



**BRIGHT IDEA** Last year in Lafayette, Colorado, DWF Wholesale Florists donated product to help the team at Lafayette Florist, Gift Shop and Garden Center offset its costs. Lori Wheat, AAF, and Brian Wheat, AAF, PFCL, got the full bang for their PR buck by delivering bouquets, a poster and press releases before the event to city hall, a popular rec center and the Chamber of Commerce. Shown: Dave and Laura Gaul of DWF, and Lori, Brian, Jessica Beard and Sandi Yoshihara-Sniff, AAF, AIFD, of Lafayette Florist, Gift Shop and Garden Center.

**For the second year, the Society of American Florists is spearheading a feel-good effort to promote local florists and get flowers into the hands of more people. Participating couldn't be simpler.**

BY MARY WESTBROOK

# Good Cheer, Made Easy



**BRIGHT IDEA** In Scott, Louisiana, last year the team at Leona Sue's Florist created easy-to-read signs, including a chalkboard easel, before their 300 wrapped rose giveaway. "People [have been] calling, stopping by and talking to me anywhere I go about the awesomeness of the event and how generous they felt we were," said Annie Taylor after the event. Shown: Katy Domingue, Taylor, Jamie Smith and Cassie Dasilva Simmick.

Imagine the streets of your city or town filled with smiling people holding bouquets. Picture your social media feeds brimming with messages of personal thanks to your shop, for making a person's day brighter with flowers. Envision a local reporter calling, asking you to tell her more about why floral gifts make such a profound, positive difference in people's lives.

Pipe dream? Not so fast.

These exact scenarios and others like them played out for the nearly 50 floral industry members who participated at the local level in the Society of American Florists' 2015 Petal It Forward public relations event. The feel-good PR campaign kicked off in New York City on Oct. 7, 2015, when SAF's energetic "street team" of industry volunteers capitalized on popular pay-it-forward initiatives by randomly giving two bouquets each to passersby — one to keep, one to share — in Times Square

and Union Square. SAF members were encouraged to promote their own complementary events — and many who participated pulled out all the stops.

Through the 2015 Petal It Forward, SAF's event exposed people to positive messages about flowers and flower-giving almost 143 million times through traditional media coverage, and efforts by local members added another 69 million consumer impressions nationwide — a feat that proves that "strategic public relations works in getting the floral message out to consumers," said SAF's Vice President of Marketing Jennifer Sparks.

This year, the association is at it again, with another high-profile giveaway in New York on October 19 and a host of ideas and inspiration for florists who want to follow suit and plan their own local events.

Here are some fast ways to make Petal It Forward a big deal in your community.

# BEFORE THE EVENT

## Lay the Groundwork

- Create or print SAF's pre-made, customizable **Petal It Forward** ([safnow.org/pif-card](http://safnow.org/pif-card)) card to attach to your flowers.
- Check with your city to see if you need permission to hand out flowers in public areas.
- **Draft messages** for what your team should share with recipients. (Need inspiration? Visit [safnow.org/pif-messages](http://safnow.org/pif-messages) for verbiage you can adopt and customize.)

## SAY WHAT?

Not sure what to say as you hand out flowers? How about: "Keep one for yourself and Petal the other Forward!" Find more sample messages at [safnow.org](http://safnow.org).

## Get Help from Your Friends

- Call your wholesaler to see if they'd like to join you in the effort.
- Invite staff, regular customers or family members to participate as volunteers; they'll lighten your load and help promote the effort through their own connections.
- Ask area nonprofits and civic groups in advance if they'd like to participate. That's what **Rio Roses** did with the IM Able foundation, for a giveaway and fundraiser at the Miami Zoo (shown, Raul Marrero, senior vice president).

## Prepare the Press

- Make a list of newspapers, magazines, TV and radio stations, websites, event calendars and blogs in your community.
- Add phone numbers and email addresses for assignment editors and local reporters (call the assignment desk for contacts).
- Follow local reporters on social media to get a sense for the stories they're working on (more reporters will respond to direct messages through Twitter than other avenues).
- A week or two before the event (or a day or two, if that's all the time you have), pitch the reporters via phone, email or social media and follow up with a press release.

## CLEAR COUNTDOWN

Get a step-by-step timeline for your media outreach plan at [safnow.org/pif-timeline](http://safnow.org/pif-timeline)

## Be the Brand

- Consider getting **T-shirts** printed in your signature shop color with #PETALITFORWARD on the front and your shop logo. Go to [safnow.org/pif-shirt](http://safnow.org/pif-shirt).
- A few days before the event, send reporters a small bouquet with a media advisory inviting them to the event and a note: "Every day we make people smile. On October 19th, we're going to make a bunch of people smile. Find out how by contacting (insert contact information)."

## NO STRESS PRESS

Don't reinvent the wheel. SAF has a customizable press release ready to go, at [safnow.org/pif-pr](http://safnow.org/pif-pr)





## DURING AND AFTER THE EVENT

### Keep it Simple

You don't have to travel far or make elaborate plans to have a very successful giveaway. Many participants last year jumped on the bandwagon at the last minute. Tim Pugh (shown) and Michael Pugh of Pugh's Flowers distributed 100 bouquets last year in a lightning fast giveaway in a busy restaurant district in Memphis, Tennessee. For 15 minutes around lunchtime, the pair surprised diners, with the help of two employees and the shop's mascot, Pughy the Skunk. To keep the love going, they later posted a short video of the effort to their Facebook page.



### PETAL TO THE PRESS

Pitching the media may not be part of your daily job, but it's a key element to attracting attention to Petal It Forward. The Society of American Florists has assembled a number of key tools to make the task easier — even enjoyable. One piece of advice that Jennifer Sparks, SAF's vice president of marketing, has for everyone: Start thinking about your push early.

"Get to know your local media outlets and the reporters," she said. "Read the papers, watch the shows, and listen to the radio stations to get a sense of the reporters' interests and themes. Start thinking about how your Petal It Forward event will help extend the reporters' subject matter further."

When you make your pitch, she said, let the writer know how and where your idea might fit. Think through the idea through the reporter's eyes — how will this piece be of interest and need to their audience? How will it meet their criteria?

Remember: Reporters are busy and social media may be the best way to connect with them.

"While email or phone calls are good avenues for making your first pitch, Twitter, Facebook and Instagram are great resources to help you get to know reporters, what they cover, and you may even get a glimpse into their personal life," she said. "For example, Twitter can offer clues as to where the reporter is and what they are doing that day. Also, many reporters may respond to direct messages through Twitter faster than other avenues."

Check out [safnow.org/pif](http://safnow.org/pif) for tools including customizable Petal It Forward press releases, media advisories, talking points, a suggested media outreach timeline and much more. — M.W.

**BRIGHT IDEA** Last year, a young woman tagged **Radebaugh Florist and Greenhouses** in Towson, Maryland, to gush about the experience of receiving flowers unexpectedly, and to share her experience of "petaling" the act forward.



## Make Your Own Press

- **Encourage** flower recipients to take selfies and share on Instagram and other social media channels using #PetaltForward and tagging @About\_Flowers and your shop.
- **Reach** out to your local news station via social media to let them know the event is live — and lots of fun! After successful PR pitches from Ashland Addison Floral Company and Kennicott Brothers in Chicago, Fox reporter Joanie Lum not only came out early in the morning to cover a giveaway she also posted a number of positive messages on social media that morning about the campaign.



**BRIGHT IDEA** The team at **Palace Florists** was easily identifiable in purple branded T-shirts last year when they handed out 1,000 roses in Washington, D.C., and interacted with about 500 people in a two-hour window. “It was wonderful to meet so many people that use our flower shop but tend to call or order online,” said owner Lee Herman. Shown: Donna Dolgoff, Andrea Luts and Beth Herman.



## Go Off Site

If you can dedicate a bit more time to the effort, you can stage your giveaway in your town or city’s busiest spots, and during the busiest times, for maximum effect. Last year, Ashland **Addison Floral Company** and **Kennicott Brothers** sent employees to Wrigleyville, the area surrounding the Chicago Cubs’ stadium. There, they happened into some good luck and good timing: A wild card game scheduled for that evening turned out to be a major home game for the Cubs, their first postseason victory since 2003. Katrina Heimberger and two employees used the lunchtime crowd to their advantage, passing out 400 carnations in downtown Wooster, Ohio. “The overall response was very positive with lots of smiles,” said Heimberger, the owner of Wooster Floral. “Even the local parking enforcement officer was carrying her flower in her back pocket as she worked.”

## Whatever you do...

Post your event on social media as it’s happening. Follow and share SAF’s #PetaltForward posts on Instagram @**About\_Flowers**, on Twitter @**FlowerFactor**, and on Facebook @**AboutFlowers**. If the media cover your event, “you have a golden opportunity to keep the story alive by amplifying it yourself,” said Sparks. This can be done by sending photos or video footage you’ve taken during the event to other media channels, sharing it on social media and using the hashtag #PetaltForward and tagging @**About\_Flowers** on Instagram, @**FlowerFactor** on Twitter, and @**AboutFlowers** on Facebook. “Once a media outlet covers your story, other media outlets like TV and radio news are more likely to approach you as well,” Sparks added. 📺

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## AS IT’S HAPPENING

“Follow along as we #PetaltForward with @FlowerFactor! How are you spreading happiness today?” Get more ideas for social media posts at [safnow.org/pif-social](http://safnow.org/pif-social).