



C'mon, Get Happy!

The Society of American Florists' Petal It Forward campaign delivered a jolt of happiness and kindness when people needed it most.

BY MARY WESTBROOK

SKATE AND SMILE A skateboarder in Encinitas, California, did a double take when the Dramm & Echter team offered him flowers. "He loved the fact that it was just a random act of kindness," said Lani Conklin, the company's marketing manager. He said, "With all the hate in the world today, finally people are doing some good."

Tears of joy. Messages of thanks. Communities filled with flowers. These are just some of the sentiments and stories shared after the Society of American Florists' Petal It Forward campaign on Oct. 11.

This year, floral industry members in 467 cities in 50 states plus Washington, D.C., and Canada led 573 local Petal It Forward events. Through SAF-generated and local member public relations and social media efforts, the 2017 campaign generated almost 82 million impressions. Throughout the country, industry segments worked together and drew in community groups to make the effort a success — boosting spirits and raising awareness about the powerful effect of giving and receiving flowers. The message was especially resonant after a summer and fall punctuated by natural disasters and the heartbreaking mass shooting in Las Vegas.

"I can't tell you how many people immediately reached out to hug me after I handed them their bouquets," said Nicole Palazzo of **City Line Florist** in Trumbull, Connecticut. "I had a lady tell me she just got diagnosed with cancer that day and just came from the hospital, and we were the first people she saw. She broke down in tears."

A lasting image of the day for Palazzo: flowers everywhere.

"It really made me smile and feel warm and fuzzy to walk down the street and see each person who passed me with an armful of flowers," she said. "It's not

something you see every day. I loved how Petal It Forward not only promoted acts of kindness and happiness but also flowers."

That's exactly the kind of message Jennifer Sparks said SAF designed Petal It Forward to convey.

"It's the surprise element — when people unexpectedly receive flowers and get the chance to make someone else's day brighter — that gives Petal It Forward its charm," said Sparks, SAF's vice president of marketing.

A Joyful Day

In Portland, Oregon, Michelle O'Brien of **Goose Hollow Flowers** enlisted the help of her 10-year-old son. When the girls' cross-country team from a local high school passed by, he charged after the runners and, to their surprise, gave them flowers. Later, when O'Brien and her staff were locking up, they saw a group of girls running nearby.

"Sure enough, one of the girls was running in the middle of the pack with a bouquet still held high," she said. "It was such a sight."

In Indianapolis, **Bokay Florist** was able to leverage its location in a "vibrant, artsy" village to reach a "diverse group of people," said Colleen Sanders. The shop was featured in a glowing segment on WISH-TV.

"We saw a lot of our regular customers, and met some new people," Sanders said. "My favorite moment was when a member of my team said, 'This is energizing and gives me hope.'"

Michelle Jones of **Flowers by Michelle**

in Las Vegas said her shop moved through 200 bouquets fast after setting up in a downtown area where they were able to surprise mostly local residents who were still dealing with the aftermath of the tragic mass shooting in that city.

"The recipients loved it, and we have had great feedback on social media [and through] email and phone calls," Jones said. "They were so appreciative."

In Waldorf, Maryland, Lorrie Anderson of **Country Florist** teamed up with a non-profit that helps adults with special needs and a hair salon to distribute bouquets around the county. "It is truly a great idea to impress upon people how much people love getting flowers," she said.

J. Miller Flowers snagged the front page of the *Piedmont Post* in California, among other great coverage. The story also credited the area growers and wholesalers who supported the feel-good effort and shared stories of recipients' surprise and gratitude. "You have no idea how much this means to me," one recipient said.

Segments Working Together

Many of the year's most successful efforts relied on collaboration (and generosity) among industry segments:

- **Bill Doran Company**, headquartered in Rockford, Illinois, encouraged participation from nearly 270 of its retail customers in Petal It Forward, a powerful team effort that ended up distributing 32,500 bouquets and single-stem roses.



COMMUTE BOOST In the suburbs of Chicago, FTD teamed up with Phillip's Flowers to hand out 3,000 bouquets at two metro stations. "It's awesome," one happy recipient said to reporters with the Daily Herald, which chronicled the giveaway. "I'm a huge flower person."



TEAM EFFORT Taylor Farms and Sakata Seed America passed out 400 bouquets on the streets in downtown Salinas, California. Kitayama Brothers and Green Valley Floral donated flowers for the effort.



SENIOR SALUTE Abbey Shelton and the team from Rose Garden Florist in Paducah, Kentucky, spread their Petal It Forward joy to consumers around town and even visited several nursing homes.

- **Frank Adams Wholesale Florist** in Portland, Oregon, helped 20 florists do Petal It Forward events — and then had their own employees join the fun, too. With the support of more than a dozen farms, the company donated 100 boxes of flowers, totaling 10,000-plus stems, to florists in Oregon and southwest Washington. Tyler Meskers of **Oregon Flowers** in Aurora, Oregon, said the buildup to the event actually represented a highlight of his experience: Prepping his family's flowers for Frank Adams felt akin to "wrapping Christmas presents." Oregon Flowers donated 1,880 lilies to Frank Adams and created a few dozen bunches for

- **Delware Valley Floral Group** worked closely with **Holland America Flowers** and **Sun Valley Floral Farms** to provide more than 60 customers in New England, the Northeast and the Mid-Atlantic with more than 5,500 discounted bouquets. The company's own employees also participated in the event. Bill Prescott, marketing and communications specialist for Sun Valley Floral Farms, said the company donated 3,000 bouquets across four states; many customers also bought discounted royal lilies for the event.
- **Taylor Farms** and **Sakata Seed America** passed out 400 bouquets

- on the streets in downtown Salinas. **Kitayama Brothers** and **Green Valley Floral** donated flowers for the effort. "I loved being part of this program. Seeing the look on people's faces when we handed them bouquets was priceless," said Katrina Gargiulo of Taylor Farms.

- **Dramm & Echter** in Encinitas, California, organized more than a dozen industry companies to help with Petal It Forward. The grower did extensive pre-event promotion and provided product, handing out more than 6,000 stems. Their use of social media showed firsthand the fun reactions to getting flowers, including a Facebook Live video. 🌸

PR FOR THE WIN

Through SAF-generated and local member public relations and social media efforts, this year's Petal It Forward campaign generated almost 82 million impressions. The impressive reach is the result of careful planning, months of collaboration and a coordinated public outreach that sent specific, powerful messages on the positive effects of flowers and flower giving in consumers' everyday lives, said Jennifer Sparks, SAF's vice president of marketing.

"This doesn't just happen. Impressions numbers like these are a result of blood, sweat, tears and strategy," said Sparks.

SAF's Petal It Forward is supported by the **SAF Fund for Nationwide Public**

Relations, which funds nationwide PR efforts that promote flowers and florists to consumers through groundbreaking research and media outreach as well as **AboutFlowers.com**, **AboutFlowersBlog.com** and **NationalFloristDirectory.com**.

For a full breakdown of how those tens of millions of impressions were generated and more stories from the day visit safnow.org/moreonline. -M.W.

STAR POWER REACH One happy recipient, Cristian Diez, took to Instagram, where he has more than 50,000 followers, to share his delight. "Today is #petalitforward day, such a beautiful act that immediately put me happy!" Diez also posted the message to Facebook, where he has 11,000 followers. Consumers' happy social media posts are a sign of the campaign's success, said SAF Vice President of Marketing Jennifer Sparks. "That is the sweet spot — when the flowers do their scientifically proven work to make someone happy, and those people are moved to tell that story to their friends, families and followers."

