#Delighted

BY MARY WESTBROOK

SPIRITED COMMUNITY

Nearly 50 floral industry businesses participated in SAF’s Petal It Forward campaign on a local level, including (clockwise from top left) Kim Wood, Ali Wood and Ashley Wood, of Patti’s Petals Florist, Gardens and Gifts in Denton, Maryland; Katy Domingue, Annie Taylor, Jamie Smith and Cassie Dasilva Dimnick of Leona Sue’s Florist in Scott, Louisiana; Dave and Laura Gaul of DWF in Denver; Lori Wheat, AAF, and Brian Wheat (center), Jessica Beard and Sandi Yoshihara-Sniff, AAF, AIFD, of Lafayette Florist, Gift Shop and Garden Center in Lafayette, Colorado; Rio Roses (Raul Marrero, shown), which partnered with the IM Able Foundation; and the team at Washington D.C.’s Palace Florists, including Donna Dolgoff, Andrea Luts and Beth Herman.

SAF’s feel-good Petal It Forward campaign inspired dozens of smaller events around the country — to the delight of reporters and consumers.
When Karen Flanders put out a call for volunteers to help support her Petal It Forward event, she wasn’t exactly sure what she—or her volunteers—was signing up for. The owner of Lady Slipper Creations in Chester, New Hampshire, planned to give out about 600 roses to strangers, including patients and medical professionals at nearby medical facilities. And while she expected the experience to be positive, she wasn’t prepared for just how emotional the day would become.

“The response was incredible,” Flanders said. Many of the recipients were cancer patients undergoing chemo and other forms of treatment. Flanders’ volunteers were allowed inside the facility to hand out flowers to family members and patients; one woman told the team that receiving the flower gave her a reason to smile—the first reason she’d had all day.

Hundreds of miles away in Scott, Louisiana, Annie Taylor of Leona Sue’s Florist had a similarly emotional moment during her Petal It Forward event, when a bouquet recipient was so overwhelmed, she sat in her car and cried.

“We have no idea what she was going through, but she said, ‘Thank you,’” said Taylor.

These stories—among many, many others like them—help capture the experience of the nearly 50 floral industry businesses who participated at the local level in SAF’s Petal It Forward PR event. In New York City on Oct. 7, SAF capitalized on popular pay-it-forward initiatives by randomly giving two bouquets each to passersby 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.

Smiles Galore
Tim and Michael Pugh of Pugh’s Flowers proved that the feel-good event didn’t require much time away from the shop. They distributed 100 bouquets in a lightning-fast lunchtime giveaway in a busy restaurant district in Memphis, Tennessee. To keep the love going, they later posted a short video of the effort to their Facebook page.

Katrina Heimberger and two employees also used the lunchtime crowd to their advantage, passing out 400 carnations in downtown Wooster, Ohio.

Lorrie Anderson, of Country Florist in Waldorf, Maryland, handed out 75 bouquets to a weekly network meeting, and then additional bouquets later in the day at a Chamber of Commerce meeting. She extended the giveaway through Friday at her store—to the obvious delight of her customers. “People truly enjoyed getting the flowers,” she said.

Palace Florists in Washington, D.C., handed out 1,000 roses and interacted with about 500 people in a two-hour window.

Radebaugh Florist and Greenhouses in Towson, Maryland, handed out a total of 200 bouquets at a local coffee shop and, later in the day, at the city center. “There were so many wonderful reactions,” said Kaitlin Radebaugh. “The best was watching someone hand off the bouquet to someone else and seeing that person’s reaction to a pure act of kindness from a stranger.”

Leona Sue’s Florist went all in for its Petal It Forward event, promoting the giveaway heavily on social media and alerting the press before taking over three sides of a popular intersection to hand out 300 wrapped roses. Team members carried signs with hashtags for Petal It Forward and the shop name.

Georgianne Vinicombe of Monday Morning Flower and Balloon Co. said her shop gave out 200 daisy bouquets along a busy street in downtown Princeton, New Jersey. They even surprised a bus filled with tourists from Japan who were eager to see Princeton University. Vinicombe and her staff made full use of social media to promote the event—tweeting, posting and even creating a Periscope video of the event.

Productive Partnerships
Many industry members partnered with other businesses and groups to plan and promote their events. (Read about another partnership on the day, between Kennicott Brothers Company and Ashland Addison Florist Company, both in Chicago, on p. 20.)

Along with California flower growers Dramm and Echter, the Sun Valley Group, Kitayama Brothers and Repetto Florist and Nursery, and local colleges and design students, the San Francisco Flower Mart distributed about 620 bouquets...
— an event a news crew from KTVU, the local Fox affiliate, captured live.

Rio Roses partnered with the IM Able Foundation for a giveaway at Zoo Miami. That effort, held on Oct. 3, also helped raise funds for the nonprofit, which supports individuals with disabilities.

In Lafayette, Colorado, DWF donated product to help Lori Wheat, AAF, and Brian Wheat offset costs at Lafayette Florist, Gift Shop and Garden Center. The Wheats turned a potential headache (construction in front of their main store) into a party with a street giveaway. “It was a great opportunity to talk to people as they were stopped in their cars,” Lori said. The shop also gave away flowers at its satellite location at Good Samaritan Medical Center. The Wheats made sure to get 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.

Post, Share, Repeat
The campaign itself was made for the digital, share-happy age. Participating SAF members and flower recipients were encouraged to share their experiences on social media with the hashtag #petalitforward. The response online was overwhelming — and overwhelmingly positive, said florist after florist.

Chester’s Flower Shop & Greenhouses in Utica, New York, gave out about 750 bunches of flowers — and landed on WKTV’s news lineup in the process. “I am glad we were part of this event,” said owner Bill Waszkiewicz.

ABC affiliate KATC in Acadiana, Louisiana, sent a news crew out to interview Annie Taylor about Leona Sue’s Florist’s giveaway. “We’re just spreading good news and good feelings,” she told a news crew.

The Star Democrat covered Patti’s Petals Florist, Gardens and Gifts giveaway in Denton, Maryland. Patti Wood, co-owner, and her three daughters, Kim Wood, Alison Wood and Ashley Wood, walked through downtown Denton, passing out carnations and daisies on the street. “We got smiles from everybody,” said Wood.

After the event in Lafayette, Colorado, a customer came into Lafayette Florist, Gift Shop and Garden Center, placed an order and complimented Lori Wheat on
Petal It Forward. “We are so lucky to have you in the community,” she said. And for Wheat, that was gold: “That was the best reward ever.”

Former SAF President Shirley Lyons, AAF, PFCI, coordinated giveaways in Eugene, Oregon — home of Dandelions Flowers & Gifts — and Roseburg, Oregon, site of the recent community college shooting. There, they visited with first responders, many of whom had seen press coverage of the giveaway. “It was astounding,” Lyons said. “Every single person in Roseburg said, “You are the flower ladies we saw on TV that were coming here. Thank you! We have never experienced anything like it.”

Mary Westbrook is a contributing writer and editor for the Society of American Florists. mwestbrook@safnow.org