





Flowers to the People



A veteran florist couple gets in front of their market in a more up-close and personal way and watches sales soar.

BY MARY WESTBROOK PHOTOGRAPHY BY SETH NENSTIEL

Vince Butera AAF, AIFD, PFCI, started feeling uneasy about halfway through 2011. The florist, who for 35 years has run Butera The Florist in York, Pennsylvania, with his wife, Carolyn, looked around the 4,000-square-foot retail shop and saw something no business owner wants to see: fully stocked displays and very, very few customers.

TOTAL OVERHAUL Faced with dwindling sales and potential burnout, Carolyn Butera (center) and her husband and business partner Vince (bottom right) supplemented their Butera The Florist studio location (center) by creating a “brand within a brand,” Fleurish @ the Market, exposing them to 2,500 customers weekly at a local market.

Overall sales were down, and wedding sales, then about a quarter of the shop's annual sales, were slipping too. Feeling defeated, the Buteras retreated to their vacation home in Maine for some serious soul-searching. Together, they talked about the future of their business, where they seemed to be heading and where they wanted to go. They dove into research about retail trends — where, how and when customers, particularly younger demographics, shop — and analyzed the profitability of the many individual products crowding their displays. They discussed wedding trends, interior design, staff training and the revitalization of downtown York. They toyed briefly with the idea of throwing in the towel. Thirty-plus years, after all, is an impressive run.

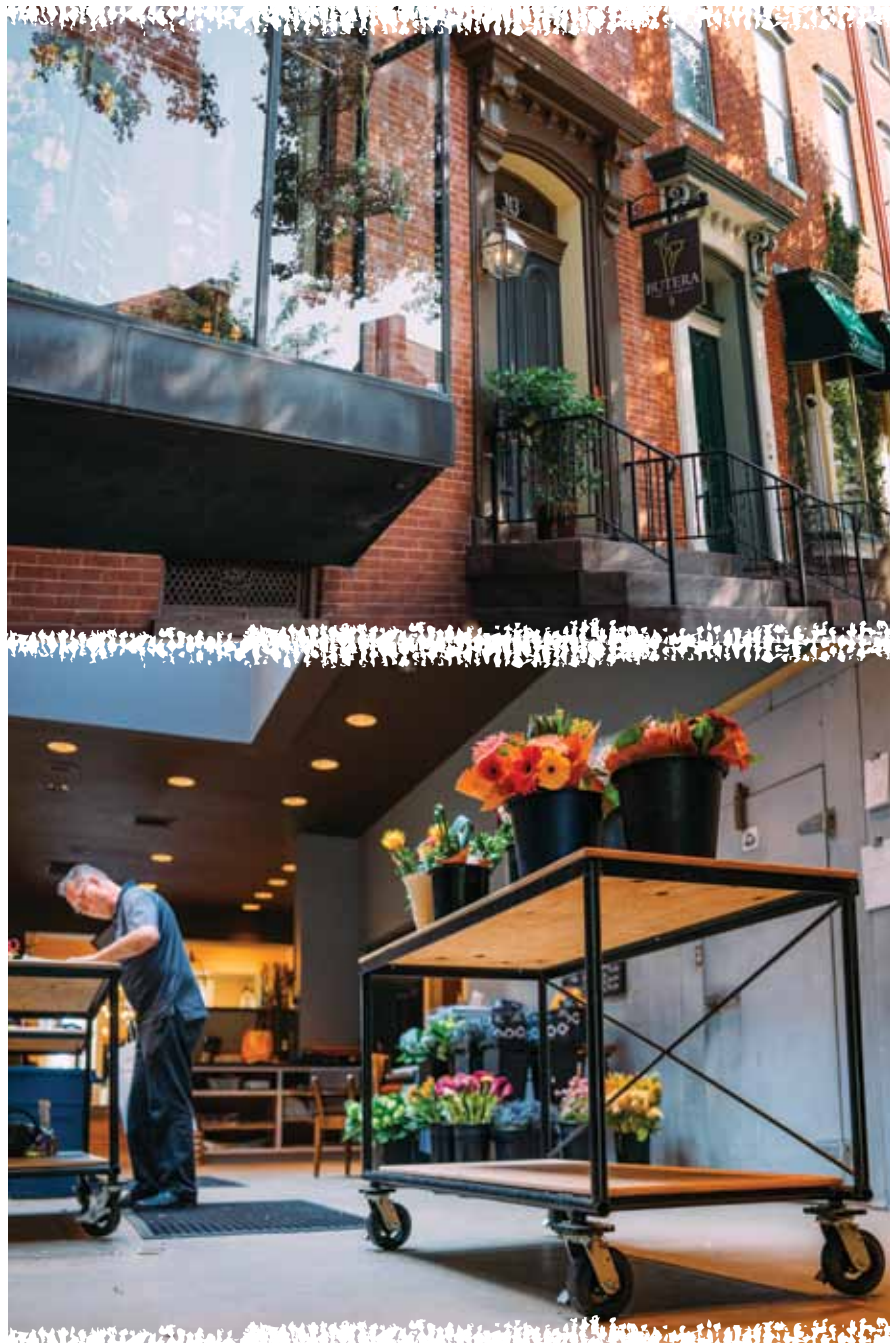
If this story sounds familiar so far, it may be because Floral Management has already covered this chapter in the Buteras' life. In 2012, we covered their soul-searching exercise and in 2014 we followed up when the business moved to a new, more urban location five miles away. But we haven't told you how that new chapter ends yet. (Hint: It includes a radical new vision for the business that required the Buteras to strip away everything that wasn't working and build a new brand, in a new space, around walk-in sales, community engagement, and, most important, high-end weddings and events.)

This month we're returning to the Buteras' story to take a much deeper look at the comprehensive business reboot that not only saved the business — it also snagged the Buteras this year's coveted Marketer of the Year honors.

New Vision, New Space

In Maine, the Buteras had drafted three concrete goals to guide their efforts in the coming years.

The first goal was to “substantially increase” store traffic every week, which created an opportunity to spotlight the shop's wedding work, which Vince and Carolyn termed BTF Weddings (verbiage they first used internally and then embraced externally as well). This would help with their second goal: to increase overall wedding sales volume by at least 75 percent. Finally, they wanted to clear out the clutter and attain clear recogni-



DOWNTOWN STYLE The Buteras traded a 4,000-square-foot suburban business for an urban location with lots of historic charm and a large, open design room.

tion of BTF Weddings in a wider geographic region.

Two elements of their business — their shop size and location — seemed to be immediately at odds with these goals. While the 4,000-square-foot shop in suburban York had been an ideal fit in the early 2000s, by 2013, it was an outdated concept.

For one thing, the Buteras knew that retail trends, including customers' increasing preference for online and

mobile shopping, were at odds with their elaborate showroom. They also understood that, like many small U.S. cities, downtown York was in the midst of a rebirth, with a youthful energy and bustling farmers market, along with new retail shops and a business-friendly local government eager for business owners to join revitalization efforts.

To capitalize on those changes, the Buteras started looking around for a new space in downtown York, one that al-

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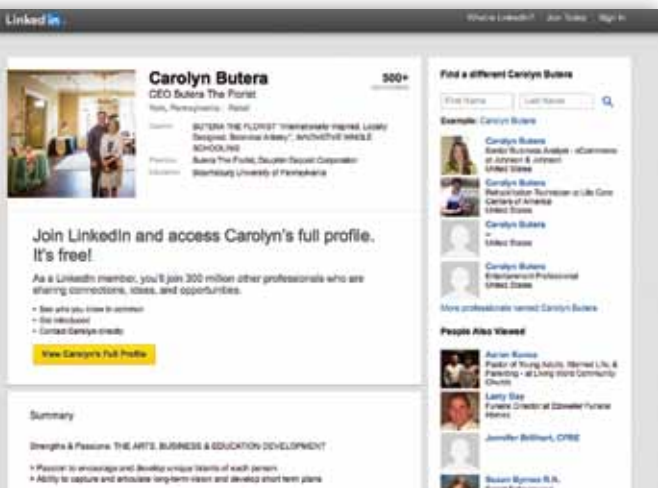
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PROMO POWER To complement their in-store transformation, the Buteras also updated their printed marketing materials and social media presence, including Carolyn's LinkedIn page and the shop's Facebook page, and created a new, independent site online.

lowed them to be part of the action and "flip the footprint" of their existing store, giving more real estate to weddings and the design room and far less area to the traditional retail showroom.

In January 2013 they found the spot: a three-story Victorian about five miles from their previous site that was situated next to one of the area's top bridal salons. In the new location, which opened January 2014, they have two front parlors for consultations, totaling about 700 square feet; an 800-square-foot open design room; and a "petite city-style store" (about 225 square feet) on the first floor of the building. The upper floors are used for storage and office space.

While the building had been vacant for 18 years, the Buteras were able to restore many of its original features, including the front door and crown molding. Today, they meet with brides in a



SEVEN DECISIONS THAT STUCK

The Buteras say that seven "key decisions" have guided much of their overhaul. These decisions were "gut wrenchingly" made, Carolyn said, but, ultimately, they helped guide every subsequent action.

Move the store. The previous location was outdated and a new, more urban locale would allow them to better highlight their core wedding and event work, host community events and establish an open-air design studio to better interact with customers, among other benefits.

Get more walk-in. Two market stands at a popular local venue took the Buteras quite literally to where their customers already were shopping.

Go pro. Instead of using stock or generic photography, the Buteras made a commitment to use only high quality, professional images created just for them.

Wise up online. The Buteras have invested time and money to make sure

their online presence on Facebook, LinkedIn and YouTube is professional and on brand.

Cut the extras. The couple jettisoned almost all of their non-floral items. Too many product lines were diluting their brand and not delivering real results.

Try the indie route. After many years with a wire service, the Buteras realized their wedding and events focus no longer meshed with the wire service model. They decided to cut ties with the service in 2014.

Pump up staff. The Buteras increased communication and training, empowering staff members to take on more and educate themselves on the new vision for the business.

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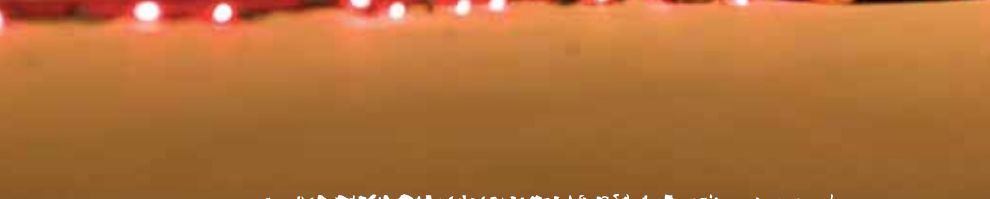
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20-by-20-foot room with 12-foot ceilings, decorated in warm golden tones and filled with natural light.

By contrast, the design room, which the Buteras call their “open art studio,” in the back of the building is “vintage industrial,” and floral designers — artisans — work under three skylights. The layout lets brides and walk-in customers catch glimpses of the designers in action, providing a level of interactivity and entertainment that was missing in the previous store.

From Off Stage To Center Stage

The new space didn't simply put the Buteras in the middle of the downtown action; it also allowed them to become an integral part of it.

In 2014 alone, the couple put together 10 free community events, often co-hosted with other groups in the community. The events ranged from a potluck Hipster Christmas Party, organized by a group of about five young men, including the couple's teenage son Matt, to a launch party for a local magazine and a reveal party for the BTF Spring 2014 Collection of original floral designs in partnership with the area economic council. Some of the more popular events, including that hipster party, which has become an annual tradition, draw hundreds to the store.

“The Hipster Christmas Party flew across social media,” said Carolyn. “I've never seen anything like it.” The crowd consisted mostly of twentysomethings — “but there were some older people there, too, and so much community,” she said. “People were running into friends they hadn't seen in years.”

The party was the realization of a dream for both Carolyn and Vince, who had envisioned their new location as a hub of activity, filled with people.

“We intentionally designed our new floor space so that we can have these big events,” Carolyn explained, adding that they furnished it with custom-made design tables built on wheels, which can quickly be pushed aside to allow more room for chairs or merriment.

The Buteras allow certain organizations to use their space at no cost; the groups provide refreshments. When they use the space to host a BTF event for

PARTY IN THE HOUSE

In 2014 alone the Buteras hosted nearly a dozen in-store events, ranging from meetings a potluck “Hipster Christmas Party,” to “First Friday” community events. The ability to host large groups keeps the business at the center of its bustling new neighborhood.

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MARKET WATCH The Buteras' Fleurish @The Market stand has become a "brand within a brand," and an invaluable tool in reaching new customers, particularly those interested in wedding and event services. The Buteras are the only cut-flower vendor in the popular, 125-year-old venue.

the community, including "First Friday" evening events, they invite other vendor sponsors to join them in providing food, beverages, etc., which helps offset costs. The goodwill and occasional PR (local reporters have covered several events) also defray the cost, said Carolyn.

To Market, To Market

By moving into the downtown area, the Buteras also positioned themselves to take advantage of another hub of consumer activity, the York Central Market, just four blocks from their new storefront. Last year they opened their Fleurish @ The Market stand, a "brand within a brand" and the only cut-flower vendor in the popular, 125-year-old venue.

The market, open three days a week from 6 a.m. to 2 p.m. and on the first Friday night of every month, draws more than 2,500 people a week — many of

them in exactly the Buteras' target market (young, affluent, invested in community and local businesses). On market days, the Buteras staff the booth with one or two people who chat with potential customers.

In creating the tiny satellite location — the booth is about 8 by 10 feet — the Buteras intentionally limited buyers' options to four product lines that seemed "synonymous with the farmers market experience," said Carolyn. (The lines are BTF Fleurettes, roses, curated market bunches of mixed flowers and "artisan bouquets.")

In fact, Fleurish @ The Market proved so successful that, several months after opening the booth, the chief operating officer of the market offered the Buteras a companion booth, BTF Weddings (8 by 8 feet), which they've dedicated to all things matrimonial. There, brides-to-be and their family

and friends can check out samples, set up a consultation — even book a wedding on the spot.

Cut Some Lines, Build A Brand

In their effort to become a go-to florist for brides and local walk-in customers, the Buteras discovered another aspect of their previous life that was holding them back: too much stuff. Like plenty of long-time florists, some of the product lines they were carrying were more about habit than revenue. Worse than taking up shelf space, however, gifts and non-floral products were actually diluting their brand, leaving customers confused about what exactly the business specialized in.

To remedy the problem, when they moved, the Buteras cut seven under-performing product lines, including balloons, scented candles, plush animals, fruit and gift baskets, gourmet food, and

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TEAMS THAT WORK To ensure staff felt empowered, not overwhelmed, by changes to the business, the Buteras instituted biweekly huddles, articulated their new vision in writing, and created new customer service training tools to aid staff members.

STAFFING SUCCESS

Imagine, for a moment, telling your staff that you were going to change locations, refine your focus, reimagine your brand, open two farmers market stands and dramatically cut product lines, all in the space of about 12 months.

How many of them would run shrieking from your store?

At Butera The Florist, floral artisan Stephanie Thompson was nervous about the changes, but “mostly, I was excited,” she said. “We were eliminating the things of the business that had become irrelevant to design.”

No one on the Butera team ran from the challenges Vince and Carolyn presented, in large part because the duo invested time and energy retraining their team and making sure they were supported during the transition. (In fact, they actually added one part-time sales team member just before they moved.)

“I was very confident in Vince and Carolyn’s vision,” Thompson said. “They were always very open and honest about any of their concerns or fears and opened everything up for discussion. As employees, our suggestions and ideas were heard and respected.”

Even though they were facing declining sales in 2012 and 2013, the Buteras also made the commitment to keep current staff levels through the move to downtown York.

“There were times during the transition when our salary expenses were too high,” admitted Carolyn. “But we were going through so many changes, we didn’t want to add extra stress to anyone’s life: ‘Am I going to get fired?’”

The couple did expect staff to embrace the changes and communicated their vision to them in several ways:

Huddle Up. To improve communication, Vince and Carolyn introduced the “huddle” meeting concept. In practice, it’s a 30- to 60-minute bi-weekly meeting covering key projects, events and problems. These meetings are informal and can sometimes include all staff, sometimes just two or three people. “They are often very practical” and focused on an immediate issue or event, Carolyn said. “Sometimes, though, they’re about longer range planning.”

Read All About It. Carolyn is the shop’s designated big-picture thinker, a role she cherishes. To ensure that staff understood how and why the business was changing, in 2013, she came up with a document called “The Blueprint” which thoughtfully articulated the Buteras’ vision for the business. Each staff member was given a copy and, during a staff meeting in January 2014, the group discussed highlights from the document.

Support and Train. While creating the Blueprint, Carolyn also formulated some helpful memory aids to support staff training. For instance, she developed something called LEAD to encourage better communication among staff, management and clients (Listen, Encourage, Ask clarifying questions, and Discuss and decide). Another helpful reminder: SERVE, for working with customers (Smile, seek and greet; Establish the need; Recommend or refer; Verify; End in Gratitude).

various trinkets and gift items. Today, you won’t find any non-floral items in-store; even the plants are special orders.

Once they solidified their new vision of who they wanted to become, making the decision to cut the extra items was easy, said Carolyn.

“By eliminating these lines, we could bring clarity to the customer’s perception of our business,” she explained. “Who we are, what we do, why we do it and what clients say about us. [It was about] clearing out the clutter and attaining clear recognition for our wedding business.”

Online: Personal And Professional

When the Buteras looked critically at their online presence, through their wire service website, they saw many of the same problems they’d identified in their physical store. Too many options, too little personalization and, most important, not nearly enough focus on weddings.

Fixing those problems posed another round of challenges. After all, the couple had long ties to their wire service and was invested in logistical tools, such as the POS and credit card processing systems. Plus, as Vince is the first to admit, technology isn’t second nature to the couple. (“We had to grow new synapses in our brain just to figure things out,” he said with a laugh.)

In August 2014 they decided to sever ties with their wire service and create an independent website. The decision wasn’t easy. “We spent a lot of time thinking about who are we, what is our brand and what is the perception that consumers have of us — what fits and what doesn’t?” Vince said. “Ultimately, we decided that the wire service model and wire service product didn’t fit our [wedding-based] brand.”

Once again, the Buteras took a step back to take a step forward.

"We started by defining the website we wanted to have," something personal and unique that was easy to maintain and easy for users to navigate and understand, Carolyn said. The couple spent months researching sites inside and outside of the industry and then sent out a request for proposals to website developers. All of the proposals came in way too high.

"We just didn't have the budget to do what we wanted to do," said Carolyn.

Or ... so it seemed at the time. Feeling disappointed, Carolyn stepped away from the website overhaul for a period. Then one day, she happened upon the website of a nonprofit she admired and — on a whim — contacted Wayne Hedlund, the developer behind the site. His company, TL Sites, agreed to take on the job, quoting the couple a rate that was about 80 percent lower than other companies and well within their budget. The new site launched in February 2015.

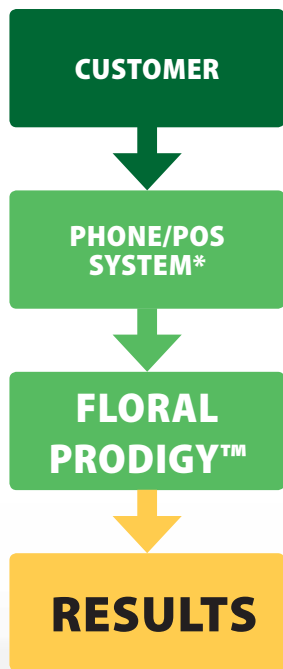
Today, Hedlund works on a monthly retainer on back-end maintenance, but the site is user-friendly enough to allow the Buteras and their staff to make day-to-day updates to photos and content.

To further underscore the brand, the Buteras now feature only professional images of their own work on the site, sourced from local wedding photographers, who receive credit for their work. Several times a year, the Buteras also engage the services of Seth Nenstiel, a family friend and professional photographer, who comes to the store and shoots updated seasonal images to share. (In 2014 he shot a total of five collections for the Buteras, all brainstormed and created by Vince and his team of designers.)

"The commitment to present only professional photography significantly increased clarity of the customer's perception of our business," Carolyn said. "Having Seth shoot the work makes it easy for us. He has the right equipment and the knowledge of lighting and composition" that help elevate the photos and make them stand out online.

The combination of the new site, higher price points and all that gorgeous photography is paying off, said Carolyn. "We know that brides are finding us easily from outside our region as they

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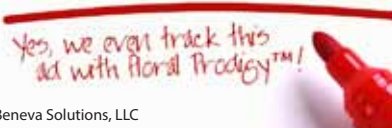
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PRO KNOWS The Buteras have made a commitment to personalized, professional photography, which they use online and through social media to set their business apart.

peruse the Internet while planning their wedding,” she said. “We’ve had brides from New York City, Maryland and Texas contact us this year, commenting specifically about the website and how it stood out from others.” Their geographic region for weddings has quickly expanded to cities that neighbor York County, such as Hershey, Lancaster, Gettysburg and Harrisburg.

Spreading The Word

As the Buteras moved through their transition, they set a number of trackable goals, including that desire to increase wedding sales volume by at least 75 percent in 2014. To get the word out about their work, they used a combination of traditional and new media approaches.

One of the first items on their agenda was to bump up their presence on social media. To that end, Carolyn cleaned up their Facebook page, making it look more professional (again, those high-quality photos helped) and committing to more regular posts and updates.

The Buteras also benefited from the already active following on the Central Market Facebook page, and administrators there who share and repost vendors’ messages to the market’s 9,500-plus followers. By the end of 2014, the Buteras had moved from

200 to 1,000 followers on Facebook and had established new accounts, including a LinkedIn profile for Carolyn, to extend the reach of the business even more through social media. They also produced a short video showcasing their wedding and event work.

With traditional promotional efforts, the Buteras became more strategic than they had been in the past. Sometimes, that meant adding new initiatives; other times, it meant stripping them away.

For instance, in 2014, the couple participated in three wedding shows — one large regional show, Wedding Wonderland, and two smaller events hosted at popular venues. While the Wonderland show tends to draw crowds of about 700, for several years the Buteras hadn’t participated in the event. The expense (about \$1,700 for the booth plus additional costs for displays and staffing) seemed too high. But with their renewed focus on weddings and desire to be seen as a regional florist, the show made more sense.

They also invested in a double-page, full-color centerfold ad in *Dream Weddings* magazine, a five-year-old publication that focuses on high-end weddings in central Pennsylvania. “The [magazine] founder’s vision is: People getting married here don’t need to go to New York or Philadelphia to find great wedding vendors,” and that idea aligned perfectly with BTF, said Vince. The magazine actually courted the couple to a certain extent, extending a discount for the prominent ad because the publisher knew the ad itself would be a showstopper coming from the Buteras.

One area where the couple did cut back was printed marketing materials. In the past they tended to create “various pieces for various occasions,” explained Carolyn. In 2014, they worked with a local designer and stationery



ROAD SHOW To complement the traditional marketing, social media and brand-building power of their presence at the Central Market, Vince Butera presents professional floral design shows throughout the region, during which he showcases BTF Wedding Designs.

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- New wedding promotion card
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- Fees and flowers for three wedding shows
- Professional photos for wedding parlor

THE RESULTS

Facilities costs:

Utilities went down 15 percent; other property expenses, 8 percent

Wedding sales

went from \$58,484 in 2013 to \$113,739 in 2014, a 94% increase.

Average wedding ticket

changed from \$1,360 in 2013 to \$1,834 in 2014.

In-store traffic

grew from about 30 per week to 2,500-plus

store owner to create just one knockout printed promotional card, focused on weddings and events. Part of that decision was necessity (i.e., constraints of time and funds) but much of it was based on their new brand, Carolyn said, and their desire to keep their aesthetic, clean, elegant and simple.

"Our thinking was, let's do one piece and do it well, instead of lots that are just OK," she said. "My tendency is to use a lot of words. On this piece we knew we didn't want much text. Instead, it's very visual."

Results: The Whole Picture Comes Together

By the end of 2014, the Buteras had achieved all three of their goals — and then some. Wedding sales were up 94 percent in one year, from \$58,484 in 2013 to \$113,739 in 2014. Their average wedding ticket had also changed from \$1,360 in 2013 to \$1,834 in 2014. "We do weddings at all different price points," Carolyn said. In 2014, their number of wedding sales increased, and most of that was for \$3,000 to \$10,000. "That made a huge difference," she said, adding that 2015 "is looking very similar."

As for foot traffic, there's no comparison between the dozens of customers the Buteras interacted with in person at their previous store and the hundreds, sometimes thousands, they'll see every week between the new location and farmers market stands. Average arrangement sales are up slightly, too (by about \$2).

More than anything, though, the feelings of loss and uncertainty are gone. Instead, Vince and Carolyn feel right at home in their new space, with their new brand — as if they're just starting their careers rather than 35 years into them. Perhaps that's not so surprising, said Carolyn. After all, Butera The Florist started as a wedding specialist.

"People talk about life coming full circle, and it's a bit of cliché," said Carolyn. "But for us, it's true. We've come full circle, and it feels really good."

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

WHAT MAKES A MARKETER OF THE YEAR?

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FULL CIRCLE Vince and Carolyn Butera say they feel right at home in their new space, with their new brand — as if they're just starting their careers rather than 35 years into them.



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Wholesale Group
Kennicott/Vans/Nordlie

BRONZE: **\$5,000 - \$9,999**

Wholesalers

Greenleaf Wholesale
Florist, Inc.
Pennock Co.

Suppliers

Accent Decor, Inc.

Growers

Sun Valley Floral Group

Importers/ Distributors

Equiflor/Rio Roses

COPPER: **\$1,000 - \$4,999**

Wholesalers

Amato Wholesale
Florist
Baisch and Skinner
Wholesale Florist, Inc.
Bay State Farm Direct
Flowers
Cleveland Plant &
Flower Co.
Dreisbach Wholesale
Florist
DWF Wholesale Florist
Co.
Flora Fresh, Inc.
Hillcrest Garden, Inc.
Mayesh Wholesale
Florist, Inc.

Mueller Supply Inc.
Pikes Peak of Texas, Inc.
Sieck Floral Group
The Roy Houff
Company
Tommy's Wholesale
Florist, Inc.
Zieger & Sons, Inc.

Suppliers

Candle Artisans, Inc.
Design Master color
tool, inc.
Floral Resources
Sacramento

Growers

Burnaby Lake
Greenhouses
Mellano & Co.
Miaflora Farms LLC
Ocean View Flowers
Oregon Flowers, Inc.
Washington Bulb Co.,
Inc.
**Importers/
Distributors**
Fresca Farms, LC
Liberty Blooms
USA Bouquet Company

FRIEND: **\$100 - \$999**

Wholesalers

Berkeley Florist Supply
Co. in Miami
Dillon Floral
Corporation
Ensign Wholesale
Floral
Frank Adams
Wholesale Florist Inc.
GM Floral Co.
Gassafy Wholesale
Florist, Inc.
Georgia State Floral
Distributors
Henry C. Alders
Wholesale Florist
Inland Wholesale
Flowers, Inc.
J.B. Parks Wholesale
Florist
LaSalle Wholesale
Florist, Inc.
Louisiana Wholesale
Florists, Inc.
Lynchburg Wholesale
Floral Corp.
Mears Floral Products
Metro Floral Wholesale,
Inc.

Miller Sales Wholesale
Distributor
Pittsburgh Cut Flower
Co.
Reeves Floral Products
Inc.
Rojahn & Malaney Co.
Roman J. Clapgood
Co.
Schaefer Wholesale
Florist, Inc.
Seagroatt Riccardi,
Ltd.
Younger & Son Inc.

Suppliers

Chrysal Americas
FloraCraft
Garcia Group, Inc./
Floral Pak Co.
Garcia Group, Inc./
Plus One Imports
Highland Supply
Corporation

Growers

Green Point Nurseries,
Inc.
Pyramid Flowers, Inc.

CONTRIBUTOR: **\$50 - \$99**

Wholesalers

Coward & Glisson
Wholesale Florists
Sunwest Wholesale
Floral, Inc.

We thank these companies who voluntarily contributed almost \$140,000 in 2014, and continue to support the SAF PR Fund. A special thanks to the Flower Promotion Organization for the contribution of \$300,000 in 2012 that continues to help with PR Fund programs.

Please consider supporting the fund — we need your help to increase opportunities for floral promotion to the consumer. 800-336-4743; memberinfo@safnow.org