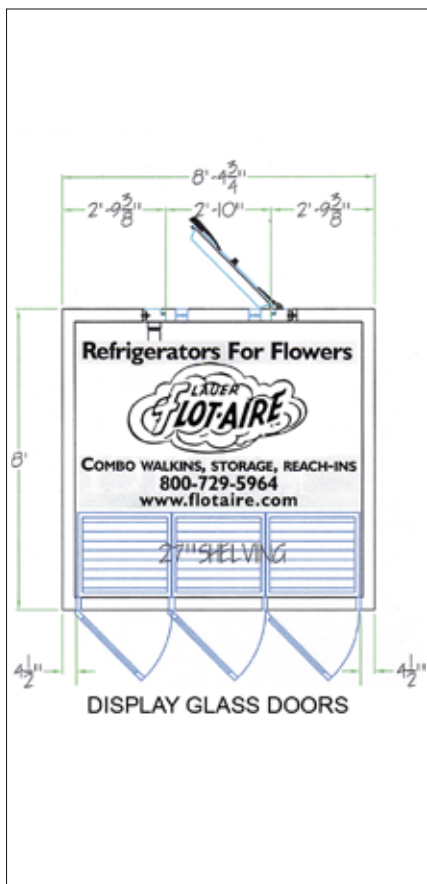
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| 601   | Frosted              | 12 x 23 x 28 |
| 601C  | Clear                | 12 x 23 x 28 |
| 603   | Frosted              | 14 x 28 x 32 |
| 603C  | Clear                | 14 x 28 x 32 |
| 609   | Rosevase - Frosted   | 12 x 23 x 36 |
| 609C  | Rosevase - Clear     | 12 x 23 x 36 |
| 611C  | Large Rosevase Clear | 13 x 32 x 36 |
| 607   | IIA - Frosted        | 20 x 36 x 36 |

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“By individually handing out medals to people in the community at these events, we initiated face-to-face contact with current and potential customers — something we may not have gotten from a printed marketing piece — and established an automatic relationship with that contact.”

### Back by Popular Demand: The Pin-Up

The Espinozas went into the 2010 Fiesta — which happened to coincide with the shop’s 20th anniversary — with even more enthusiasm for what the medal could do for the shop.

Spring Garden paid about \$1,300 to produce 1,000 Fiesta pins this year, which featured a new design showcasing the shop’s 20th anniversary. Once again, they distributed them through employees during Fiesta — but their approach

was even more strategic and targeted: They gave them to customers and many people who requested it but they also deliberately sought out members of Fiesta royalty and San Antonio’s influential elite and would make the exchange a memorable one.

“Employees would then ask for that person’s own medal or business card, so they could send a follow-up e-mail to thank them for their medal as a way to maintain contact,” David said. The Espinozas and their team would also make a point to invite any pin recipient to become a Facebook fan.

Following the 20th anniversary medal distribution, the shop held a two-week contest on Facebook, asking fans to submit photos showing them or their friends and family wearing Spring Garden’s Fiesta medals. The winner received a \$75 gift card to the shop —

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**FIESTA FRENZY** Fiesta week can mean a slew of last-minute orders for floral tributes honoring the heroes of the Alamo. Spring Garden Flower Shop co-owner Oralía Espinoza, AIFD, TMF, above, and her team are only too happy to do the job.

which the shop promoted as “perfect for a Mother’s Day gift.”

“We planted the seed for people to begin thinking about Mother’s Day, and when they did, to think of Spring Garden Flower Shop for their Mother’s Day deliveries,” said Oralia.

They also seized upon a prospect-rich pin-trading opportunity during Fiesta week. Many of the dozens of organizations that have Fiesta medals gather in the city’s plaza to trade pins. “It’s a hand-shaking event, where you introduce yourself, your shop or organization and ask to trade pins,” Oralia said.

The net impact of the 2010 pin distribution was dramatic: Walk-in sales increased nearly 18 percent for the month of April compared to 2009, and the shop booked 15 new events in April and May, from notable organizations, including the American Diabetes Association, the City of Alamo’s employee recognition banquet and Motown Meets San Antonio. Their event business grew from \$13,300 in 2008 to \$35,000 in 2010, nearly half of which was booked in April and May. That’s an impressive return on investment, considering they spent less than \$1,300 to create the medal. Since they passed out that very first medal, the shop’s event business as a percentage of total sales has gone from 1 to 4 percent.

Spring Garden’s social-networking outreach resulted in a 9 percent increase in Facebook fans — they have close to 500 fans — who became regular visitors to the shop’s fan page during Fiesta week, for updates on when the shop’s medals would be distributed.

David respectfully chuckles at the success of that tiny, shiny pin. “Creating the medals put us in direct, face-to-face contact with customers, and helped us network with key community and business leaders who could help increase the amount of special events throughout the year,” he said.

The Espinozas are already thinking about their pin design for the 2011 Fiesta, but they know that until then, they’ll be near the hearts — literally — of their fellow San Antonians, and always within reach. 🌸

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**STICK IT TO ME** David Espinoza, second from right; Oralia, and the Spring Garden Flower Shop team happily don their Fiesta pins, and hope San Antonians will, too.

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