

2014 retail florist of the year

Porterfield's Flowers and Gifts

BY AMY BAUER



A service-oriented approach and a clever promotion have enchanted customers for decades.

When **David Porterfield, AIFD**, started working in his family's flower shop, he loved the creative energy. But today, after several decades in business, he realizes that the most special aspects of floral service are the personal relationships and getting to witness the effects that flowers have. "Being with people at really meaningful times in their lives has become a lot more satisfying," he relates.

David, along with **Mark Lamantia**, co-owns **Porterfield's Flowers and Gifts**, a single-location shop in Topeka, Kan., known for high-quality floral design. The duo, whose business is in a small strip of shops in an upscale residential neighborhood, also offers impeccable customer service as demonstrated by a fresh-product guarantee with no exceptions or time limits; a policy

(above left)
Porterfield's Flowers and Gifts is located in a Mediterranean-style building, constructed in the late 1920s, that occupies the corner of a block-long shopping strip. When David Porterfield, AIFD, moved to the location in 1981, he added the signage, brick planters, etched glass entry and bronze fountain.

(above right)
Mark Lamantia (left) and David Porterfield, AIFD, co-own Porterfield's Flowers and Gifts in Topeka, Kan.

to never decline an order, aside from availability issues; and same-day delivery for anyone requesting it, even on holidays.

During this past Christmas season, the store's residential decorating services were booked solid. When a couple called asking to move up their decorating date—their daughter had just been diagnosed with leukemia—Porterfield's staff immediately shifted gears, decorating the home the next day and adding a complimentary ballerina tree for the young girl's room.

Such commitments to excellent service were key to Porterfield's selection as the **2014 Retail Florist of the Year** in the annual contest co-sponsored by **Florists' Review** and the **Wholesale Florist & Florist Supplier Association (WF&FSA)**. The shop was nominated by wholesaler **Baisch & Skinner** of Topeka, Kan.

continuing the family business

David's parents, **Brooke and Virginia Porterfield**, founded the flower shop in Kansas' capital city in 1965. David joined his parents in the business and purchased the shop upon their retirement in 1981, moving it to its current location.

Mark, who was then a college student, began working as a part-time delivery driver in 1973. He learned the trade from the Porterfields, fell in love with the business and, in 1997, became a co-owner. "It gets in your blood. It's so satisfying to help someone when they need you, during good times or bad," Mark shares.

Like Mark, several of the 10-member staff have been with the shop for 20 years, and most of the office staff have worked there between 10 and 15 years. Paid vacation and health insurance for full-time



(above)
Shop staff change the paint colors and table linens seasonally to keep a fresh and interesting look for customers. The large chandelier is one of five that the shop also can interchange depending on the season and the mood desired.

(below)
Porterfield's expanded its retail footprint in 1999, when it took over the space next door—previously a liquor store—and created Botanica, which David says is a market for "plants, garden appointments and the like." In this view of Botanica, which Mark describes as a "great complement to the décor side of Porterfield's," green and blooming plants are displayed along with interesting containers and accessories.



employees, plus continuing education for design and office staff, contribute to job satisfaction.

connecting with customers

One of Porterfield's most popular promotions is "Five-Buck Friday Flowers" (see sidebar on Page 32). For the first year of the program, Porterfield's committed all of its advertising budget to the special, including a weekly live promotion with a popular local radio personality.

Today, customer contact remains critical, but the media landscape has evolved. In addition to its newspaper and magazine advertising for holiday and wedding work, the shop also relies on email, sending brief newsletters and specials to its list of 1,600 customers who have opted in. Sign-up sheets at the shop door and checkout counter encourage customers to join the list.

A recent email promotion—the shop tries to send one each week—included a drawing for a spring wreath to those who came into the shop and registered over a two-day period. Several hundred people

responded, David says, noting that regular giveaways such as this one, along with in-store coupons, keep customers engaged and drive walk-in traffic.

Porterfield's has a small studio in the basement, where staff photograph designs for posting on the shop website, www.porterfieldsflowers.com. The studio is also useful for creating video content—how-tos and other behind-the-scenes tidbits—for regular posting on the website and the shop's Facebook and Twitter feeds. Such social media outlets have grown in importance as the shop works to reach younger customers.

capitalizing on christmas

Christmas is the most lucrative season for Porterfield's, with approximately 20 percent of annual sales generated during this time. To kick off the seasonal celebration, the shop hosts a festive holiday open house every year.

Porterfield's invites customers, via email, to the Friday, Saturday and half-day Sunday event, which takes place the first weekend in November. The shop also pur-

Porterfield's Flowers and Gifts at a glance

OWNERS: David Porterfield, AIFD, and Mark Lamantia

LOCATION: Topeka, Kan.

YEARS IN BUSINESS: 49

STORE SIZE: 7,000 square feet, including basement storage and design room

EMPLOYEES: 10, including David and Mark

CUSTOMER DEMOGRAPHICS: Approximately 65 percent of Porterfield's clients are women, and its customers include both corporate and affluent individual clients as well as middle-class customers.

AVERAGE FRESH FLOWER SALE: \$50 to \$65

AVERAGE GIFT ITEM PRICE POINT: \$25 to \$50

AVERAGE ACCESSORY PRICE POINT: \$50 to \$200

MINIMUM FOR DELIVERY: \$35

DELIVERY VEHICLES: 3

DELIVERY RADIUS: Approximately 35 miles

chases some local advertising to alert the public. And throughout the season, Porterfield's keeps interest high by creating weekly specials—a percentage off ornaments one week, garlands the next week, picks the next, and so on.

In-home decorating for the holidays is also in high demand. David reports that the shop charges a minimum of \$70 an hour for a designer's work and \$40 an hour for a helper. The cost of product is also added.

In 2013, Porterfield's decorated 54 homes for the winter holidays at prices ranging from \$500 to \$5,000. Occasionally, a holiday décor order will extend to the \$15,000 to \$20,000 range.

adopting shoppers' schedules

During the Christmas season, the store extends its hours and is open Sunday afternoons and during holiday home tours. In addition, the shop, which has an art gallery among its neighbors, stays open until 8 p.m. for the First Friday Art Walk.

David says that these events, as well as Five-Buck Fridays, emphasize the need to do business when customers are available to buy. "If you do business at your convenience, your business is never going to be strong," he explains. "You have to sell something that people want, and you have to be there when they want to buy."

In fact, David has found that two of his busiest times are from 7 a.m. to 8 a.m. on Fridays, as shoppers are on their way to work, and from 5:30 p.m. to 6 p.m., as they return home from work.

nurturing relationships

The relationships and goodwill that Porterfield's has built over nearly 50 years in business are priceless, and staff members work diligently to continue the tradition of excellence. For example, David says the shop's quality guarantee is absolute. While he knows that other businesses sometimes set limits on returns or time frames in which to report a problem, he doesn't believe such parameters serve the company.

In fact, the shop often goes above and beyond. On Valentine's Day, Porterfield's created more than 20 funeral pieces for a



(left) This custom-crafted display, located near the checkout counter for impulse sales, showcases Pickwick & Co. scented candles, which, in Topeka, are exclusive to Porterfield's. A box with adjustable shelves was built into the wall and surrounded by a 3 1/2-foot-by-5-foot frame.

(below) In 2013, Porterfield's added baby giftware to its year-round offerings, and David says it has been successful, especially nursery-rhyme-themed décor from Mark Roberts.



community leader for a Feb. 14 visitation. The morning of the holiday, after delivering the pieces the night before because transportation wouldn't be available on the busy holiday, the shop received a frantic call from a funeral director. Her clothing had snagged a rack, causing several to topple like dominoes. Vases were broken and arrangements destroyed.

So at 10 a.m. on Valentine's Day, staff from Porterfield's Flowers descended on the funeral home, replacing broken vases and flowers, even those from other florists. That gesture is indicative of the lengths to which Porterfield's will go to live out its service-oriented commitment, which has ensured the business decades of success.



(above) Calling to mind the blooming prairie in spring, this arrangement, featuring a delicate nest surrounded by lovely blooms and branches, is an Easter selection that can be replicated year after year with its timeless style.



Each Friday, prominent signage reminds passers-by of the affordable bunches.

\$5 business builder

Almost 20 years ago, **David Porterfield, AIFD**, was brainstorming ways to draw more walk-in traffic to his shop, **Porterfield's Flowers and Gifts** in Topeka, Kan., which is in a residential area that he says is "not where people would just happen by most days." This brainstorming session proved fruitful because he hit upon an idea, and an alliterative moniker, that have proved popular to this day: **Five-Buck Friday Flowers**.

Each week, the shop offers bunches of blooms, and sometimes mixed bouquets, for just \$5. The quantities of stems in the bunches vary depending on the product.

Porterfield's works with wholesaler **Baisch & Skinner** to source seasonal flowers specifically for the promotion. Products range from *Alstroemerias*, chrysanthemums and carnations to stocks, *Gladioli*, snapdragons and even roses—whatever the wholesaler can purchase to meet the \$5 price point.

Porterfield's tries to hold costs to \$2.50 to \$3.50 per bunch although, for some special occasions, the shop will reduce its margin to as little as 50 cents or \$1 per bunch. David, who co-owns the shop with **Mark Lamantia**, says the margin has remained fairly consistent over the years. The difference, he confides, is in the amount of product that can be sold at that price.

"We largely leave the selection to the wholesaler," David relates. "They have been doing it for us for 20 years, so they know what we want." In fact, he adds, "There's not much we can't sell for \$5, but we try to focus on materials with longevity. If it lasts for two or three weeks, people remember."

Customers snap up about 300 bunches each Friday. During holiday weeks, sales skyrocket—to as many as 1,100 bunches during Valentine's week.

In addition, Porterfield's sells punch cards good for five Five-Buck Friday redemptions. David says they are popular options for inclusion with floral gifts.

"When we started, there really wasn't anything like it," David recalls. "The promotion increased foot traffic and made people feel comfortable coming in." And they keep coming back. Today, revenue from Five-Buck Friday Flowers accounts for approximately 14 percent of the shop's fresh flower sales.

partnering for profits

Bob Oliva, manager of the Topeka branch of wholesale floral distributor **Baisch & Skinner**, nominated Porterfield's Flowers and Gifts for this year's contest. Bob says customer service sets this company apart from other retailers. "They really take personal care of their customers," he shares. He also adds that David, Mark and their staff do a wonderful job promoting flowers in the community.

David and Mark, who have worked with the staff at Baisch & Skinner—formerly Stuppy Floral Products—for years, say they value the mutually beneficial relationship. The pair depend on the wholesaler to source well-priced bunches for their signature Friday promotion as well as an array of other fresh supplies and hard goods.

Baisch & Skinner was founded by **Art Baisch** and **Roy Skinner** in 1952 in a modest space at the **St. Louis Flower Market**. Although the space has increased from its 3,700-square-foot storefront to a 160,000-square-foot complex of buildings, the headquarters remains at the St. Louis Flower Market. Today, Baisch & Skinner operates eight facilities in Missouri, Illinois, Kansas and Arizona. For more information about Baisch & Skinner, call (800) 264-4617, or find them online at www.baischandskinner.com. ■

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