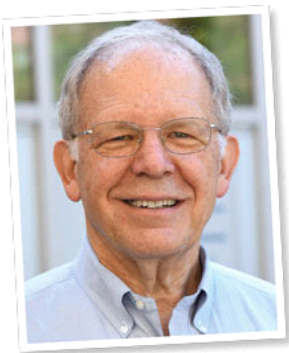


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Grow By Giving

Bill McCurry



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Imagine a town of 45,000 inhabitants with less than half the annual rainfall— and half the snow—of many U.S. metro areas. This is the landscape where Watters Garden Center thrives and shines. Harold and Lorna Watters opened the garden center in 1962. Their daughter, Lisa Lain, and her husband, Ken Lain, piloted the rocket even higher.

McKenzie Lain, who's the third generation, was 2024's Green Profit Young Retailer Award winner. As a Young Retailer judge, I asked McKenzie how Watters helped their community. She explained about fundraising for the education of needy children, pet rescues, food banks and other community give-backs. In recent years, every Young Retailer finalist had spoken of ways they nurture their customers, calling them

"our community." Instead, Watters helps people who may never buy from them, making Prescott, Arizona, a better place to live.

Danny Summers, executive director of the Garden Center Group, invited me to attend their Fall Gathering, giving me a chance to interview Ken Lain. Once there, I heard two garden center owners talking about how much time Ken spent sharing how to improve their PR.

For instance:

- Media will only call when their deadline is close. If you're not responsive, they likely won't call you again. Don't complain about deadlines when you tell them you'll respond in time. If you agree to do something, do it!
- Never abuse the media. Their readers don't want "news" that belongs in the paid advertising that keeps the media operating. Pitch unusual facts and events, information that helps their audience, such as how to prepare for frost, extreme drought or torrential downpours. Being quoted as a source markets your business.

At the event Ken shared that he and Lisa sponsor and host a weekly gardening radio show. They have full programming control, but it's not a Watters commercial. Their invitation to the store refers to service: "What's your issue? How can we help you?"

Ken often "gives away" air time they bought to interview local non-profit entities that promote their own messages and events designed to improve the Prescott community.

- Watters has a limited budget. It doesn't automatically give a gift certificate to every non-profit. Watters takes their skill set and leverages it where they're most effective for their community.

- Annually, the Grapes For Good program, sponsored by the Prescott Frontier Rotary Club and held at Watters Garden Center, raises around \$100,000 for local educational initiatives. Watters promotes it in their social media and on the radio show. Rotary volunteers do the work. Watters provides the physical space, along with some equipment and comparatively little promotion. The team feels good because they're benefiting their community. Sometimes it even brings new people to visit the garden center.
- Watters hosts animal shelters at their location. Customers can meet adoptable animals they wouldn't routinely see elsewhere, while they and the employees share a good time.
- Ken told me, "Every community has people who can and will commit to donate. Many are our customers, so we help everyone by introducing our customers to deserving local community organizations."
- "If team members have deep feelings for a specific charitable organization we emphasize it. Since the team gives their internal support as well, the likelihood of success is even greater."

Despite the Prescott climate, Watters garden center is thriving. They support their community and, in return, their community supports them. A well-deserved thank you to the entire Watters team for showing us how to reach out in our communities. **GP**

Bill would love to hear from you with questions, comments or ideas for future columns. Please contact him at wmccurry@mccurryassoc.com or (609) 731-8389.