

PIEDMONT POST

A COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER SERVING THE CITIZENS OF PIEDMONT

22

Piedmont, California

Wednesday, October 18, 2017

FEATURES & BUSINESS

Petal It Forward

J. Miller Flowers spreads joy with gift of flowers



A group of enthusiastic volunteers mobilized at J. Miller Flowers on Tuesday, October 10, creating bouquets to be given to assorted city and school offices, fire stations and police departments as part of the national Petal It Forward program. Pictured are: Jeanne Roberts (left), Sharon Trinagali, Edna Cooper, Claire Faughnan, Marilyn Weber, Nancy Kurkjian, Valerie Lee Ow, Char Hamilton and Nancy Schwartz. Not pictured: Hallie Alfaro and Robbin Lee.

By: Shari Santos

What can you do with 300 floral bouquets donated by 14 growers from the San Francisco International Flower Market? You can bring smiles to the faces and lift the souls of everyday folks who need their day brightened with a cheery bouquet of fragrant flowers.

Petal It Forward brings together hundreds of florists and volunteers — 561 local efforts in 459 cities in all 50 states and Canada. Locally and for the third year in a row, J. Miller Flowers spent hours with a group of volunteers processing flowers, preparing bouquets, and loading them into buckets of water in the back of a delivery truck. Bringing this together are sisters Valerie Lee Ow and Robbin Lee, Piedmont natives and co-owners of J. Mill-

er Flowers for 46 years. Valerie and her adult son Robby went out with a group of women volunteers from all walks of life whose only mission was to bring a welcome surprise of flowers to those who least expected them, but may have needed them the most.

The Bay Area nurseries and growers who donated the beautiful blooms are J&N, Santa Rosa, Pacific Coast Evergreen, North Bay Farm, J&J, Repetto, Gemignani, Karmen Kwong, Rata's, Brothers, Torchio, Neve Roses, Mt. Eden and Brannan Street.

With the hazy smoke from the fires engulfing California hanging in the air, the Happiness Ambassadors canvassed the local community, handing out two bouquets to each, one for the recipient to keep and one to share with someone else. This year, the

volunteers brought the flower-laden truck to Piedmont City Hall, Piedmont Police Department, Piedmont Middle School, Downtown Oakland Senior Center, Kaiser Permanente Hospital and Medical Offices, and UCSF Benioff Children's Hospital in Oakland. A hard-working UPS driver even became a surprise recipient of some flowers.

Everywhere they went, the volunteers were greeted with a smile and, in some cases, a tear, but always with delight at the unexpected gift of flowers. We asked each volunteer what their favorite moment was from a day filled with heartwarming moments. One remarked that hers was spending time with other women volunteers, some of whom she had never met, and finding a new community.

Another was a young security guard at the Senior Center who followed volunteers from room to room just to watch the faces of the recipients. He said over and over again, "I can't believe what you are doing."

Another volunteer singled out a woman who was hanging back, by herself. When handed the flowers, she began crying, saying "You have no idea how much this means to me. I'm going through such a hard time."

We were reminded that you never know what burdens another person is carrying. One woman was so grateful that she said "These flowers just made my day. Let me give someone a hug."

At a medical center a woman said that she had just turned 95, and she was no longer able to get out of the house to purchase flowers and was so happy to be bringing some home.

Yet another volunteer met a woman whose home in Napa



Mark Enea of the Public Works Department receives a bouquet from Marilyn Weber.

was engulfed in flames. She had also lost a home in the Oakland firestorm years earlier. The flowers, to her, were a moment's relief from the grief of losing a home for the second time in her life.

These are just a few memories of a group of women whose lives were made so much better

by making others' lives brighter. None of us will ever forget the faces of those whose lives were touched that day, if just for a moment in time. A bouquet of flowers may not seem like much to some, but judging by the faces of those who received them today, they meant the world.



Robby Ow (left) and Char Hamilton (right) surprise members of the middle school staff with flowers on Petal It Forward Day.