

Features

2/1/2022

From Near and Far

Bill McCurry



The Watering Can in Vineland, Ontario, Canada, opened 25 years ago as a florist and retains those roots. The amazing shop is run by Lisa and Earl Lautenbach. Their success is demonstrated by their eight delivery vans making floral and food-to-go deliveries around the Niagara region.

In addition to plants and gifts, The Watering Can offers bouquets, planters, Euros (European arrangements) and so much more. Cut flowers aren't displayed in refrigerators and customers are encouraged to make their own bouquets.

How They Drive Traffic

Social media provides vital marketing. The team has latitude to do whatever they think appropriate. A series of reels on Instagram—"Morning Routine @The Watering Can"—express the team's personality and sense of humor.

Social media also plays a critical role in communicating with current and potential customers. While everything at The Watering Can is colorful and photogenic, that can be too much of a good thing. When an Instagram post showed the newly displayed eucalyptus wreaths, they immediately started selling. The alert staff took the wreaths off display so they could hold some in the back for customers who came in saying, "I want what you put up on Instagram this morning." The wreaths sold out, but the number of disappointed customers who made the trip to the store was reduced because of the quick-thinking staff. The staff is very conservative about which products go on social media so customers aren't frustrated when they're sold out.

Lisa says, "We've been very successful with moss boxes (some call them moss frames). They sell out in a couple of days, even though we don't advertise them. Our moss box DIY class is also successful."

Staying True to Their Roots

Mother's Day focuses on traditional cut flower bouquets. The pandemic necessitated limiting service to 650 BOPIS (Buy Online Pick up in Store) orders. A local grower rushed truckloads of gerbera daisies to the shop the Saturday before Mother's Day. A "gerbera only" bouquet production/sales area was established for appreciative men who buy hundreds of bouquets at the last minute.

The Watering Can is a European-style Flower Market in addition to being a garden center and cafe. Product isn't displayed on carts or trays. Unlike traditional garden centers or florists, customers aren't separated from plants. In the cut flower shop, they're invited to make their own arrangement or bouquet choosing from the fresh Flower Bar or

they can choose the flowers and an experienced designer will prepare exactly what they want.



When it comes to providing cut flower bouquets for nuptials, the Watering Can doesn't welcome large (high-dollar) weddings.

"We would rather do 15 relaxed, fun weddings than one \$15,000 affair where expectations sometimes can't be met," Lisa says. "You have to know your playground. It's not whether big weddings are right or wrong; it's a question of being true to who we are."

The Watering Can sees customers in the best and the worst of times. Weddings are joyful; funerals are not. Their pricing doesn't allow them to give their region's customary kickbacks to funeral homes, but they serve those funeral homes that appreciate quality, reliability and sensitivity to the needs of the bereaved family. More than once The Watering Can has saved a funeral when some other firm's error resulted in no flowers. The management team lists their cell phones on the website for emergency funeral calls only, which their customers respect.

Lisa says, "Earl and I answer to The Watering Can. We may own it, but it owns us, too. We're required not to let down customers, which might mean answering funeral calls on Christmas. Those calls are just to reassure the family we'll be there for their needs. That's one of the things we stand for. You can't let those calls go to voicemail.

"There's a responsibility when dealing with funeral flower orders. There's a balance between bereaved families overspending from grief and a nice casket spray. We strive for the right balance. Funerals are our highest priority. We deliver on time as promised."

Stop, Look and Be Amazed

Even at COVID-19's peak, customers weren't separated from employees by plexiglass barriers. Instead, The Watering Can used strategically placed window frames to provide safety with a creative flair so customers felt welcome. Especially now, during the "post-pandemic period," customers want to stop, look and be amazed. This store doesn't disappoint.

"We don't compete with box stores," Lisa explains. "Our customers appreciate what we offer. We don't have rows of bedding plants. That's not who we are. If you're true to yourself, your team's personality shines and customers return. The Watering Can changes people's attitudes when they spend time here."

The shop doesn't pat itself on the back for its community support. Lisa was reluctant to talk about all they do. She feels they're doing "what is right," not what generates business in return for support. She tries to approve every reasonable donation request involving health, science and community with either cash, flowers or gift cards.



Engaging Activities

Beer, Burgers and Blooms is a February 12 event for men creating a unique arrangement for their Valentine. Each year, about 150 men build self-directed arrangements with all proceeds going to Wellsprings Cancer Support Centre.

Another engaging activity started when they began participating in the weekend passport program where customers paid a nominal sum for a passport to wineries, which entitled bearers to free samples and gifts. The Watering Can gave passport customers a free small boxwood for just coming in. Over six years, 500 passport customers visited The Watering Can. These customers, captivated by the offerings, were responsible for the initial launch of The Urn Club. This program will restart post-pandemic, but the shop can't participate until it can provide more parking. Today, when its 265 provided spaces are filled, customers park illegally.

Urn Club customers have their own urn or buy one. Available in different sizes, the 12 in.-tall premium urn has a 15.5-in. mouth. The customer receives four seasonal planters for outdoor display and can pick up fresh outdoor flowers or greenery in a stunning planter to drop into their favorite urn each season. The winter urn's drop-in arrangement can be provided by staff or customers can make their own at a winter displays workshop. Despite the pandemic, the customer demand for quarterly Urn refills is stronger than ever.

The fall season is The Watering Can's largest sales time. Besides urns for Urn Club members, the shop provides businesses and families with colorful and creative urns to brighten their fall season. Grinch trees are a relatively recent phenomena (and now Grinch Amaryllis). Three full-time people make only Grinch trees during the fall.

Staying True to Their Mission

Lisa and Earl have a special needs child on the spectrum. They understand many people with autism can lead productive lives and be valuable team members. In addition to their son, Alex, they currently employ two other people on the spectrum and are considering additional ways to tap this overlooked talent pool.

Hiring and keeping the best people is vital. Sample interview questions include:

- What are you going to give back when you're hired?
- Please share some of your artistic ideas.
- What feedback can you give me about the store?

Lisa's mantra is, "You must do what you do best. Leave the rest to someone else." Price isn't a customer's sole motivator; selection is more critical than price for them. While Costco may sell thousands of urns, they have only one size and style. One size doesn't fit all if you're shopping at The Watering Can.

Lisa doesn't believe in sales, discounts or markdowns. "We have great quality at reasonable prices—that's why our customers come to us." Judging by the overflowing parking lot, their system seems to work well. **GP**

Bill would love to hear from you with questions, comments or ideas for future stories. He is a Green Profit columnist and owner of the consulting firm McCurry Associates Inc. Please contact him at wmccurry@mccurryassoc.com or (609) 688-1169.

More on The Watering Can

Bill McCurry wrote about the company's displays and popular workshops in our December Style Issue. Open your camera and shoot the QR code to see that story.



SCAN ME