

floral management

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THE FLORAL BUSINESS AUTHORITY

APRIL/MAY 2019 | VOLUME 36 | NUMBER 2

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

WE WELCOME YOUR FEEDBACK ON THE MAGAZINE. PLEASE SEND YOUR OPINIONS AND SUGGESTIONS TO: FMEDITOR@SAFNOW.ORG.

YOUR WORDS HAVE WEIGHT

> Right before Valentine's Day, I was terribly disappointed when I got an email from Bombas, one of my favorite retailers, with the subject line, "Forget Flowers. Give Socks." Naturally, I let the company know that message did not sit well with me! To my delight, I quickly received a response stating the ad was a botched attempt at lightheartedness. Going forward, Bombas would never again put anyone down to build themselves up.

Every holiday season, we see dozens of examples just like this. I'm sure my peers share my gratitude to the Society of American Florists for responding to disparaging comments about flowers and urging companies to promote products based on their own merits. Many seem receptive to the feedback.

However, I've noticed another, more troubling trend: negative comments about the floral industry coming from within it. I don't believe any of our own professionals intend to cast the industry in a bad light. Rather, I think, it's a matter of speaking without first considering potential consequences.

As a kid, I had aspirations of becoming a floral educator and speaker, and my parents introduced me to people eager to coach me. My mentors, including Tommy Bright winners Frankie Shelton, AAF, AIFD, PFCI, and Rocky Pollitz, AAF, AIFD, PFCI, taught me to be cautious with the media. Journalists, they explained, always have an angle. Many are hungry for controversy. If you're not paying attention, they'll lead you down a path you shouldn't be on.

They particularly love to focus on the fact that flowers don't last forever and that they seem exorbitantly expensive, especially at the holidays. Annoying? You bet. But the predictable nature of these points means we can prepare responses. I suggest studying aboutflowers.com and reviewing SAF's PR Bootcamp (access it at safnow.org/moreonline), where you'll find loads of useful information — from flower facts to research studies — you can cite to distract reporters from their awkward questions.

For instance, I had a reporter ask me, on the air, why red roses cost so much for Valentine's Day. Rather than diving

into supply and demand, I said, "While red is traditionally associated with the holiday, studies have found that women actually prefer other colors

— and there are a lot of incredible shades available." As for vase life, it's important to stay positive, such as by saying, "Floral professionals use care and handling practices to ensure flowers are their freshest, and customers can enjoy them as long as possible by using flower food, refreshing the water and cutting stems."

I also see cringe-worthy comments from industry folks on social media — namely, people taking sides and maligning others: mass merchandisers, foreign growers, wire services and "basement Betties." I hate seeing us tear each other down and worry about what impression our fighting gives the public.

Look, there are a lot of flower sellers out in the world. The variety of choices is a good thing! It means more people have more opportunities to buy more flowers.

Consider a guy who has stayed out too late and has a sinking feeling he's going to be in trouble at home. Thank goodness for late-night bodegas and gas stations that sell grab-and-go bouquets or single stems of roses! Do they represent the best quality in the market? Not even close — but they serve a purpose. If they get that guy out of the doghouse, that's a positive experience that primes him to buy flowers again.

Five-star restaurants don't begrudge fast-casual establishments or grocery stores for stealing customers. They recognize there's a time and place for different experiences. Can't we do the same?

The next time you feel compelled to make a statement to the press or online, weigh your words first. Evaluate whether they will help or hurt the industry. When in doubt, remember: If you can't say something nice, don't say anything at all. 🌻

J Schwanke, AAF, AIFD, PFCI, a fourth-generation florist, is the CEO of uBloom.com. j@ubloom.com



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SPRINGTIME REFRESH



> When Peggy and Wayne DeBey, AIFD, first reached out to Floral Management last year to share some of the changes they've made at The Flower Nook in Salina, Kansas, one quality jumped out at us: The couple's willingness to try new ideas. The Flower Nook is a longtime small business, and the DeBeys have owned it for more than three decades. They've led their shop (and staff) through all kinds of changes, but a drop in foot traffic a few years ago scared them. Rather than settling into that fear, however, the couple got to work. They researched their local market, reached out to their community and,

as a result, they've turned their shop into something that surprises and delights customers all over town — and they've created dozens of new reasons for those customers to stop in and see what's happening at The Flower Nook. "We recognized we had to start thinking about our customers in a different way," Peggy told us. "They want to be entertained and to see things that are really different, all the time." The secret to their success so far is no secret at all — just plenty of thought and experimentation and lots of hard work. You can read more about their story this month starting on **p. 24**.

Elsewhere in the magazine, we're talking economic trends (**p. 32**), and the results of an SAF survey conducted at the start of this year. The survey found that most floral industry members are feeling upbeat about 2019, even as some ongoing challenges still trouble them. (One particularly thorny issue: the availability of labor. Look for this to be a topic we return to again.) Meanwhile, in March, dozens of growers, wholesalers, suppliers and retailers came together in Washington, D.C., to talk directly with lawmakers and key congressional staff about the biggest issues their businesses and the industry face. SAF's 39th annual Congressional Action Days, which you can read about on **p. 10**, showcased the best of a united industry asking for some common sense solutions. That's something we can all be excited about — and take pride in.

A few more things to be excited about this spring? Pink is big and — well — could there be a more flower-friendly color for teens headed to prom or brides and grooms headed down the aisle to be clamoring for? In our Fresh Choices column (**p. 22**), senior contributing editor Katie Hendrick Vincent details some stems that are right on trend with this color craze. You'll also want to see how one savvy florist adds more oomph (and higher price points) to prom work in Business of Design (**p. 44**).

Finally, as we go to print, more than 150 industry members were getting ready to head to Boston for SAF's 1-Day Profit Blast. That educational series, which takes place around the country throughout the year, has become a popular offering from SAF because it offers practical takeaways and great advice from a convenient setting. If you missed the Boston event, you can check safnow.org for more upcoming programming, including — if you want to talk about *really* convenient options — our popular (free!) webinar series. Upcoming topics include small web fixes that deliver big results and solutions to common delivery questions. 🌿

Mary Westbrook, Editor in Chief
mwestbrook@safnow.org

More Online



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ROI ON SWEETHEARTS

How did your sales for Valentine's Day 2019 compare to the industry's overall returns? Check out SAF's coverage of the holiday on p. 38, then head to safnow.org/vdayresults for more florist feedback and additional holiday findings.



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MOTHER'S LOVE

SAF has all kinds of tools to help you drive sales and profits for Mother's Day, from full tutorials on pricing and streamlining your operations, to online graphics and much more. Check them out at safnow.org/moreonline.



TOOT YOUR HORN

Join the ranks of those who have won \$5,000 and throw your hat in the ring for Floral Management's Marketer of the Year Contest. If your marketing efforts (large or small) during the last few years have been measurably successful, you're a candidate! Entry deadline is June 4. safnow.org/marketeroftheyear 🌿



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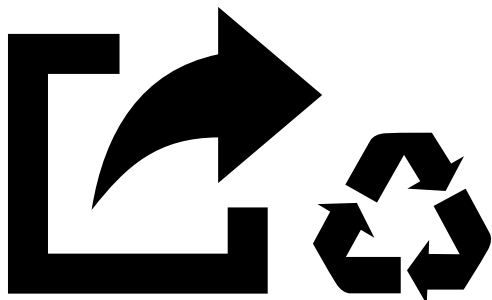
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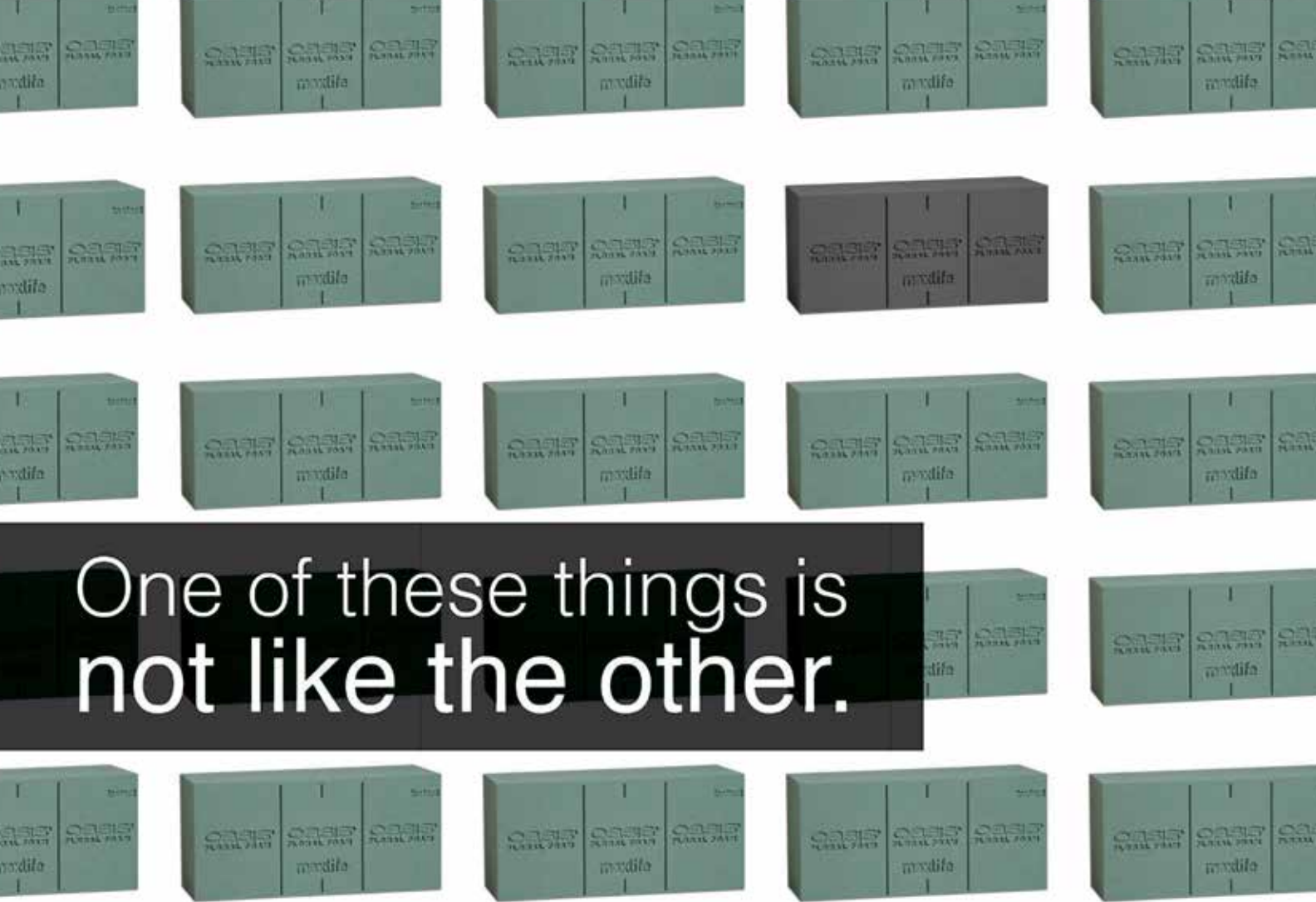
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- Brian J. - Retailer, Lima, OH

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FILE UNDER: GREAT IDEAS

> This month on p. 32, we're sharing results from a new SAF economic survey. One of the questions we asked respondents: What's an idea that's working well right now for you? Some of the responses are too good not to share.

We offer a 12-month of flowers card for \$30. We have about 2,500 cards out with a 50 percent redemption rate. The customer brings in the card each month in exchange for a bundle of flowers. The card is valued at \$96. We break even on the card, but it has generated in-store traffic and, in turn, those people spend in the store. Those customers have generated an additional \$150,000-plus in sales in the last year.

Jennifer Barnard, Tillie's Flower Shop, Wichita, Kansas

We continue to grow our auxiliary services, from going out to the home to having more ready-made grab-n-go items in store. Anything to make it easier for our customer

James McArdle, McArdle's Florist & Garden Center, Greenwich, Connecticut

We've become more active on Instagram and Adwords. Flowers are a product that is needed on a daily basis and if a consumer can't find you online or when they Google "florist," then we lose out on everyday orders that keep us going.

Carma White, Four Seasons Flowers & Plants, San Diego, California

We purchased a used Ford Transit for our new delivery vehicle. It is bigger, better on gas, newer and an actual delivery vehicle with a bright new floral wrap. It is more efficient, cheaper to run and better for our drivers!

Molly Drayer, Molly's Flowers & More, Sunbury, Ohio

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Brian Kusuda, Jimmy's Flower Shop Inc., Ogden, Utah 🌻

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THE FLORAL INDUSTRY HEADS TO WASHINGTON



POWER IN NUMBERS Retail florists, wholesalers, suppliers and growers came together in March during the Society of American Florists' 39th annual Congressional Action Days. Together, the group completed 130 visits to lawmakers' offices on Capitol Hill.

➤ When **Karen Fountain, AAF**, of Flowers 'n' Ferns stepped into the office of Sen. Tim Kaine (D-Virginia) on March 12, she was ready for a challenge. Earlier this year, Kaine joined with 30 senators to introduce a bill that would raise the minimum wage to \$15 by 2024 — an increase that Fountain said would devastate her retail flower shop in Burke, Virginia. "I showed him real numbers from our store — our costs, our profits — and walked him through how this kind of change would affect all of us," Fountain said. "I didn't change his mind, and I wasn't expecting to do that in one meeting, but he thanked me for bringing actual numbers to our meeting and for such a good conversation. The most important thing to me is that I got to go in there and make the case in person for my business."

In March, 91 retail florists, wholesalers, suppliers and growers came together during the Society of American Florists' 39th annual Congressional Action Days (CAD) to meet lawmakers and congressional staff, discuss issues, learn from subject matter experts, reaffirm connections and forge new relationships. In a time of deep partisanship, SAF members from 28 states, including 16 first-time participants, used civility, personal sto-

ries and data from their businesses to lobby Democrats and Republicans for common-sense solutions in the immigration system and to advocate for research funding and a critical federal crop report. Like Fountain, they also expressed opposition to the effort to raise the federal minimum wage to \$15.

"Lobbying can be a force for good," said **Cheryl Denham, AzMF**, of Arizona Family Florist in Phoenix, an SAF volunteer leader and longtime CAD participant who introduced many of the expert speakers for the two-day event. "One person can make a difference. This is our democratic tradition — and it works."

Understanding Washington

Before heading to Capitol Hill with their state delegations, CAD participants heard from journalists and Washington insiders about the current landscape in Washington and how future events, including the 2020 presidential election, could change the terrain.

Reid Wilson, the national correspondent for The Hill newspaper, noted demographic shifts in the country are playing out in the two political parties — including historic gains among female candidates in the midterm

elections and at state-level offices — with the Democrats drawing in more women, minorities and college-educated Americans while Republicans attract more white, male voters far from urban centers and hit hardest by the last recession.

"This hyper-partisanship is only increasing and it's having a deep effect on our culture," he said. "Over the last two decades we've undergone a really big undermining of trust in all of their institutions. That has played a big role in [our polarization]."

Shawn McBurney, SAF's senior director of government relations, outlined SAF's position on immigration reform and opposition to the minimum wage increase. On immigration — a contentious and complex issue — SAF members told lawmakers they oppose stand-alone, mandatory E-Verify legislation and instead support reform efforts that include enforcing immigration laws at the border, improving verification of employment authorization and creating an acceptable guest-worker program.

Mike Mooney of Dramm & Echter, a grower with farms in Baja, Mexico, and San Diego, California, joined McBurney on stage to share his own personal

reflections on the issue —including his poignant experiences at the retail, wholesale and grower levels working alongside friends whose immigration status isn't always clear — and how disruptive and unfair the current system is to workers and employers in need of a stable, reliable labor force.

"These are my friends and our friends," Mooney said. "They are vital to our industry. This is a big issue and we all have these same stories to share. We're all knitted together by the same problem."

Skip Paal, AAF, of Rutland Beard Floral Group, headquartered in Baltimore, discussed how rising state wage requirements in Maryland have already adversely affected his business — and why a federal effort could make things worse. "Increasing the minimum wage to \$15 is not sustainable," Paal said, noting that he had to consolidate eight positions and reconfigure his designers' compensation package to accommodate increased costs imposed in Maryland. "This is one of our most important issues — it affects every segment."

Building on successes following last year's Congressional Action Days, when Congress agreed to allocate more funding to the Floriculture and Nursery Research Initiative and generate a new Floriculture Crops Summary after several years' lapse in publication, **Terril Nell, Ph.D., AAF**, research coordinator for the American Floral Endowment, and **Dr.**



GREAT LAKES A number of CAD participants met directly with their members of Congress. Pictured here: Kevin Scicluna of Norton's Flowers & Gifts in Ypsilanti; Suzette Barbee of Vogt's Flowers Inc. in Flint; Nancy Hooper of Norton's Flowers & Gifts; Rep. Debbie Dingell (D); Tim Galea of Norton's Flowers & Gifts; Rodney Crittenden of the Great Lakes Floral Association in Haslett; and Kal Krueger of Vogt's Flowers Inc.

Marvin Miller, AAF, of Ball Horticultural Company, addressed the roles these research-based efforts play in the future success of the industry.

"Research is all about your business, it doesn't matter the segment," Nell said, noting that FNRI research has played a central role in creating new technology and best practices in pest and disease management. "Money toward research makes it happen."

SAF members also heard from subject matter experts **Joe Bischoff, Ph.D.**; **Alice Gomez**; and **John Sandell**, all of Cornerstone Government Affairs in Washington, D.C., who discussed updates in U.S. trade policies, including the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement set to replace NAFTA; trade disputes between the U.S. and China; the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) as it relates to roses imported from Ecuador; and future infrastructure funding. In addition, **A.B. Stoddard**, an associate editor and columnist with RealClearPolitics, provided in-depth political commentary on the 2020 presidential election to SAF members who attended the annual reception and dinner for SAFPAC, the industry's political action committee.



AT HOME Rep. Jimmy Panetta (D) meets with the California delegation, including CAD first-timer Matt Altman of Altman Plants/Floragem in Vista.



TALK SHOP Tim Dewey of DVFlora in Sewell, New Jersey, joins Maryland's Kaitlin Radebaugh, AAF, of Radebaugh Florist & Greenhouses in Towson and Skip Paal, AAF, of the Rutland Beard Floral Group in Catonsville in a conversation with staff of Sen. Chris Van Hollen (D).



SWAP MEET Jennifer and Tristen Barnard with Kenneth Denton of Tillie's Flower Shop in Wichita, Kansas, exchange business cards with an aide in Sen. Pat Roberts' (R) office.

Taking to Capitol Hill

Before the state groups headed to their congressional appointments, Cornerstone's **Hunt Shipman**, a former USDA deputy undersecretary for Farm and Foreign Agricultural Services, reminded SAF members to make their pitches to lawmakers and staff personal.

"Find a way to make a connection with each office," he said. "This is not a partisan exercise. This is about staying engaged and making sure you and your business are top of mind with these lawmakers."

The message resonated with first-timer **Robin Van der Schaaf** of Flamingo Holland in Vista, California, who spent the day with other members of the California delegation, many of whom have been participating in CAD for a number of years. An aide in the office of Sen. Kamala Harris (D-California) was delighted to spot the group and particularly Mooney; one of her aunts is a customer of Dramm & Echter. She remembered the group from years past.

"It was nice to meet with people who had some familiarity with our industry, and they seemed to understand the complexities of E-Verify," Van der Schaaf said.

Matt Altman of Altman Plants/Floragem, headquartered in Vista, California, said he was surprised, too, "by how accessible" Congress felt. "SAF did a good job demystifying the process and simplifying the issues," added Altman,



ILLINOIS WINS With Dr. Marvin Miller, AAF, at the helm, the Illinois delegation visits every congressional office in its state. Four of the nine SAF members from the group take a well-deserved break after visiting 20 offices, a walking trip that took them more than 5 miles around the Capitol. Pictured here: Gustavo Gilchrist of Kennicott Brothers - Chicago; Jennifer Zurko of Ball Publishing; Patricio Gilchrist; and Anna Ball of Ball Horticultural Company.



SOMBER REFLECTIONS CAD participants pay their respects during a visit to Arlington National Cemetery.

who was also participating in CAD for the first time.

Kate Delaney, AAF, of Matlack Florist in West Chester, Pennsylvania, said the "biggest pushback" her group received concerned the minimum wage — but even on that issue, personal connections paid off. Rep. Madeleine Dean (D-Pennsylvania) worked years ago in a flower shop now owned by SAF president-elect **Chris Drummond, AAF, PFCI**, of Plaza Flowers in Philadelphia, who was also at CAD.



VIP VISIT The Colorado delegation's Dwight Larimer AAF, PFCI, of DESIGN MASTER color tool, inc. in Boulder; Erin Brotherton of DWF Wholesale Florist in Denver; Tanner and Brian Wheat, AAF, PFCI, of Lafayette Florist, Gift Shop & Garden Center in Lafayette; meet with a legislative assistant and Sen. Cory Gardner (R).



THANK YOU SAF CEO Kate Penn recognized COO Drew Gruenburg, who retires in December, for his role coordinating 38 of the 39 CADs. **See more CAD photos. Search #safcad on social media.**

"She started to talk about her memories working as a teenager, wrapping the flowers, sweeping the floors, and then we could remind her how important those entry-level jobs are," and how minimum wage increases could force small business owners to cut such positions, Delaney explained.

For **Jodi McShan, AAF**, of McShan Florist in Dallas, Texas, CAD was productive and interesting. "It was enlightening to talk with the aides and to hear what they're working on," she said. "It was a good day—with lots of walking."

In fact, when the hard-charging Illinois group, which visited 20 congressional offices, tallied their miles, they realized they'd traveled more than 5 miles around the Capitol.

"Our approach [as a state group] is that we see everyone," said Miller, "every senator, every representative, no matter their political affiliation. If they don't represent us directly, well, they still have the floral industry in their district."

"What we're doing here is so important," added Miller, a longtime participant and key driver behind the push for research funds. "My dream for CAD is to have someone here from every state. My ultimate dream is to have someone from every district." 🌿

SAVE THE DATE

SAF's 40th annual
**Congressional
Action Days is
March 9-10, 2020.**

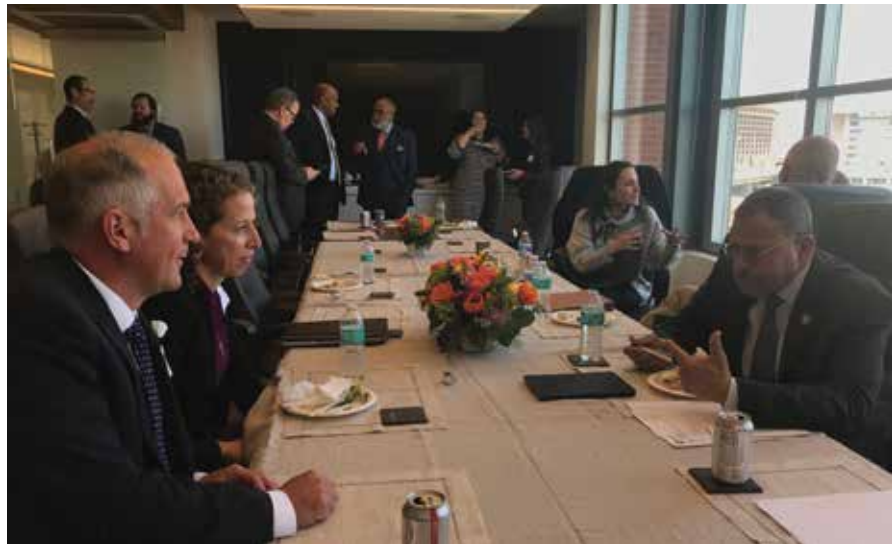
SAF LEADERS TALK INDUSTRY ISSUES WITH CONGRESSMAN

> Members of the Society of American Florists executive team scored valuable face-time with an influential member of Congress in March.

While in Washington, D.C., for the association's 39th annual Congressional Action Days, SAF President Bill LaFever, PFCI, of the Bill Doran Company in Rockford, Illinois, joined SAF CEO Kate Penn at a small luncheon for Rep. Sanford Bishop (D-Georgia), chairman of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture.

The subcommittee determines how much funding programs within the USDA receive, including the Floriculture and Nursery Research Initiative (FNRI) and the Floriculture Crops Summary — two programs that SAF members lobbied for during CAD.

Penn and LaFever talked at length with Bishop about the value of FNRI and the Floriculture Crops Summary, as well as some of the industry's challenges, including obtaining duty-free status for Ecuadorian roses under the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP).



POWER LUNCH SAF President Bill LaFever, PFCI, of the Bill Doran Company in Rockford, Illinois, and SAF CEO Kate Penn discussed floriculture, labor, trade and research over lunch and flowers with House Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee Chairman Sanford D. Bishop, Jr. (GA-02).

"As lunch was wrapping up and attendees were leaving, we stayed and took advantage of the opportunity to have some one-on-one time to talk about our issues," said LaFever. "Rep. Bishop was very interested in what we had to say and even requested that

SAF follow up with key members of his staff as FNRI and the Floriculture Crops Summary go through the appropriations process."

The luncheon was "a great opportunity to have some face-time with an influential legislator," added LaFever. 🌿

UPDATE 'MY SAF PROFILE'

> The Society of American Florists knows that members use its website, **safnow.org**, to keep up with everything from industry news to small business education and access free promotional materials and advice. That's why SAF made changes to its site to enhance the membership experience.

"We value the busy schedules of our SAF members," said SAF CEO Kate Penn. "With the new 'My SAF Profile' portal at safnow.org, we've streamlined everything members need to stay connected — no matter if you're accessing content at noon or midnight."

The improvements include:

- An updated log-in system to access members-only content and resources
- A new "My SAF Profile" portal to manage your account, such as updating your contact information and adding employees to your record

- A convenient, streamlined way to renew your membership
- A redesigned registration platform for all SAF events

"There's so much more you can do now online to manage your SAF membership," Penn said. "And it's all to help us serve you better. Click around 'My SAF Profile' and see for yourself."

The first step to manage your SAF Profile, if you have not done so already, is to reset your password, Penn said. For step-by-step instructions, go to **safnow.org/update-my-saf-profile**.

"If you have any questions or need anything at all, your SAF team is ready via LiveChat on safnow.org. You can also email info@safnow.org or call (703) 836-8700," Penn said. 🌿

Jenny Scala is SAF's director of marketing and communications. jscala@safnow.org



COMPLETE CONTROL With "My SAF Profile" at **safnow.org**, members can update their contact information, renew membership and add employees to their records. Get started at **safnow.org/update-my-saf-profile**.

snapshot

Wascana Flower Shoppe REGINA, SASKATCHEWAN



FARM TO TABLE Key to breaking up the 2,000-square-foot open concept showroom: four oversized farmhouse-style tables. “We draw clients to the sections with our oversized and dramatic artificial floral arrangements on each table,” Anderson said. “From smaller-scaled artificial pieces, to decorative pots, teas, treats, candles and bath items, we hope to inspire multiple purchases within the same look.”

PLEASE TOUCH The floor-to-ceiling custom display units were designed to “draw the eye up and complement the table display areas,” Anderson said. “The simple and repetitive product showcase allows the product to shine and inspire from a different vantage point and makes it easy to see each product individually and to shop without stress of ‘wrecking the pretty table.’”

ROOM TO SHOP, MEET AND MORE

➤ A “massive renovation” completed in March 2019 has meant a new look — and new practical features for the 5,000-square-foot Wascana Flower Shoppe, located in Regina, the capital city of Saskatchewan, the province in Canada. The first impression for customers? Flowers, naturally, said Tanya Anderson, co-owner of the business alongside her mother, Petra Janssen. “Walking through the doors, you are greeted by a 24-foot fresh floral showcase,” Anderson said, adding that “the cooler was specifically designed to allow for a full and upfront floral experience.” The mother-daughter team has been strategic about carving out spaces for privacy, too — areas that allow them to meet privately with clients for event work and sympathy planning, but that still feel on-brand. “The consultation rooms were designed to create an intimate meeting area cohesive with the showroom,” she explained. “We have one room that was designed for more of a boardroom-style gathering, and the other one is more of a pretty meeting space.” See additional photos at safnow.org/moreonline. 🌿

Mary Westbrook is the editor in chief of Floral Management. mwestbrook@safnow.org



WELCOMING VIBES In the consultation rooms, “Clean lines along with warm wood tones project a calm and inspiring environment, allowing these spaces to be dynamic for brides, events, as well as bereavement planning,” Anderson said. “The main objective within these spaces was to create an area in which clients could feel private, relaxed, comfortable, but yet still inspired.”



THE LIMITATIONS OF 'NICE'

> This month, I called a shop in the Midwest, the traditional home of "nice," to play the role of a customer who wanted to express extreme gratitude to a doctor for "life-changing" back surgery. Did the clerk live up to the stereotype and smother me with "niceness"? Was she empathetic to my situation? Read on and then listen for yourself (along with your staff)!

Speaking of good care, as the self-appointed floral sales doctor, I want to make sure your staff is getting its monthly dose of "Vitamin Tim" by listening to the recording of the call I write about here. You can download or play it directly at safnow.org/TimsCalling.

The Opportunity: Life-Changing Thanks

I told the employee that I had just undergone major surgery and wanted to express my gratitude with flowers. I was the ideal customer, stating I had no clue about flowers and needed her to guide me toward something appropriate for my needs and proportionate to the sentiment I was trying to convey. This truly was a golden opportunity to sell me anything. (Perhaps that triple spike orchid plant that needs to be moved out?) I even said, "I just want to leave it to you."

Thumbs Up: Nice... But Nothing More

She was polite. Beyond that, there is absolutely nothing she did right on this call. Even her politeness touches on a huge issue that is a cancer on the retail floral industry: the misconception that because your staff is friendly or polite, they are giving good customer service. That is not the case. (Just listen to the recording of this call to understand my point!)

Thumbs Down: No Empathy, Poor Service

The employee answered the phone without giving her name and then simply did not listen

to me or the numerous cues, both subtle and obvious, that I presented. She asked the insane question, "Do you have a price range you want to spend?" and then started me at \$50 after I explained that I wanted to acknowledge the doctor's epic, life-altering care. While she was polite, she never connected with me by stating, for example, "That's so good to hear about your recovery" or "Let's send the doctor something spectacular" — the kind of professional comments that would have provided her with an easy way to justify offering a larger design/higher price point. It gets worse: She also rubbed the delivery cost in my face, saying, "There is going to be a \$10 delivery fee...Is that OK?" (What if a customer says no to that foolish question? Do they get a 50 percent discount at your shop?) I even had to prompt her for an add-on, asking, "Is there anything else I can add, like a 'thank you' balloon?"



VH-STUDIO/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

The Takeaway: Train Your Staff to Be the Experts

Customers like independent retail florists: They enjoy calling us and seeking our professional advice. There is an unwritten covenant that exists between the two groups: Customers often proclaim their ignorance of our product and ask for guidance, assuming we are listening, paying attention and offering what's best for our needs. Too often, as in this call, we sell from our own pockets and operate under the unfounded fear that, upon hearing a higher price, a customer will hang up or storm out. It does not happen. But what does take place is that customers follow our lead and buy what we tell them to buy — and what we suggest is frequently way too low. Ever wonder why your website sales are so much higher than your store and phone sales? The website holds up our part of the deal and shows customers higher price points. And they pick them. Your staff can do the same. 🌿



The Recording

You're only half-done learning from this column. Next step, gather your staff 'round a store computer, read this column to them and then play the recording of my call to this shop by visiting safnow.org/TimsCalling. Ask your team for feedback on what they heard and have them talk about how they can make better sales moving forward.

"Too often, we operate under the unfounded fear that, upon hearing a higher price, a customer will hang up or storm out. That does not happen."



Tim Huckabee, FSC, is the president of FloralStrategies.com, which teaches ultimate customer care to retail and wholesale florists. tim@floralstrategies.com



VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

How does your staff REALLY treat customers? Email tim@floralstrategies.com to volunteer your shop for a free Tim's Calling undercover shopping call, anonymity guaranteed. (Retail value: \$50.)



PETAL IT FORWARD

Wednesday

OCTOBER 23, 2019



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and join us at
safnow.org/pif



EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT



Laura Jacobs Renaud

Project Manager
Jacobson
Boston, Massachusetts

> At Jacobson, Laura Jacobs Renaud oversees all marketing functions *and* human resources — important roles that require (ahem) *a lot* of organization to keep straight. Before joining the company two years ago, Renaud worked in behavioral health doing clinical counseling with kids and adolescents while finishing her master’s degree in social work at Boston College. Today, she’s a major force behind maintaining and building company culture at the largest floral hard goods supplier in New England. “I love getting to know the veteran staff and being the one to introduce great new people to the team,” she said. “It’s the best when I see someone who’s worked with us for 20 years laughing with someone I hired.”

Best advice I’ve been given:

“I was just told by a colleague that when hiring someone and ranking them out of 10, you can’t use the number seven. Think about it: There’s a big difference between a six and an eight! It might save you from a misfit if you take that ‘catch-all’ seven out of the mix.”

My biggest “oops” moment:

“We had a designer do some live videos with our product over a weekend and I forgot to tell the sales department that it was going live. They received *so many* inquiries and customer registrations that they thought our system was being hacked. Whoops! I learned to always consider the ripple effect. If you have a meeting or a project with someone, you have to slow it down and think, ‘Wait. Who else will this impact and do they know about it?’”

My favorite things:

“Basecamp is a project management software that’s web based. You can upload documents, add the necessary people to the projects, and there’s an instant message and discussion piece. It has calendars and you can assign to-dos. We spend less time trying to find information in old email threads. Plus, it has an app that’s great. Also, I use the fax machine all the time, and I love the fax machine. (Sorry, not sorry!) A final recommendation: Everyone needs to get a Peloton bike! I love it. I used to go to spin class. Now, I can spin in my own home, on my own schedule.” 🌸

Mary Westbrook is the editor in chief of *Floral Management*. mwestbrook@safnow.org



Listening in...Legally

Q: “Is there any problem with recording incoming and outgoing calls on my store’s phones to use for quality assurance and in the event that there is a dispute with a customer?”

A: Businesses need to be careful about recording telephone conversations (or engaging in other surveillance). Many states have “two-party consent” laws, which mean that both parties to the conversation must consent to the recording.

Businesses should always check their local laws before implementing any new form of monitoring.

If recording is permitted, even if two-party consent is not legally required, it is still a best practice to notify any callers that calls are being recorded for quality assurance and to have employees sign an agreement to acknowledge and consent to the recording.

SAF partners with Paley Rothman, a Bethesda, Maryland law firm, so that members can get fast, free answers to business legal questions. Have a question you want to ask? Call Jessica Summers at (301) 968-3402. Be sure to mention that you are an SAF member.

2,210,433,861

CONSUMER IMPRESSIONS AND COUNTING

More than 2.2 BILLION. That's how many consumer impressions have been generated by SAF's public relations and social media programs, such as the award-winning Petal It Forward program (safnow.org/pif), StressLess research (safnow.org/stressless) and the Two Minute Trends campaign (safnow.org/twominutetrends). These forward-thinking companies are the leaders in industry promotion. SAF's consumer programs would not happen without them.



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DVFLORA

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Wholesalers

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Flowers
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Ocean View Flowers
Oregon Flowers, Inc.
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Inc.

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Transportation

Armellini Express Lines,
Inc.

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Alders Wholesale
Florist
Berkeley Florist Supply
Co. in Miami
Dillon Floral
Corporation
Frank Adams
Wholesale Florist Inc.
Louisiana Wholesale
Florists, Inc.
Mueller Supply Inc.
Schaefer Wholesale
Florist, Inc.

Suppliers

Berwick Offray LLC/
CSS Industries, Inc.
Lion Ribbon Co., Inc./
CSS Industries, Inc.

Growers

Green Point Nurseries,
Inc.

CONTRIBUTOR:
\$250 - \$499

Wholesalers

Ensign Wholesale Floral
GA State Wholesale

Gassafy Wholesale
Florist, Inc.
GM Floral Co.
Jacobson Floral
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BUILD YOUR TEAM

> People often ask me how we manage to assemble the right group of people to accomplish the myriad tasks that need to be performed in the daily routine of the flower shop.

I think of my staff as a team, a group of people working together to accomplish a goal that benefits all involved and the company itself. I use this term “team” often when addressing my employees. Most people understand the concept of teamwork and why every member is important. I teach them to support each other. Not every employee understands all the workings of the flower shop, so we count on each other to be mentors in our different areas of expertise and to help others in areas where they may be lacking.

Guiding Principles

Over the years, I’ve come up with a few principles I use to create and support our team, which ranges from a crew of 12 people to about 35 for our “Super Bowl” holidays (aka Valentine’s Day or Mother’s Day).



LIGHTFIELD STUDIOS/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

Don’t burn your bridges. Sometimes, people separate from the shop, usually for reasons beyond my control: new opportunities, immaturity, health, etc. I never begrudge people who leave to do what they feel will improve the quality of their lives. Several of our holiday helpers are past employees who departed on positive terms and simply enjoy the hustle and bustle.

Familiarize all employees with every aspect of what you do, even those tasks that fall outside their primary responsibilities. It gives them a feeling of belonging and empowerment. More than once at our business, an after-school student — whose main role is to clean up around the shop — has prevented a critical mistake because they had knowledge of our day-to-day activities.

Turn errors into teaching opportunities. This can be challenging at times, depending on employees’ egos, but when feedback is delivered constructively (i.e., NOT belittling a team member in front of the others), mistakes allow you to raise team members’ performance while reinforcing the need for everyone to keep a positive, almost nurturing eye out for each other.

Welcome input. Everyone has a voice. I encourage team members to offer their constructive ideas on how to do things around the shop. You never know when a different perspective may make you rethink the way you’ve been doing things for the last several decades.

Holiday Helpers

Bringing together 35 people for a mid-week holiday like this past Valentine’s Day or another high-volume event can be quite a task. Here are some of my tips:

Keep your phone number list. I recently called someone I worked with in the 80s and said, “Wanna come play flower shop?” My old friend spent four evenings with us at Valentine’s Day and brought along family to help out.

Assess people by the company they keep. A polite, well-rounded,

enthusiastic employee will often have friends or family with similar qualities. Ask your team members if they have any contacts who may be able to help out during peak times.

Seek out professional freelancers. Many cities and towns have organized groups of designers who make themselves available to florists for holidays and events. This can strengthen your team when they need extra (expert) hands to get them through the busy times. Hiring a clutch corsage and bouquet maker ahead of your biggest prom can be a huge asset.

Consider community business organizations. These can be a great resource for busy times around the shop, too. Our local Business Improvement District has helped connect us with skilled part-time workers to grow our team when we need it the most.

Keep your young people around. Don’t underestimate the quality of youthful workers! Many a florist started their career pushing a broom and watering flowers. We always have people who start here when local school students, work through college and joyfully return to us during busy times.

Think about who knows the roads. Drivers are some of the most integral parts of our team. A properly processed and beautifully designed order is useless if it doesn’t arrive at its destination. We resource drivers from the local police and fire stations. If they can’t find a delivery location, no one can!

Remember, your team is the most important part of your business. Whether you’re in the midst of a scrimmage, regular season game, playoffs or your Super Bowl, the right team will take you all the way to victory! 🏆

Patrick Kelly is the owner of Stein Your Florist Co. in Philadelphia and Burlington, New Jersey. In addition to his family’s business, he maintains a personal blog, WakingUpWithPatrick.com, on meditation. steinyourflorist@aol.com

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PINK: IT'S THE LATEST OBSESSION

➤ Rami Malek and Olivia Colman may have won the top acting accolades at the 91st annual Academy Awards, but the star of the evening — on the red carpet at least — was a certain rosy hue. Dozens of A-list actresses, including Gemma Chan, Helen Mirren, Angela Bassett, Sarah Paulson and Linda Cardellini, turned heads in frocks that flaunted the coquettish color's myriad tones from cotton candy to bubblegum to salmon to fuchsia.

This year's Oscar fashion statement mirrors a growing trend in bridal wear. After Mandy Moore tied the knot in November wearing a blush Rodarte tulle gown, InStyle magazine interviewed Lanie List, founder of Lovely Bride, an Atlanta-based boutique, who said about 10 percent of her clientele made similar sartorial choices. Why? With such a wide range of warm and cool tones, pink is almost universally flattering. (It also doesn't hurt that it's psychologically associated with romance.) With Pantone's pick of "Living Coral" as the 2019 Color of the Year, she expects pink's popularity to soar even higher.

In March, the design team at Rockcastle Florist in Rochester and Canandaigua, New York,

debuted a series of arrangements that incorporated pink. "We're branching out and looking to sources like fashion, HGTV, great artists and local destinations for inspiration," said co-owner Wendy Rockcastle. One of the shop's latest bestsellers, "Rebel Heart," features baby pink gerberas and hydrangeas, watermelon pink roses and hot pink ranunculus; it's become a favorite with young adults. "My millennial daughter, a graphic stylist for the shop, tells me her generation doesn't regard pink as feminine," she said. "Rather, they embrace the many shades it has to offer and how it pairs with other colors." Some of their preferred combinations: blush and burgundy, hot pink and lime green, pale pink and coral.

The floral world abounds with pink opportunities. Here are just a few to try this year. 🌸

Katie Hendrick Vincent is the senior contributing editor of Floral Management. Kvincent@safnow.org

'LARISSA'
GERRONDO GERBERA
Green Valley Floral



'P. TYING SHIN'
PHALAENOPSIS ORCHID
Dümmen Orange

'CORNEILLE'
SCABIOSA
Hilverda Kooij

'CHAMPAGNE PINK'
CHRYSANTHEMUM
Dümmen Orange



'AVIANCE' GERBERA
Green Valley Floral



'BENSON' ORIENTAL LILY
Sun Valley Farms



'SHIRLEY TEMPLE' PEONY
DVFlora



PINK KALANCHOE
Sun Valley Farms



'MARIACHI PINK' LISIANTHUS
Esprit Miami



'PINK EUROPA' ASTILBE
DVFlora



'AUXIERE' FANCY TULIP
Sun Valley Farms



'AMBITION' SPRAY CARNATION
Dümmen Orange



'PINK IRISCHKA' SPRAY ROSES
Royal Flowers



'PARLE MOI' GARDEN ROSE
Green Valley Floral



'PINK RIVER' DELPHINIUM
Valleflor



Gallery Place

A Kansas couple brings new life and attention to their flower shop through partnerships with local artists.

BY MARY WESTBROOK
PHOTOS BY EARL RICHARDSON

ZAMUROVIC PHOTOGRAPHY/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

Imagine, for a moment, that you and your spouse are the owners of a small retail flower shop in the downtown area of a 50,000-person city, located in the middle of the country. The shop was established in the 1940s. You took it over in the mid-1980s and have been running it for 35 years, through boom times and slow periods, cycles of trends and consumer preferences, shifts in competition and new technology. It's not easy, but you push through these challenges and, together, you build a successful business.

Then, around 2015, you begin to notice more radical changes. Even bigger challenges. Your once bustling showroom feels quiet; people aren't coming in the store nearly as much as they once did. Some of your formerly top-selling merchandise is gathering dust. You have too much space. You still feel passionate about your business, but you also feel a little disconnected — from your customers and what they want, and from your community and fellow business owners. Your sales are down and so is your morale. It's almost enough to make you want to give up entirely.

Almost.

For florists all around the country — in small towns and big cities, on the East and West coasts and every place in between — this scenario is anything but a hypothetical. In the past 10 years (or even the past five or three), the pace of disruptive change introduced in retail and the floral industry has been head-spinning. The way customers shop, the things and services they want to buy, how they find and communicate with businesses...it's all evolving, and it's on business owners to evolve and adapt, too.

And that's exactly what husband-and-wife team Peggy and Wayne DeBey, AIFD, set out to do, when they realized it was time for them to make big changes at The Flower Nook — that longtime flower shop in Salina, Kansas. Over the course of just a few years, they've managed to breathe new life into their business (and draw more people into the store) by rethinking who their customers are and how they shop, reaching out to local artisans and selling their one-of-a-kind goods, and partnering with area businesses for events that place The Flower Nook back in the center of their customers' attention.



The Flower Nook Salina, Kansas

Owners: Peggy and Wayne DeBey, AIFD

No. of employees: 2 full-time; 4 part-time

Annual Sales: Around \$300,000

Their challenge: Reinvigorate their store to attract more customers; put existing space to better use; connect more deeply with their community

Their approach: The DeBeys now host a rotating cast of dozens of local artisans throughout the year in store. They've replaced underperforming sales items (permanent botanicals) with the artists' work. The shop receives commission from the artists' sales and the artists pay a booth fee and sign a three-month contract. The couple has also launched new in-store events to generate more foot traffic.

Results: Since bringing in the artists, the DeBeys have seen an increase in visitors and overall sales — despite the fact that they've had to deal with ongoing construction in front of their store during the same period. They've also created a new revenue stream through artisan booth rentals and commission on artwork sales.



CHANGES FOR GOOD The team at The Flower Nook changes their store more often since partnering with artists. Their tools of choice: paint, movable walls and flexible display units.



PROUD PARTNER Featured Flower Nook artist Mary Ann Tanking stands with her painting, "Displaced Pelicans."

First Steps: Identifying the Problems

The DeBeys first began considering the need for significant change a few years ago, when they started to notice a drop-off in foot traffic and walk-in sales, while simultaneously noting other causes for concern. Among them: Permanent botanicals, which took up a significant portion of their showroom space, had become less popular, and a small rental space, adjacent to the shop, had been left without a tenant for the first time in years. Peggy and Wayne understood

that the formula — fewer customers, reduced sales levels, higher facilities costs — was a recipe for disaster, and they decided to take action by first researching the market themselves, to try to pinpoint the source of their challenges.

"We understood there was a variety of reasons for this decrease, such as economic stress, mass merchandisers, an increase in online shopping and turmoil in the floral industry," Wayne said, ticking through a list of challenges that will sound familiar to any florist. "We did an informal competitive analysis in our community and discovered flowers could be purchased at one of three full-service florists, plus the hardware stores, gas stations, the cheerleading club at our local high school, the grocery stores, Wal-Mart, and others — and that's not even counting the online competition."

The DeBeys needed to make some changes to re-energize their business and attract more local customers — changes that included rethinking everything they *thought* they knew about those customers in the first place. Having some experience showcasing local artists' work on a small scale in their store, they experimented with hosting holiday pop up art booths for 24 local artists in their adjacent rental space, but that initiative required having an additional full-time staff member to manage it. And while it did attract more people to the pop up area next door, the effort didn't solve the problem of bringing more people into The Flower Nook itself.

To accomplish that goal, the DeBeys knew they'd need to keep experimenting.

"For months and months, we analyzed our area buying patterns, read about national trends, talked with each other and debated each other," Wayne said. "But we kept coming back to the fact that the old definition of customers had changed. These new consumers were more interested in the shopping process. They want a unique store, diverse products and, really, a full sensory experience."

To give them that experience, the DeBeys would need to draw on all that they already knew from running their business and the pop up space — and bring in some new concepts to truly set the store apart in their local market.

From Florist to Gallery, Event Space — and More

Peggy and Wayne were not alone in their assessment that “experience” matters.

In fact, today, experience is a key concept for retailers of all sizes, according to customer service expert, author and speaker Shep Hyken. “Local businesses today can compete against these larger competitors not with marketing dollars — because you’ll be outspent there — but with experiences as the driving force,” he said. “It’s the classic David versus Goliath story.”

One of the first major changes the couple made was to diversify their product line. Over the years, they’d noticed that drop in permanent botanical sales, and they were ready to introduce new merchandise. They also wanted to find a way to make their showroom feel more dynamic. While the pop up venue hadn’t been a complete success, Peggy loved the energy the artists had brought to the space, and she and Wayne began to wonder: What if The Flower Nook could transform itself into a space that was part retail flower shop, part art gallery, with works by local artisans displayed and sold on a rotating basis all year long?

Today, that’s exactly what’s happening. The shop now displays goods from 12 artists in the showroom at any given time throughout the year — with an additional gallery space along the 14-by-14-foot back wall. Artists sign contracts with terms that are specific to each agreement — usually for about three months at a time. Artists pay The Flower Nook for booth space and give the shop a commission, though the exact terms vary.

“Some artists bring their own following with them, and that means more people in my store, which is valuable to us,” Peggy said. “Other artists are a little newer and don’t have the same draw yet.” (See sidebar for a CPA’s take on the commission-based approach.)

Bringing in the artists and becoming a de facto local art gallery “required us to become art consumers by attending dozens of [regional] art galleries and events that showcased a variety of artists,” said Peggy, who has since been elected to a local arts board, a position that’s helped her make connections in that scene and find the right artists to complement the store. “We needed to have buy-in and create recognition of ourselves and our shop in the local art community.”

COMMISSION SUCCESS

Thinking of inviting artists or other small businesses in to sell their goods on commission in your shop? Space is the major variable to consider, said Paul Goodman, MBA, CPA, PFCI, a longtime contributor to Floral Management. While Goodman isn’t an adviser to The Flower Nook, he said he thinks the overall approach is a good one to consider — in large part because, as Peggy DeBey explained, those featured artists bring people into your store. “I have promoted florists partnering with other businesses for marketing purposes, for instance, a florist putting arrangements and cards in a salon and the salon putting cards in the florist shop, or florists partnering with a nonprofit to bring the nonprofit’s customers into a holiday open house,” he said. The partnerships can be a win-win. “Unless the florist doesn’t have the physical space, I don’t see a downside,” he said. Get tips on how to write and negotiate contracts with local artisans from the DeBeys at safnow.org/moreonline.



CENTER OF TOWN Customers now think of The Flower Nook as a place for community events and unique gifts, not “just” flowers, said owners Peggy and Wayne DeBey.



GOODS TO GO The Flower Nook now displays goods from 12 artists in the showroom at any given time throughout the year — with an additional gallery space along the 14-by-14-foot back wall.

In 2018, the shop collected \$3,000 in booth fees alone, along with commission on the art sales (between 20 and 30 percent). Art sales totaled \$22,500 in 2017 and \$25,000 in 2018 and are growing this year.

For the DeBeys, the commission revenue itself is less about sales and more about marketing. “I think about it almost as advertising,” Peggy explained. “It’s about getting people in the door, to see the shop and all that we have. Once we get them in here, they’re more likely to remember us in the future, when they have floral gift-giving needs.”

And the approach seems to be working. Since introducing art, the shop has seen foot traffic increase year over year — despite recent troublesome construction in front of the store that has reduced street visibility and taken away valuable parking spots. (Overall sales are up by about 5 percent.)

New Looks for a New Mission

The changes in inventory also necessitated changes to the showroom itself. The team at The Flower Nook now updates its front window displays monthly and regularly reimagines its interior space — reconfiguring movable walls and rearranging furniture and display units to accommodate the changing roster of new artists.

Every three months, they also repaint the back-wall gallery space, to provide a fresh backdrop. (For the first few months of 2019, the wall was painted a peachy-coral tone — a homage to Pantone’s selection of ‘Living Coral’ as the color of the year.) The goal? Make the shop look new and exciting, even to customers who stop by often — an effort that requires considerable sweat equity.

“We get the drill out and the hammer,” said Peggy with a laugh. “We try to

GO DEEPER

See more photos from The Flower Nook and their events at safnow.org/moreonline.

make our displays and merchandising as creative as possible to complement the art, and of course the flowers.”

While permanent botanicals are no longer a focus for the shop, cut flowers and plants remain at the heart of the business, Peggy added. “The front of the shop has definitely changed, with all of our artisans on display, but we still have flowers front and center in the cooler. You still know it’s a flower shop.” (Not wanting to miss out on permanent sales, the DeBeys now have cheerful signage encouraging shoppers to ask staff about custom permanent work.)

An unexpected perk: The design team has been inspired by the art now on display, becoming “more artistic” and inventive in their own right, Wayne said.

“There has been a slow but steady acknowledgment of The Flower Nook being interested in creating, sponsoring and promoting arts in the community,” Wayne said. “There has also been an awareness from the community that we have more than ‘just’ great flowers. This translated into people wandering into the store to see the art and discovering flowers at the same time, or folks coming in to get flowers and realizing we had a regional art and gift gallery.”

Bringing the Community Together

Another focus of the reinvention at The Flower Nook: in-store events that combine the power of joint marketing efforts among local businesses with the appeal of unique goods and family-friendly entertainment.

For the past two Christmas seasons, for example, The Flower Nook has expanded its artist affiliations even more, with up to 30 artists showcasing gift items such as candles, glassware, jewelry, leatherwork and more. (A popular part of the event, which last year drew a crowd of more than 200, is a visit from Santa and Mrs. Claus.)

In addition, since bringing in artisans to the store on a permanent basis, The Flower Nook has launched new events, including “Art is the Heart of the Community” and “The Lips Amore,” which give community members the chance to participate in the creation of art projects later displayed in the store.



HAPPY TEAM Shop employee Fran Cassidy works on a floral arrangement. The refresh at the store has improved foot traffic and morale.



The shop also hosts Salina's monthly First Friday event, which can attract anywhere from 100 to 175 people at a time. (The DeBeys always open their doors an hour earlier than other participating venues to encourage extra shopping.) "We invite the community in to see the store and meet some of our artists while browsing," Peggy said. About a dozen businesses participate in the monthly event, meaning The Flower Nook can take advantage of group marketing efforts, while being seen as a community player.

To complement these in-store events, the shop has added a "Kansas-made" food display in their showroom and features food items from local vendors. "For each First Friday event, we select one or two Kansas foods to create a display and give samples," Peggy explained, adding that she and Wayne also often have a food truck on site to attract customers and amp up the excitement. (The food trucks and food vendors rotate based on availability and season; those vendors handle their own sales transactions, which means The Flower Nook does not need additional licensing.)

To enliven events even more, the shop often brings in performers, including a teen cello group and a bluegrass band, along with animals from the local zoo. Recently, the shop also had four alpacas in its back-garage area, mainly for photo opportunities (which were a big hit). The inclusion of the animals is light-hearted, but it's also strategic: "They tie in with our line of alpaca wool clothing we were carrying at the time from one of our artisans," Peggy said.

All of which ties back to the couple's original inspiration: To make their shop buzz again, and to give these new (and longtime) customers that full sensory experience they crave.

"Our goal is to make it fun and memorable and lively for our customers," Peggy said. "We want everyone to have a good time and to take away a good memory from our events, so that they'll remember us in the future." 🌿

Mary Westbrook is the editor in chief of *Floral Management*. mwestbrook@safnow.org

FINDING NEW REVENUE STREAMS

Looking for a way to inject new lines of revenue into your business— beyond plant, cut-flower and event sales? During SAF Amelia Island 2019, the Society of American Florists' 135th annual convention, Sept. 18-21, you'll hear from florists who have done just that and get practical tips on how you can follow suit, along with so much more, including educational programming, design inspiration and big picture perspective from some of the industry's top minds on major challenges and opportunities for the coming years. Find out more at safnow.org.



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Take a Walk on the Bright Side



A new economic survey of SAF members finds business is good for many industry members — even as key challenges remain.

BY MARY WESTBROOK

Floral industry members across segments have a relatively optimistic take on the economic landscape, according to a new survey from the Society of American Florists.

In response to the question “How’s business?”, 57 percent of respondents answered “good” while only 3 percent described it as “poor.” About 29 percent classified business as “OK” and less than 2 percent termed it “terrible.” (Remaining respondents said they are “unsure.”) When SAF surveyed members at the same time last year, 49 percent classified business as “good”; 38 percent as “OK”; 9 percent said “excellent”; 3 percent said “poor” and 1 percent, “terrible.”

The Economic Outlook Survey was emailed to SAF members on January 21, 2019, and had a response rate of 7.9 percent.

Overall, 51 percent of all respondents this year said they are “optimistic” about sales in 2019, with another 11 percent calling themselves “very optimistic.” Twenty-nine percent said they are “neutral/uncertain”; only about 8 percent said they were either “pessimistic” or “very pessimistic.” These answers were consistent across segments — although respondents who identified as wholesalers, suppliers or importers appear to have the sunniest outlook, with 18 percent classifying themselves “very optimistic” about the new year.

These results did not surprise Charles R. Hall, Ph.D., professor and Ellison Chair in the Department of Horticultural Sciences at Texas A&M University and the 2018 winner of SAF’s Paul Ecke, Jr. Award. “To be in this industry, you almost have to be an optimist,” he said with a laugh, before noting that — while many challenges exist — a number of economic factors support the positive take. “It’s been a strong period for flower sales, and that’s correlated to the business cycle and consumer confidence, which is up.”

Key Issues

Among all respondents this year, 63 percent said “the availability of labor” is having an effect on their business. That doesn’t surprise Hall either. “Since

right before the last recession started, labor costs are almost exactly one-third higher,” he said, noting that, thanks to low unemployment levels, “as wages go up in other sectors, folks have a choice where to work.”

That was a sentiment shared by a retailer respondent in the West. “It seems like the quality workforce is already employed,” he said. “Overall, we are a relatively low-paying industry, and it seems like the younger crowd will leave if a better paying job becomes available.”

About 56 percent of respondents to this year’s survey say they expect to spend more on labor this year — even though 47 percent do *not* plan to hire additional permanent staff in the next six months, and only 38 percent are planning increases in salaries or pay in the same time period. Meanwhile, 43 percent of respondents agreed with the statement “We have a difficult time attracting non-seasonal candidates for entry-level positions”; and 52 percent agreed with the statement “We have a difficult time attracting non-seasonal candidates for experienced design positions.”

“It’s really hard to find people for this industry cold,” wrote one wholesaler in the Pacific Northwest. “Not that we haven’t had luck, but I find existing employees who bring people in has worked the best. The job, hours — they’re not sugar-coated. People say they love the morning, until the third day of waking up at 3 a.m. or 3:30 a.m.”

51 percent of respondents are “**very optimistic**” about sales in 2019

Top Issues by Segment

Growers

77%
Availability of Labor

69%
Transportation

54%
Health Care Costs

54%
Minimum Wage

Wholesalers, Suppliers, Importers

63%
Transportation

57%
Health Care Costs

53%
Availability of Labor

Retailers

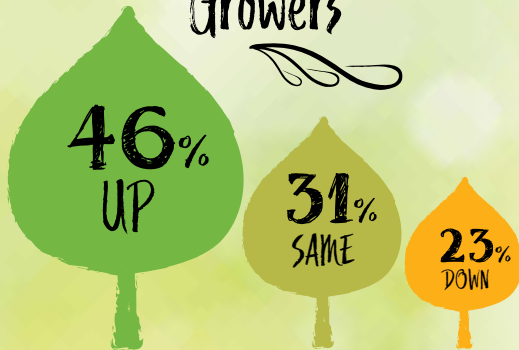
64%
Availability of Labor

60%
Minimum Wage

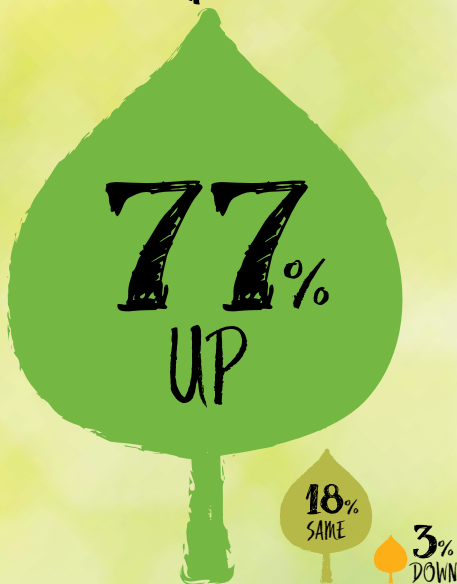
42%
Trade/Tariff Issues

Gross Sales Trends by Segment

Growers



Wholesalers, Suppliers, % Importers %



Retailers



Remaining percentages unsure

Another retailer from the Pacific Northwest summed up her labor challenges in three points: a lack of skilled designers, a time crunch to find and keep people, and common misperceptions among the public about what it's like to work in a busy flower shop.

"As the sole operator of a small shop, I am maxed out and training is a huge time commitment," she explained. "I literally have to decide what won't get done when I spend time training and the number of times it hasn't worked out is demoralizing. People [also] think it would be fun to play with flowers all day. They are not prepared for reality of shop life."

Other key issues noted in the survey and expected to impact companies: **"minimum wage"** (55 percent); **"trade and tariff issues"** (43 percent); **"health care costs"** (40 percent); **"transportation"** (29 percent); **"supply chain logistics"** (24 percent); and **"tax reform"** (11 percent). Nearly 23 percent of respondents also said the **"partial federal government shutdown,"** which started Dec. 22, 2018, and ended Jan. 25, 2019, affected their business.

Hall said these concerns are all valid, and he pointed to those associated with higher input costs (including minimum wage and transportation) as especially challenging.

"As input costs increase, margins shrink," he said, adding that the primary way to offset those increases is to adjust your own prices. "If your prices stay the same, you're just eating your margins."

Sales Trends

About 54 percent of all respondents to this year's survey said their 2018 gross sales were higher than those in 2017; 27 percent said they were about the same and 18 percent said they were down. (A small percentage, less than 2 percent, wasn't sure how gross sales compared, year over year.)

By comparison, last year, about 51 percent of all respondents said 2017 gross sales were up over 2016, 24 percent said they were the same and 24 percent said they were down. (A similar-sized group last year also was uncertain of year-over-year gross sales comparisons.)

Among respondents who saw gross sales drop in 2018, 74 percent said the decrease was between 1 and 10 percent. Among those who saw an increase, 73 percent charted the gains between 1 and 10 percent.

Sustainability, Origin Questions

Forty-three percent of this year's total respondents said they "occasionally" source sustainably grown/manufactured products — 42 percent said the same in the survey last year. About 24 percent of respondents this year said they source such products "regularly," compared to roughly 30 percent last year.

Eighty-two percent of retailer respondents this year said they are rarely/never asked about sustainably grown/manufactured products, which tracks closely with last year's responses (81 percent).

63 percent of respondents said **"the availability of labor"** is having an effect on business

Meanwhile, 47 percent of retailers this year said they are “occasionally” asked where flowers come from; 39 percent said they are “never/rarely” asked. (In last year’s survey, 54 percent of retailer respondents said they are “occasionally” asked about flower origin; 36 percent said they were “rarely/never” asked.) These responses remained fairly consistent when filtered by shop size (in annual sales) and location.

Only about 15 percent of respondents this year said they are willing to pay up to 10 percent more for products that are sustainably grown or manufactured; 41 percent said “maybe.” (Less than 2 percent are willing to pay up to 20 percent more.) Last year, 22 percent of respondents said they would pay up to 10 percent more and 3 percent would pay up to 20 percent more.

Hall said he’ll be interested to see if these numbers change in the coming years, as younger generations become more influential consumers.

“Questions about sustainability are intriguing to me,” he said. “On the whole, there is a more sustainable mindset among younger people. I

think we will see more of an interest in these products from millennial and Gen Z consumers.” 🌱

Mary Westbrook is the editor in chief of Floral Management. mwestbrook@safnow.org

GO DEEPER

Read more about the survey, including spending predictions on perishable product, hard goods, giftware and more at safnow.org/moreonline.

43 percent of respondents “occasionally” source sustainably grown/manufactured products.

24 percent do so “regularly.”

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EDITORS' NOTE *Paul Goodman, MBA, CPA, PFCI, and Derrick Myers, CPA, CFP, PFCI, love a good financial management challenge, however big or small. Send your questions to fmeditor@safnow.org, and we'll challenge the experts to tackle them in an upcoming article.*



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Beat the Summertime (Staffing) Blues

Best practices in staffing during busy times and slow periods

BY PAUL GOODMAN, MBA, CPA, PFCI

Here's something you probably already know: Most florists make money in the holiday months and lose money or barely break even the rest of the year. That's true no matter what kind of volume the shop does. A small shop might make money in December on \$30,000 in sales. A larger shop might lose money in July on \$30,000 in sales. How can one florist do so well on \$30,000 in sales and the other so poorly?

Clearly, larger shops will have higher fixed expenses. A bigger facility means higher rent, utilities and insurance. More deliveries require more vehicles, more operating costs as well as vehicle maintenance. That's not the whole answer, though. Too many florists assume they won't make any money in the summer, so they don't really try. They set their sights on not losing any money. It doesn't have to be that way.

Staffing for Reality

The retail flower business is commonly viewed as being very cyclical: holiday months with high sales and nonholiday months with low sales. This perception is wrong. Except for December, most "holiday months" bring only a few days of "holiday business."

Take Valentine's Day. The average florist is really only *super* busy for three to five days. The rest of February is quite

normal, thank you. The same is true for Administrative Professionals Week and Mother's Day. In fact, if you totaled up all the "busy" holiday days during the year you would get 30 to 45 days, depending on the florist. The rest of the year, 10.5 to 11 months, is nonholiday sales, which remain quite level week to week.

Conclusion? If you're going to make real money in this business, you have to staff for the sales volume you will have during that 10.5- to 11-month period. You can't keep extra staff on board waiting for the next busy holiday to roll around. Understanding this true sales pattern should change your perspective on staffing.

What if you had no holidays at all? Just level sales month in and month out. You'd figure out how to make money at that level of sales, wouldn't you? Of course, you would. You would find the level of staffing you needed to service your customers profitably. That's exactly what you must do with your summer months.

Summer Staff Equations

Just how many people do you need?

A few statistics will help you answer that question. During the six months from June through November you will make approximately 6.5 percent of your annual sales each month. Once you know your average nonholiday sales levels for the summer months, multiply that by 30 percent to get your payroll budget for each month. That will include payroll taxes, employee benefits, and the owner/operator on the payroll.

If you stay within that budget, you will be fine. However, the challenge is knowing how much payroll you can afford in the various work areas of your shop, such as design or delivery.

One staffing problem is that many floral employees wear different hats. The average florist can't afford to have people who are dedicated to just design, sales or delivery. The key is knowing how many hours you need in each area, then making sure you have enough people to cover those hours — and no more.

An additional challenge is that the number of hours you need for a given task will vary by day of the week, so staffing should be adjusted accordingly to produce a stellar bottom line.

Return to the Basics

On average, total payroll costs, including payroll taxes and employee benefits, should not exceed 30 percent of sales when the owner/manager (one person) is on the payroll. If the owner/manager is not on the payroll, it's 20 percent of sales.

Do a staffing analysis to determine your ideal staffing level for the summer months. Then look at your current employees. Who fits in where? Who is left over?

If you are overstaffed, you can either let an employee (or two) go or ask your employees to help. Tell them the number of hours that need to be reduced. You might be surprised to learn some might prefer working fewer hours and you won't have to let anyone go.

However, don't avoid making the tough decisions when you must. This may be an opportunity to get your payroll in line and rid the shop of an employee who is not an asset anyway. Someone, for example, who doesn't fit in, is negative or just plain difficult to manage.

You will get your payroll down and the atmosphere of your shop will improve. Two birds. One stone.

Conduct a Staffing Analysis

It would be nice if you could divide your weekly sales by the number of days you are open to get your daily sales. You could then keep the same staff on hand each day of the week. Unfortunately, that won't work.

Some days are busier than others. Friday is often the busiest day of the week. Friday's sales may be two times Wednesday's sales. You can't have the same staff on hand for both days and keep payroll in line.

A proper staffing analysis begins with the design room. Track your daily design sales for four consecutive, nonholiday weeks — just the products that require design labor. Most florists can get these daily sales reports from their POS.

Add all the Monday design sales together, then divide by four to get your Monday average. Do the same thing for each day of the week. When you're done, you'll have the average nonholiday design sales for each day of the week.

Next, decide how much a full-time designer can produce in a single day.

COSTS TO WATCH YEAR ROUND

It's no secret that two major expenses make up the bulk of your costs year round: Arrangement Cost of Goods Sold (COGS) and Payroll. Keep those two areas in line and you should make money. Both, however, are ongoing concerns, requiring constant oversight. You can't just "fix" them once and for all. Monitoring flower usage must be done every day, with every arrangement counted. Payroll requires a similar approach, except instead of counting flowers you need to count people and hours. — P.G.

Most good designers can prepare one average arrangement every 15 minutes. If your average arrangement is \$45, that means \$180 (at retail) can be produced per hour of design labor. Suppose you get only six productive hours out of eight from a designer, that still amounts to \$1,080 a day in design production or \$135 per hour over eight hours.

Divide your daily design sales by \$135 and you will now know how many hours of design time you need each day.

Example: Your average Monday design sales are \$1,000. At \$135 per hour, you will need 7.4 hours of designer time that day to cover the work ($\$1,000$ divided by $\$135 = 7.4$). You may divide these hours up however you choose — two people, three people, four people. One way or another, however, you have to come up with 7.4 hours of design time. Anything more than that and you're overstaffed for design.

Do the same kind of staffing analysis for sales and for delivery. A good salesperson can sell \$2,000 per day or \$250 per hour. So, \$2,500 in sales on Friday would require 10 hours of time dedicated to sales. A delivery person can make 25 to 30 single deliveries in a day.

Have enough people each day to meet the load...and no more. That's how to keep payroll under control. 🌿

Paul Goodman, MBA, CPA, PFCI, is the founder of Floral Finance Business Services based in Tulsa, Oklahoma, editor of *Floral Finance* and author of *The Profit-Minded Florist*. plgoodman@aol.com

MOST RETAIL FLORISTS SEE VALENTINE'S DAY SALES RISE

> With a weekday holiday and a strong economy, many retail florists had a good Valentine's Day 2019. Fifty-nine percent of retail florists responding to a Society of American Florists' postholiday survey said their sales increased this year compared to 2018.

The average purchase amount this year was around \$75, a figure that represents a slight uptick from last year's \$73.

Forty-one percent of respondents also said their sales increased this year when compared to returns from 2013, the last time the holiday fell on a Thursday.

The SAF survey was emailed on February 17 to 1,741 retail members of the Society of American Florists and had a response rate of 8.2 percent.

Reasons for Increases and Decreases

Seventy percent of respondents who saw an increase credited the day of the week, a Thursday, with their sales increase. (About 47 percent of respondents say Wednesday is the best day for the holiday; 29 percent said Thursday is tops.) Roughly 39 percent said the weather helped their business and 38 percent said higher price points played a role.

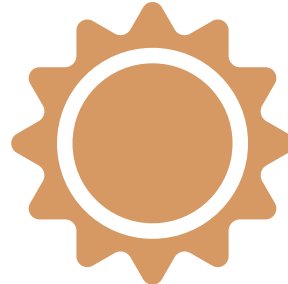
Sixty-seven percent of these respondents saw an increase in website sales, 62 percent saw a bump in walk-in sales, and 55 percent saw phone sales rise.

Those florists who saw sales drop compared to last year blamed competition from mass marketers and su-

TOP 3 REASONS FOR HOLIDAY SALES INCREASE



70%
Day of the week



39%
Weather



38%
Higher prices

permarkets (40 percent), the weather (38 percent) and competition from order-gatherers (33 percent) as their top factors behind the decline.

Forty-seven percent of these florists said phone orders declined, 42 percent said walk-in sales were down and 39 percent said wire-in sales dropped.

Flower and Gift Preference

On average, respondents said about 53 percent of their holiday orders were for roses, which is similar to last year (51 percent). Sixty-six percent of rose orders were for red roses, which also is on par with results from last year's survey.

Respondents said that 39 percent of their holiday orders were for mixed flowers, compared with 40 percent last year, and that only 5 percent of orders were for non-rose monobotanical arrangements (for example, all tulips). Last year, that figure was 8 percent.

Chocolate and candy proved to be the most popular nonfloral gift item again this year (63 percent), followed by plush products (almost 11 percent) and balloons (3 percent).

Pricing and Costs

Prices for roses trended slightly up this year. On average, respondents charged:

- \$83 for a dozen arranged long-stemmed roses, compared to \$80 last year.
- \$66 for a dozen unarranged long-stemmed roses, compared to \$63 last year.

Respondents said they charge \$66 on average for a dozen arranged, long-stemmed roses in nonholiday periods (last year that number was \$65), and \$53 for a dozen unarranged, long-stem roses (compared to \$50 last year).

Sixty-one percent of respondents said the cost of red roses this year was on par with last year; 71 percent said the same thing about non-red roses.

Order Timing

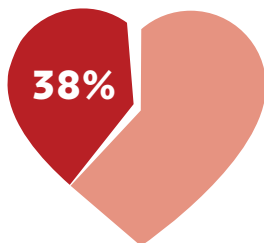
Respondents said 62 percent of their orders came in before Valentine's Day and that 76 percent of holiday orders for delivery were delivered on Valentine's Day. Getting orders in early remained a priority for many.

Find additional survey responses, including insight on promotion efforts and staffing, at safnow.org/moreonline. 🌿

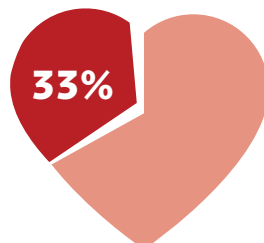
TOP 3 REASONS FOR HOLIDAY SALES DECLINE



Mass market competition



Weather



Order-gatherers

FTD EXECUTIVE CALLS HEADLINES ON COMPANY'S FINANCES 'DISTORTIONS' OF THE FACTS

➤ FTD's announcements in mid-March that the company saw "lower than expected" results on Valentine's Day and failed to meet its overall "financial objectives" for the fourth quarter of 2018, coupled with high-profile headlines about its updated SEC regulatory filing that addressed the company's \$217.7 million in unpaid debt, have generated conversation, speculation and worry around the floral industry.

Tom Moeller, executive vice president of the florist division at FTD, recently spoke with Floral Management, saying that competitors and "misleading news stories" have "distorted" FTD's financial situation. "This entire situation has been an exaggeration of the facts, and we, as a company, are really upset about that, which is why we've been so fast to respond," said Moeller, adding that the company has been "very transparent" about the corporate restructuring and cost-savings plan it undertook last year in large part to address that \$217.7 million debt that comes to maturation in September. "We will continue to support our member florists to help them win."

Moeller said in late March that he had personally spoken with dozens of FTD member florists to reassure them. The company sent out a member communication emphasizing that "the running of our day-to-day business remains the same, with no changes to products or services...including support for your Mercury system" and promising that FTD florists "will be paid for all orders cleared through the FTD Clearinghouse Statement."

The concern about Mother's Day has been intense in quarters of the industry, with some retailers saying they plan to turn off Mercury for the holiday, despite those assurances from FTD that all orders will be paid. In the Philadelphia area, Scott Kremp of Kremp Florist, a longtime FTD member, said he's been talking to industry colleagues with precisely that concern.

"The news came out in a way that really scared people," said Kremp, who

added he has no plans to alter his own Mother's Day operations. "I base my level of concern off of how the [FTD] executives are reacting, and the higher ups seem to have things under control. I have faith right now in the people we're hearing from."

Moeller acknowledged Valentine's Day and the company's fourth quarter had been disappointing, but in talking about that shortfall, he cited issues related to other FTD brands, including marketing challenges for Personal Creations, weather issues that affected Shari's Berries pricing and productivity, and less-than-expected traffic from TV and radio spots at ProFlowers. Meanwhile, he added, the company actually saw FTD.com orders "well into the \$80 range"—a record for the company—and "high consumer satisfaction and strong demand and sell-through" for codified products.

"The competitive environment was so intense for Valentine's Day, but there were a lot of wins there," Moeller said. "We were very pleased with our FTD.com, FTD florist and Interflora business."

Moeller also addressed the company's debt—and that looming deadline this fall. In July, as part of its restructuring and cost-savings plan, FTD announced that it had "initiated a review of strategic alternatives focused on maximizing stockholder value"—alternatives that could include a sale or merger.

SAF President-Elect Chris Drummond, AAF, PFCI, of Plaza Flowers in Norristown, Pennsylvania, said he wasn't surprised by the recent news, given FTD's challenges and debt level.

"It certainly paints a dismal picture from a shareholder perspective when the debt is more than 10 times the [current] market cap," said Drummond. "But industry insiders understand the value in the brand. Consumers recognize the brand, and FTD continues to maintain a solid network of quality florists who they support with popular products and good technology. I believe the value is certainly higher than the market cap suggests."



Tom Moeller, executive vice president of the florist division at FTD

Moeller said he could not comment further on the strategic review process or the prospect of a sale, but he said FTD remains focused on its goal to successfully wrap that process by June 1. He called lenders "incredibly supportive," and, as an example, pointed to the company's move to amend its credit agreement in March, an effort Moeller said "gives us more flexibility to continue to successfully execute our business plans, including Mother's Day, as well as our strategic review process."

Those Mother's Day plans include fine-tuning assortments and communicating early with member florists, so that they have time to streamline production and make sourcing decisions, and also investing more in digital and social marketing on the consumer side. In addition, the company rolled out a new consumer website on Mother's Day 2018 and is continuing to expand and develop that platform. It's also beta testing new florist sites, which will launch in June.

"Those new sites will be more responsive, and they'll look good on any mobile device," Moeller said, noting that florists will be able to trade out prices and product easily and create custom add-ons in a "seamless" manner. 🌸

Mary Westbrook is the editor in chief of Floral Management. mwestbrook@safnow.org



INNOVATION AT WORK Plant breeders at Royal Van Zanten aim to create disease-resistant flower varieties that grow with fewer chemicals and less energy.

THINKING GLOBALLY, ACTING LOCALLY

> Royal Van Zanten, a flower breeding company founded in 1862 in The Netherlands, today has operations on five continents. Their quest to constantly improve flower genetics focuses on developing more disease-resistant, robust flower varieties — plants that grow well with fewer chemical inputs and less energy. The ultimate goal is flower production with sustainability in mind.

“We take our responsibility toward society very seriously and keep a close eye on what is happening around us,” said production manager Dik van Alphen. “We like to do our bit whenever and wherever we can.”

Wanted: Ideal Growing Conditions

Royal Van Zanten starts by selecting the best locations for raising specific crops. For instance, lily flower bulb production occurs in The Netherlands, France and New Zealand, where soil, temperature and sunlight patterns help these plants thrive. Meanwhile, Uganda’s abundant natural light and mild temperatures work well with chrysanthemums, and translate to low energy costs. The company



QUICK TAKE

Royal Van Zanten, headquartered in The Netherlands

Product: More than 350 million cuttings and 70 million bulbs annually over roughly 750 acres worldwide

RoyalVanZanten.com

is constructing six acres of new greenhouses to raise cuttings of ‘Chic,’ its popular spray variety.

“We first invested in Uganda for plant production in the mid-1990s,” Van Alphen said. In addition to Uganda’s optimal climate, the country also boasts a readily available labor pool.

Sustainable flower growing typically embraces environmental tenets, such as recycling water, reducing chemicals and using energy efficiently. Royal Van Zanten goes a step further by focusing heavily on community development.

“We invest in the environment, and we’re also committed to good citizenship in every country where we work,” Van Alphen said. “We want to enhance the strength of the local community.”

Investing in Employees

Royal Van Zanten has become a human resources pioneer that has had an influence on Ugandan society.

“We provide fair wages, which has actually inspired other local employers to do the same,” said Jan Willem de Putter, managing director in Uganda. The company also provides health care for its 1,200 Ugandan employees, along with training and daily transportation to and from the workplace.

“Each thing that we do for employees is about providing peace of mind,” De Putter said. For instance, about 80 percent of Royal Van Zanten’s Ugandan workforce is female, so the company established a daycare center on site.

“They can check on their children during the work day and even breastfeed their babies.” Since investing in this ben-

efit, the company has seen an improvement in workers’ job performance.

Financial Services Bring Success

Employees also have access to financial counseling, money management assistance and microcredit.

“We help workers learn to save money and many have also made many successful microloans in recent years,” De Putter said. Employees often use these loans to buy land or build a home — actions that forge a stronger local community.

“One employee started her own design company,” De Putter said. “She’s also providing our employees with printed T-shirts and sportswear. The profits of her business pay school tuition for her nephews.”

“We want to see both a flourishing organization and a flourishing community,” De Putter continued. “We know that our success depends on our employees, so we take care of our people seriously.”

In 2018, the Uganda Export Promotions Board recognized Royal Van Zanten’s groundbreaking efforts in labor management with a Silver Award. The award takes into account criteria like export quality, supply consistency in the global marketplace and involving local people in key management positions.

“Our dedication to the needs of our employees has helped to shape the work climate of Uganda,” De Putter said. “We’re very proud of that.”

Julie Martens Forney is a contributing writer for *Floral Management*. fmeditor@safnow.org

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HOW TO DEFEND AGAINST PHISHING ATTACKS

> To quote former FBI director Robert Mueller, “There are only two types of companies: those that have been hacked, and those that will be.”

That’s no histrionic statement — it’s supported by data from organizations that track cybersecurity breaches year after year. Statistically, the chance that your personal or company information will be compromised is quite high.

How It Happens

The vast majority (90 percent) of security breaches start with a successful phishing attack. This is when a malicious individual, posing as a legitimate institution, contacts an unsuspecting target by email, telephone or text message and lures them into providing sensitive data such as personally identifiable information, banking and/or credit card details and passwords.

A typical example is an email that looks like it was sent from your bank. The email’s body requests that you click on the login link to check for unusual activity on your bank account. Unsuspecting people will enter their username and password, which immediately go to the cybercriminal.

If you’re cautious, however, you will hover over the login link with your cursor.

This will show the actual URL embedded. Check it out. Does the domain name match your real bank’s website? Does the “from” address match the domain name of your bank? For even more security, you can take it a step further: Pick up the phone and call your bank instead.

Cybercriminals are trying to manipulate your emotions. They like to use the following triggers to trick you: curiosity, entertainment, fear, urgency, reward, recognition, social, coercion and opportunity. When you check your email or phone, pause and think before clicking a URL, opening an attachment or installing any software downloaded from the web. Remember the old Russian proverb, “Trust, but verify.” Make this your cybersecurity mantra!

Defense Tactics

A useful tool to cut down on phishing attacks is to ask your mail provider to set up DMARC (Domain-based Message Authentication, Reporting & Conformance) on your shop’s own domain name. That’s all you have to say; they should know what to do next. (If they don’t know what that means, it is time to move to a new email provider!)

Pretend, for example, a cybercriminal sends an email allegedly coming from



Find out how well you can spot a phishing attempt. Visit <https://phishingquiz.withgoogle.com/>.

membership@safnow.org. If your mail system is set up to use DMARC, it would first check with the Society of American Florists’ published DMARC record to validate whether or not the sender is authorized to send emails on behalf of the association. If the authorization fails, the message is rejected or sent to junk mail — thus never reaching your inbox.

You can use an online tool — mxtoolbox.com/DMARC.aspx — to check if your domain name is set up with DMARC. If it is not, the results will show “DNS Record Not Found.”

You can learn if your email information has been compromised by visiting haveibeenpwned.com and typing in your email address. The results will identify which sites have exposed your address to cybercriminals. You can repeat the same test with your passwords at haveibeenpwned.com/Passwords.

Another smart move? Enable two-factor authentication for all of your online accounts if it is available. This does not necessarily prevent phishing, but if you were compromised due to a successful phishing attack, cybercriminals would be required to provide the two-factor authentication code to get full access to your account.

Joe Aldeguer is SAF’s director of IT. jaldeguer@safnow.org



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BEGUILING BRACELETS

> Prom is priceless — that’s the attitude held by *many* teens and parents around the country, according to Visa’s annual prom survey. It found that, on average, families spend between \$799 and \$1,393 (figures vary by region) for the big night out.

The takeaway? Don’t hesitate to pitch high-end pieces. Offering a few posh choices can give your bottom line a nice boost, said Michael Derouin, AAF, AIFD, CAFA, PFCI, floral director of McArdle’s Florist & Garden Center in Greenwich, Connecticut. His shop’s website features a carefully curated prom collection of seven designs, of which four retail for \$50 to \$150 (depending on the level of customization requested).



PIECE OF PRINTEMPS The ever-popular garden style shines through this dainty design of hyacinth and mini hydrangea blossoms. Richly fragrant, the white and green cuff encapsulates the joy of spring. Design time: 15 minutes. Wholesale costs: \$9.50. Suggested retail price: \$75 to \$95.

“Our area has proms scheduled constantly from March through June, and every weekend we have a handful of customers who pay \$100 or more for a corsage,” he said. These upscale options do take more time than McArdle’s bread and butter order (a spray rose and ribbon attached to a pearl or rhinestone bracelet for \$40), “but not proportionately so,” he said. “They’re still pretty easy and the profit margin’s great.”

Here are some premium wristlets to capture your client’s hearts (and wallets). 🌸

Katie Hendrick Vincent is the senior contributing editor of *Floral Management*. kvincent@safnow.org

Find complete recipes and an additional design at safnow.org/moreonline.



EARTHY ELEGANCE Two consumer favorites — greenery and succulents — come together in a fashionable bracelet of mini echeveria, dusty miller and gardenia foliage. As hardy as it is chic, this design will hold up through a full night of dancing. Design time: 20 to 30 minutes. Wholesale costs: \$20. Suggested retail price: \$100 to \$150.



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BUNDLES OF JOY



ROMP AROUND

This pale pink romper, made of utterly soft muslin, is generously sized (allowing for many wears as baby grows), features wood buttons down the back (for added style) and has a snap opening at the crotch (for easy diaper changes). Pretty and practical, it would make a great shower gift or a thoughtful add-on for a “new arrival” floral delivery. BebaBean.com



PAMPERING PICK

Babies' delicate skin requires extra TLC. This Bath & Hair wash collection includes a gentle shampoo, detangling conditioner, fresh body wash and nourishing body oil. Infused with Moringa Oil, known as nature's nourishing cleanser, it nurtures tender skin, leaving it soft and supple. LilOBlossom.com



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CollapseAndGo.com

Shelia Santiago is the Society of American Florists' director of publishing and digital strategist.
ssantiago@safnow.org

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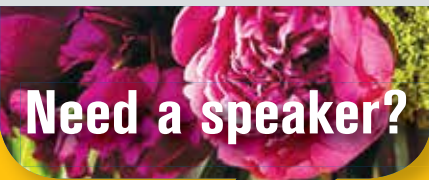
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WOODSY ALTERNATIVES FOR WEDDING SEASON

> As another wedding season dawns, floral designers everywhere look forward to the brisk business and the chance to stretch their creative muscles. Eager to stand out from the crowd? Inspiration may be found in your own back yard: spring flowering branches.

A New Accent on a Classic Theme

Consider the classic, standard selection of wedding flowers, such as roses, tulips, carnations, chrysanthemums and lilies. These blooms have earned their status for a reason: They show well. They are in demand. Designers know how they develop and behave, and they know how to work with them.

As in every other walk of life, however, there will be people — brides, in this case — who don't want the classic standard. They crave something different, as vaguely defined in bridal magazines and lifestyle shows on cable TV. And "different" may be the only direction they offer a beleaguered florist. Flowering branches can provide an alternative springtime floral accent to centerpieces and room décor.

Abundant in Season

Flowering branches are available beginning in early spring across wide swaths of the Northern Hemisphere. They grow on a variety of trees and shrubs and offer a rainbow of colors to accent any floral theme. Depending on which plants grow in your region, you may choose from the snowy white of pussy willow or ser-

viceberry; the range of pinks offered by apple, cherry or dogwood; the royal lavender of wisteria; the deep red of quince; the sunny yellow of forsythia; or the bold, surprising chartreuse of witch hazel.

Many floral wholesalers offer regional varieties of flowering branches. Enterprising floral designers, however, often try their luck with specimens growing wild in wooded lots, or the domesticated examples in their own back yards and landscape beds!

If you plan to harvest your own branches, follow some general timing guidelines based on the work of woody ornamentals expert Janet Bachmann.

- Forsythia, quince, apple, cherry: Cut when buds are very tight
- Lilac, rhododendron, *Kalmia*, deutzia, camellia, witch hazel, hibiscus, *Mahonia*, spirea, *Pieris*, viburnum: Cut when buds are starting to open
- Acacia, hydrangea, leonotis, *Hypericum*, *Cornus*, *Erica*: Cut when buds are nearly open

If you can, try to gather or purchase some "practice" branches a couple of weeks in advance to study how and when they open.

Forcing Buds to Open

When working with spring-forced branches, allow time for the buds to hydrate and open. Here are some guidelines for forcing:

- To help branches adjust to warmer temperatures, harvest when outdoor temperatures are above freezing

- Place branches in warm water (100 to 110 F) containing a commercial flower food
- Avoid using water treated with softeners
- Begin forcing at 50 F for approximately two weeks to prevent buds from blowing open
- Move to 75 F to accelerate opening; keep at 50 F to slow opening; move to 35 F cooler to stop opening

Choose an area with good light, but not direct sunlight, as intense sun may burn the buds and branches. When you reach a stage when blooms are ready to open, place branches in the cooler to hold them at that stage.

Ideally, with sufficient time and staff, you should place branches in a commercial hydrating treatment for two to three hours, followed by a bucket with flower food. In early spring, the flowers on forsythia or quince, for example, emerge before the leaves. Thus the branches are quite dependent on energy provided by the sugar in commercial flower food.

As with any flower in storage, follow proper sanitation protocols (find a run-down at safnow.org/moreonline), and change your flower food solution regularly to keep water clean and promote adequate uptake.

Natural Accents

The words "local" and "natural" are popular among today's brides, but these terms can be hard to define. Well, what could be more rustic, natural and local than fresh-cut branches harvested from a nearby field or woods?

Spring flowering branches can be a value-added proposition for your business, something beyond the typical floral offering — and one that costs very little for you to acquire.

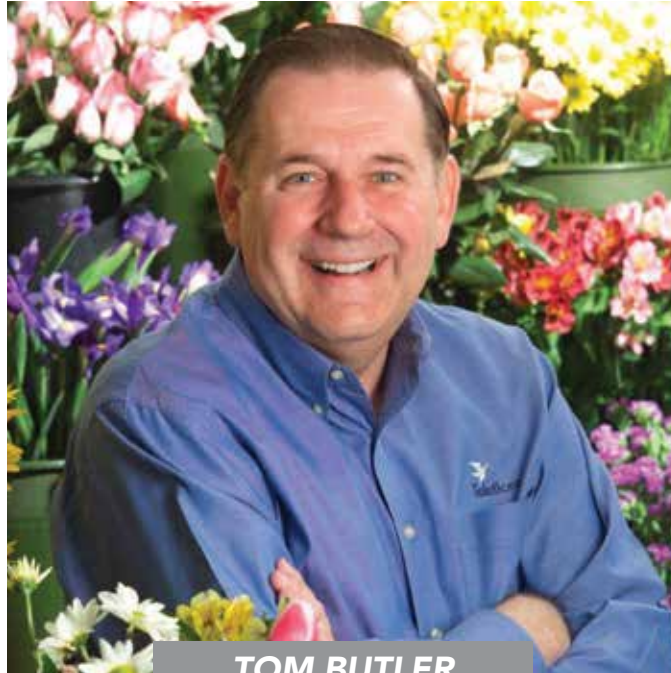
This wedding season, do something original and unexpected that inspires you, surprises your brides, and sets you apart from other designers. 🌸

Sharon Mikulinski is the global marketing director at Floralife, a division of Smithers-Oasis. smikulinski@smithersoasis.com



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