

## Features

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## Setting the Mood

Jennifer Polanz



There are garden centers that are utilitarian (nothing wrong with that!) and then there are inspirational, cute garden centers that make you want to wear a floppy hat and sundress, carry a basket and shop all day. Blumen Gardens in the small town of Sycamore, Illinois, is the latter, with a lovely atmosphere that translates well to its events and wedding side.

*Pictured: I love the look of this building right off the street, which sets the tone for the lovely atmosphere.*

Even the backstory for this store is adorable: founders Joel and Joan Barczak met at Kishwaukee Community

College where they were both studying horticulture and fell in love (a true horticulture love story!). They opened Blumen Gardens 34 years ago out of a house that sits across the street from the current location as Joan's landscape design business. They grew plants in the backyard, and she would design the gardens and he would install. Eventually, they bought the dump (yes, the dump!) across the street and turned it into the charming garden center and events facility that's there today. As they grew into new revenue streams, they also started thinking about the next phase of the business.



“That’s really truly why I became involved; I saw my parents create Blumen Gardens,” said Jill Barczak, a registered dietician and daughter of Joel and Joan. “When they started talking about a succession plan I couldn’t let it not be there anymore.”

*Pictured: It pays to remind customers their plants are being grown locally. Blumen Gardens grows all of their own perennials and some shrubs, and sources organically grown herbs, edibles and seeds from local suppliers. • Events have become a bigger part of the business, and as you can see on this list, the garden center had a*

*full schedule planned for the summer.*

They still run one landscape design crew with Joel heading it up that accounts for another fourth of the business, and the garden center is half the business with its outdoor sales yard and building with indoor plant and home décor offerings.

### **Setting the Stage**

The wedding business came about as they renovated more of the property, including an older building that was perfect for the rustic look many couples were looking for. The space holds 200 people with rooms for the wedding party to get ready. Jill said it's a fun experience to have wedding parties in the space getting ready while retail is happening outside. Weddings are scheduled for after retail hours, so once the tills close, the ceremony and party starts. Weddings have the run of the place, with the outdoor checkout turning into a cocktail bar and twinkle lights make the lovely outdoor atmosphere even more romantic.

They keep that business separate, though, with a different staff to work the weddings (so no pulling double shifts in the garden center and weddings) and there are full-time event coordinators who work with the couples. It accounts for a fourth of the business.

Hosting these all-important events makes it imperative, however, that the garden center is always on point and looking great.

“We have three to four professional photographers here a week and our displays are in the wedding photography,” Jill said. “We are always working during the week to make sure all of our displays look really nice. That is really important to us to make sure everything looks good.”

COVID was a hit on the wedding business, but now it’s ramped back up to be even more than what they experienced before, with the space rented into 2025.

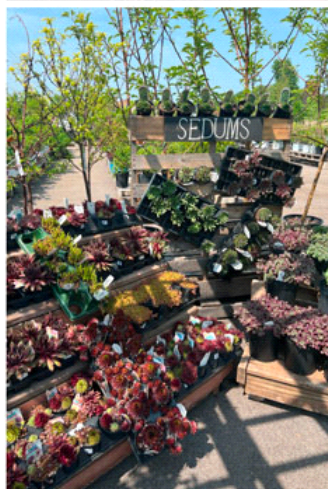


### Even More Events

Weddings aren’t the only events at Blumen Gardens, though. Jill said they’ll rent the space out for private gatherings and they also hold events of their own. Some fun ones she mentioned are Trivia Night, Dueling Pianos, Taco Tuesday and Ladies Night.

For Trivia Night, she found a trivia company that does all the work, and she sells the tickets and orders the food. For Taco Night, they bring in a taco truck and have live music. And for Ladies Night they offer a floral bar to make bouquets, as well as have a DJ. They have a liquor license now where they can sell alcohol in the garden center, so they make sure to have a signature cocktail or matching drink (like margaritas for Taco Night).

“I definitely think it helps,” she said. “We really try hard for our events to have food, food trucks, or some sort of food and drink.”



*Pictured: This checkout stand converts to a cocktail bar for outdoor events and weddings in the evening. \* The magic of the outdoors carries into the indoor shop with Insta-worthy displays and lots of different product*

*offerings, from houseplants and accessories, to home décor, tools, clothing, health and beauty, kids products, and more. • Here are some examples of displays that show off the vibe of the store. It helps there are mature trees on the property that cast dappled shade on some areas.*

They often have customers coming from a distance, so they make sure they offer what they need to stay on site longer. They’ve hosted an antiques show for the last 19 years that attracts people from Wisconsin, Iowa, Missouri and Kansas, she said.

“We’re doing events all year round, so the type of events depends on the season,” she added. “We’ve seen a really big increase in experience, with workshops and events.

“We made it a big focus to do more events than we have in the past.” **GP**