

BLOOMS FOR KIDS Linda Pizzuti Henry and Ted Winston of Winston Flowers brought a flower demo to patients at Franciscan Hospital for Children. Pizzuti Henry is a philanthropist and the wife of Red Sox owner John Henry.

COURTESY WINSTON FLOWERS



Good Deeds Done Right



Do charitable giving and profitability have to be mutually exclusive? Absolutely not, say florists who've found a way to do good for the community — and their business.

BY MARY WESTBROOK

Brother, can you spare a dime? How about 15, 20 centerpieces? Like many large florists, Winston Flowers was fielding dozens of requests every day from area charities three years ago — heartfelt pleas for donations, product, gift cards, coupons, you name it. The venerable, Boston-based florist, headed by Ted Winston and his brother, David, has a reputation for philanthropy, but it's not a charitable giving foundation. It's a *for-profit* business. The owners' first obligation is to a healthy bottom line, and the staff members who depend on it. Ted Winston knew he needed to make a change.

"(Working with charities) is about aligning yourself with the people who support the organization, as board members, committee members, donors," Winston said. "That can be a win-win. But we had to ask ourselves, 'How can we take it to the next level?'"



BRIAN SMITH

BEHIND THE SCENES Winston Flowers employees are encouraged to become involved with the florist's charity partners, and some nonprofits have weighed in on floral designs for their featured arrangements. Here, Karim Choury puts finishing touches on a design.

For Winston, the answer, and the next level, came in the form of Charity in Bloom, a formalized program that prioritizes strong, long-term partnerships between the florist and nonprofits, rather than one-off donations. By late 2013, the business will have donated close to \$1 million to its charitable partners through Charity in Bloom, while generating goodwill, positive press and capturing new customers. The powerful program also provides a model for florists who want to transform their own scattershot charitable giving into a defined plan, with actionable steps and measurable returns.

Engaged, Equal Partners

Thanks in part to the breakout success of brands such as TOMS, which donates a pair of shoes to a person in need with each purchase, more Americans actively support businesses that back worthy causes. When two products have roughly the same quality and price, social purpose becomes the "leading purchase trigger" for consumers — more important than design, innovation and even brand loyalty, according to the global 2012 Edelman goodpurpose Consumer Study.

73% of consumers would switch brands if a different brand of similar quality supported a good cause, a 9 percent increase since 2009.

(SOURCE: 2012 EDELMAN GOODPURPOSE CONSUMER STUDY)

Seventy-two percent of consumers said they would recommend a brand that supports a cause over one that doesn't.

Strategic relationships with local charities and nonprofits can be especially important to independent small businesses, including florists, that need to stand apart from large national companies with bigger marketing budgets, said Bob Negen of WhizBang! Training in Grand Haven, Mich. The key is to make sure that these relationships are based on "active and equal partnerships" rather than "hope" marketing. (As in, "I hope the charity's major donors notice that my shop donated 15 centerpieces to this swanky gala... and I hope those donors become my customers.")

"Smart retailers realize that when you give back, people respond with their hearts and wallets," Negen said. "You want to be strategic. You want accountability on both sides."

From Handouts to Handshakes

Building up to that level of trust requires lots of groundwork on the florist's part, as Winston Flowers found out when they launched Charity in Bloom in May 2010. Each month, Winston Flowers uses the program to highlight a nonprofit partner with a custom-designed arrangement, available at four different price points (from around \$65 to as much as \$225). When a customer purchases that design, Winston donates 20 percent of the proceeds to the nonprofit. The program didn't replace Winston's tradition of donating product and gift cards, etc., to charities. Instead, it complemented the florist's already high level of community engagement and helped the staff define their goals more clearly.

The Do-Gooders

"Community relations is a full-time program," Winston said. "As a company, that's where our marketing dollars go today (to Charity in Bloom and charitable donations to nonprofits). When we work successfully with nonprofits, we feel that we get a better return than when we buy magazine ads or direct mail."

Charities can apply year-round to participate in the Winston program but Julie Sullivan, marketing and community outreach manager at Winston, acts as the gatekeeper: After an initial conversation, Sullivan presents groups with a one-page information sheet. Then, she asks them to create a plan of their own, with specific insight on how they plan to market the partnership to their donors, volunteer leaders and members. The approach allows Sullivan to open a dialogue with every group that expresses interest in the program (so that she never has to turn anyone down outright). It also helps weed out the less-than-serious nonprofits, or the groups that are looking for a free ride.

"Some groups come up with really creative ideas," Sullivan said. "If they aren't willing to submit a plan, I know they're not committed." (For tips from Sullivan on how to say no delicately, see "On My To Do List," p. 18.)

Charities that make it through are then invited in to meet with a committee of Winston employees. The committee always includes Sullivan and at least one of the Winston brothers; the other two spots rotate, giving more employees the chance to participate and providing a new points of view each time the group meets. At the meeting, the charity's representatives, usually members of the development team, talk in more detail about how they'll hold up their end of the marketing deal, and Sullivan shares tips and best practices from some of the more successful Charity in Bloom runs. This year, the Winston staff also started asking the charities to bring at least one volunteer leader or donor to that meeting — someone, essentially, who is part of Winston's target market.

"That person represents the community," Sullivan explained. "His or her presence helps us stay fresh and brings a new perspective to our brainstorming."

"After we meet with them, we talk about our own ideas internally," Sullivan continued. "From there, we work with the charity to find a good month and then I work alongside our PR person and their Marketing or PR Department to find story opportunities" that the two groups can pitch to the press. In recent years, for instance, Winston employees have participated in demonstrations and classes on-site at the Boys and Girls Club of Boston, a Charity in Bloom-featured nonprofit in December 2010, December 2011 and December 2012.

The Winston team likes to confirm charity partners at least four to five months out, to allow for planning and promotion; at press time, they had already scheduled eight of the 12 slots for their new fiscal year, which begins in May.

Prep Before the Ask

Four years ago in Wilmington, N.C., Dana Cook of Julia's Flowers faced the same kinds of challenges that Winston and Sullivan were working through: too many donation requests and not enough infrastructure and pre-planning, in-store, to handle the workload.



BRIAN SMITH

Winston Flowers

Ted Winston, Julie Sullivan
Boston, Mass., and surrounding areas; Greenwich, Conn.

CAUSE: A formalized cause-marketing approach that highlights one charity each month

EFFECT: By late 2013, the florist will have donated around \$1 million to its charity partners.



Jacob Maarse Florist

Hank Maarse
Pasadena, Calif.

CAUSE: Nights out in honor of a worthy cause, hosted by a community-minded florist

EFFECT: A 10-year relationship with influential women in Pasadena, Calif.



Julia's Florist

Dana Cook
Wilmington, N.C.

CAUSE: A Grant Program, in the nonprofit model, that accepts year-round applications from charities in need.

EFFECT: A reputation for philanthropy and community members clamoring to be involved in the grant program.

CHARITY PRIMER

Development officer. Call to action. Appeal. Annual campaign. Major gift. If these terms are new to you, it may be time to brush up on your nonprofit/charity knowledge. Doing so will help you approach organizations as an equal partner, with at least a basic understanding of the world in which they operate. Some points to consider:

Fundraising is getting harder. Nonprofits and charities are scrambling for funds. The Chronicle of Philanthropy recently reported that charitable giving is only expected to rise 1.6 percent in 2013, making it “one of the worst fundraising years in five decades.” Atlas for Giving, an independent forecasting service, blamed the gloomy prediction on the high unemployment rate, healthcare costs and the 2-percent payroll-tax increase. “The less people take home, the less they have to give,” Rob Mitchell, of Atlas Giving, told the Chronicle.

Timing matters. Do you pull your hair out when a charity calls for a donation on Feb. 13? Nonprofits have similar crunch periods: the weeks leading up to their annual gala or signature walkathon or half-marathon are always busy and in October, November and early December key staff members are likely pushing hard to meet year-end fundraising goals. Those windows probably aren’t the ideal time to jumpstart a relationship or assess your partnership in detail.

Know the VIPs, rainmakers and targets. Take the time to find out more about the key decision makers, just as you do with corporate accounts. Is the board chairman a figurehead or an active voice? Are there any particularly influential donors or celebrity spokespeople? Talk to the Marketing or Public Relations Manager to find out how the group communicates with its members (and how often) so that you can make educated suggestions when it comes time for the charity to promote your shop. Ask the Development Department about their ideal donor and target audience. In a perfect world, their targets will be similar to yours. Finally, if the group has a mission/vision statement or core purpose, make sure you and your staff are familiar with it, so that you aren’t caught flat-footed when a customer asks you about the group — and why you care enough about the cause to attach your name to theirs. —M.W.

93% of consumers want to know what companies are doing to make the world a better place.

(SOURCE: 2011 CONE/ECHO GLOBAL CR STUDY)



ADVANCED NOTICE At the start of each new Charity in Bloom partnership, Winston Flowers sends an email to customers detailing the featured charity, and why the florist supports the cause.

“We were getting requests every day of the week,” said Cook. “The causes were usually things I would have supported, but — I have a budget!” (About \$10,000 a year in 2012.)

Charitable, in-kind contributions already were a line item on Cook’s budget back in 2009, but the shop’s strategy was a patchwork of yes and no responses, often determined by the requestor’s timing. As requests increased, Cook, a former accountant who has served on many nonprofit boards, suddenly hit on a solution: She needed a grant program.

Today, instead of accepting and rejecting requests randomly, Cook and her staff ask everyone to fill out an application for a Julia’s Florist Flower Grant, which Cook created with the help of a local PR firm already on retainer for her shop. Groups can submit applications year-round. Each August, Cook convenes a five- or six-member committee, composed of staff and community members, to review the requests and make selections. (The program has become so popular with Wilmington-area nonprofits that Cook now has people asking to serve on the committee.)

“I never tell people they missed the deadline or that they ‘have to apply,’ which sounds like a long process,” she said. “Instead I tell them the truth: I am excited for them to participate in this new program, and submitting an application is the best way to get into our donation cycle. That way, my employees never have to say ‘no.’”

“Never have to say no,” is likely music to Negen’s ears. He said florists should treat every single donation request “as an opportunity to get lots of new customers.” Clearly articulating your expectations and goals, to both your staff members *and* the nonprofits, can make or break a relationship, especially as the old rule of thumb (say yes to groups that are affiliated with your best customers) becomes less relevant. Winston Flowers has a database of about 90,000 people, representing customers from its seven locations, including its newest store outside of New York. Almost everyone who approaches the business can trace a connection to Winston through the organization’s staff, board of directors or donors. And the number of requests isn’t decreasing. In fact, the Boston Foundation reported a 38.5 percent increase in Massachusetts-based charities from 1995 to 2008. Other metro areas have seen similar growth.

71% of consumers would help a brand promote their products or services if there is a good cause behind them, a growth of 34 percent since 2008.

(SOURCE: 2012 EDELMAN GOODPURPOSE CONSUMER STUDY)

Go for Face Time

Another perk of Cook’s grant program is that it gets the winners into the store. After mailing out regrets and acceptances, the shop hosts an award party-open house in September with light refreshments. The in-shop ceremony gives Cook face time with nonprofit leaders and volunteers. (In 2012, she didn’t host the event because the bulk of her \$10,000 Flower Grant budget went to three nonprofits already familiar with the shop, but she plans to restart the tradition in 2013.) If you don’t make a point to personally meet the key leaders of the organization, you risk “dropping the arrangements off at a banquet hall and never having any face-to-face contact with the people you want to meet,” Cook said. “The marketing opportunity is completely wasted.”

And a good word from an influential person can go an awfully long way. In early December, Cook provided 75 centerpieces for a 720-person luncheon hosted by Good Friends, an organization that supports women and families in crises — and the recipient of a Flower Grant. After the event, the head of the nonprofit sent a personal email to everyone who attended the event, encouraging them to buy their Christmas flowers from Cook. (She also became a customer herself.)

“My total donation to that event was worth around \$1,200 or \$1,300, including labor,” Cook said. “I’ve already made that back in sales from people who were at the luncheon.”

At Jacob Maarse Florist, Hank Maarse and his team have experimented with a number of in-store, shop-for-a-cause-style events. For about a decade Maarse has worked closely with the Junior League of Pasadena, Calif., each fall for a themed night out just before Thanksgiving; in 2012 it was “Snow Below the Boulevard: A Holiday Celebration and Shopping Event.” The programs take place after hours, usually



COURTESY WINSTON FLOWERS

REALITY RULES In 2012, HGTV’s “Going Yard” co-host and “Bachelorette” contestant Chris Lambton visited Franciscan Hospital for Children with Winston Flowers.

STAR GAZING?

If a nonprofit has managed to attract the attention of a celebrity, high-profile news coverage is a potential perk of aligning your business with their cause...but those relationships can bring their own share of challenges.

In the past year, Winston Flowers has scored news stories from its partnerships with Jumpstart, a group that focuses on improving early childhood education, and the Franciscan Hospital for Children. In August, Sullivan worked with the hospital to arrange a flower-arranging demo (and adorable photo op) featuring two young former patients alongside Chris Lambton, a “Bachelorette” contestant and the current host of HGTV’s “Going Yard,” and Lambton’s wife and co-host Peyton Wright (a one-time “Bachelor” contender.) *The Boston Globe* picked up that story and then, a month later, ran a brief story on the actress Bridget Moynahan, a Jumpstart spokeswoman. A picture of a smiling Moynahan, holding the Jumpstart bouquet (red, yellow and peachy-orange roses with bright hypericum) ran above the story, which explicitly mentions the Charity in Bloom program. Sullivan organized the shoot in New York, to make it easier for Moynahan who was working in the city.

“(Bridget Moynahan) is a wonderful customer and she was a great sport about that photo,” Sullivan said. “With high-profile celebrities, you have to do a lot of advanced preparation,” another reason it makes sense for Winston to have Sullivan focused on community outreach full-time. —M.W.



RANDY H. GOODMAN

MADE BY US! Kids from the Boys and Girls Club show off the design they helped create to raise funds for their organization through Winston Flowers' Charity in Bloom program. The Boys and Girls Club — a longtime favorite of owner Ted Winston — has been a Charity in Bloom partner three times.

on a Thursday night. For a two- or three-hour period, Maarse offers a 10 percent discount and 10 percent of proceeds to the Junior League, whose members handle all of the logistics: food, beverages, setup, cleanup and, most important, promotion. Last year around 160 people came out for the event, ringing up \$6,000 in sales. After the event, Maarse delivered a \$600 check to the group.

"The Junior League events draw in a lot of people, and the people who come are ready to spend," Maarse said. "Plus, they're so organized. They do everything. All we do is show up and support their cause."

That high level of engagement is critical to success. Maarse has tried similar after-hours events with other groups, including a December 2012 affair that benefitted three children's charities. The store promoted the event online and with flyers, secured food sponsors, worked with a nearby wine store to coordinate a wine tasting and offered the same deal in-store: 10 percent discount and a 10 percent donation to one of the three charities (customer's choice). Given the collaborative spirit of the night, Maarse was hoping for about \$20,000 in sales. Instead, he rang up about \$6,000 from about 130 people over the course of the 2.5-hour event. While the charities sent out some information to their communities, they didn't have the same level of engagement as the Junior Leaguers.

"Some of the charities we worked with that night are a little bigger, so I don't think they saw our event as a major fundraiser," he explained. "I'm not sure we would do that again; it's a lot of work for my staff at a busy time of year."

Make a Bigger Commitment

Back in Boston, Winston Flowers has fine-tuned its Charity in Bloom program to be much more than a passive promotion. The florist has adopted an all-hands-on-deck approach, encouraging staff members to take advantage of volunteer opportunities at the nonprofit and inviting charity members and volunteer leaders to the store for design demos or classes. In one of the most memorable collaborations, staff members brought flowers and supplies to the the Boys and Girls Club, and the kids helped design their Charity in Bloom arrangement.

"Bringing employees into this process is important," said Winston, who, like Maarse and Cook, sits on a number of local nonprofit boards himself. "Employees want to be part of something bigger than themselves."

Sullivan also works closely with the nonprofit to coordinate promotions and timing. At the start of the month, both Winston and the charity will send out an email detailing the relationship and explaining the cause. When orders go out, they include a card that lets recipients know they've sup-

ported a good cause just by getting flowers. In some cases, the charity's email or letter will come directly from the CEO or board chairman, an approach that "really helps get the word out directly to the charities' leaders," general members and key donors, Winston said. "The members read about our support and feel good. It establishes a bond with Winston." At the conclusion of a successful run, Winston and the charity may follow up with another letter, thanking customers and also providing information on results. Here, Sullivan suggested quantifying results using something other than money. For instance, "Because of your support, ABC Charity can now send 10 kids to camp this summer." Doing so reinforces the charity's message and makes customers feel even more connected.

A final tip: While Negen strongly advises independent businesses to give in proportion to what the nonprofits members spend in your store (see "It's on Them," below) he also encourages business owners to do more than, say, a 5 percent discount.

"Don't be cheap," he said, adding that his personal preference is 20 percent. "It's a customer acquisition cost. Think about how much you spend (or could be spending) on advertising."

'IT'S ON THEM.'

Bob Negen of WhizBang! Training in Grand Haven, Mich., has two main rules for independent retailers who want to get into cause marketing: Keep it local and put the pressure to perform on the charity.

"Find the local nonprofit groups that need the money, whose members are motivated to work with you, and whose members are most likely to be your customers," he said. "That last part is important. Ask yourself what organization does your ideal customer belong to? Those are the ones to work with."

Negen said his second point should become a mantra: Give back to the organization in proportion to the amount of money that their members give to you. His tried-and-true solution to the "donation dilemma" many florists face is to offer every nonprofit gift certificates to your store, which they can distribute to their members. Each certificate should include affinity language to tie-in with the charity.

"The old school way would be to give every nonprofit a gift certificate, a check or an item; in that, you may acquire one new customer," Negen said. "Instead, when a nonprofit approaches you, give them 100 \$5 discounts. Include this language on each certificate: '20 percent of the sale goes back to the Humane Society.'"

The approach incentivizes both parties. As Negen said, "If the supporters spend a lot of money, a big check goes out." Don't forget to include an expiration date on each certificate.)

—M.W.



BRIAN SMITH

MEET AND GREET Ted Winston, Meghan Covington, Greg Mastroianni and Julie Sullivan of Winston Flowers discuss upcoming promotions for Charity in Bloom. Charities meet with a committee of four Winston staff members to brainstorm and plan marketing ideas.

Evaluate. Assess. Promote.

The last step in Winston's Charity in Bloom program involves evaluation. Immediately after a Charity in Bloom run ends, Sullivan and team reach out to the charity to review sales and promotion — whether the results were good or lackluster. Sullivan is polite but honest in these exchanges; if a charity didn't hold up its end of the bargain, she tells them so explicitly. If she wants the charity to participate in the program again, she tells them that, too. In those situations, she also engages the nonprofit reps in another round of brainstorming and note-taking: *We worked really well together, but how can we do even better next time?*

Like Maarse, Sullivan has found that bigger isn't always better. In their initial queries, some nonprofits immediately ask to be featured in February, for instance, because they expect high returns around Valentine's Day. One year, Sullivan gave a smaller nonprofit the month, but she cautioned them: "February is about five great sales days. The rest of the month, people are on vacation or not thinking about flowers. You're going to have to work hard." The group rose to the challenge. They researched a number of lesser-known holidays — e.g. Random Acts of Kindness Day — and sent out a bunch of e-blasts to members. ("Send flowers to the person who shoveled your walkway!") The result? Higher sales volume than some more established (and larger) charities.

"The (smaller nonprofit) killed it," Sullivan said. "When we look year over year, that's a group we'll ask back."

Don't forget to spread the word about your successes either, Negen said. "Every time you do a cause-marketing event, send out a press release before the event," he said. "If it's successful, send a press release out afterwards."

"By nature, I tend to shy away from publicity," said Winston, whose shop has seen some high-profile coverage in the past year, thanks to Charity in Bloom (see "Star Gazing?," p. 31). "But, in the end, if we do a good job, if we're bringing attention to our business, we're also bringing attention to the charities, and the causes we care about." 🌸

Mary Westbrook is a contributing editor to Floral Management. mwestbrook@safnow.org

Hands On

TIPS, TRENDS AND TACTICS FOR THE SAVVY RETAILER

FIRST HAND ACCOUNT

D.C. SHOP CONNECTS WITH REALITY TV FOR GLAMOUR, POSITIVE PR



PARTY TIME hundreds of 20-somethings turned up for a glam cocktail party hosted by “Bachelor in Paradise” cast member Ashley Iaconetti. Palace Florists donated 200 roses for the event — and became part of the buzz on social media.

➤ Like just about every flower shop in the country, Palace Florists, in Washington, D.C., gets more than its share of requests for donations and charitable contributions — particularly around Christmas. But last fall, they got an offer they couldn't refuse, when a former reality TV star asked them to be part of her high-profile philanthropic efforts.

In October, former “Bachelor in Paradise” cast member and Northern Virginia native Ashley Iaconetti reached out to Beth and Lee Herman about a cocktail party at Velocity Five, a hip venue in Centerville, Virginia. The event featured a silent auction of cast members' personal belongings, as well as a special “Bachelor-inspired” rose ceremony. (On both the long-running “Bachelor” and the spin-off “Bachelor in Paradise,” the bachelor hands out coveted roses to the women who make the cut that episode.)

In addition to Iaconetti, a number of other popular cast members were set to be in attendance, making the party a potential hit on social media among key demographic of millennials, said Beth Herman. In fact, throughout the night Iaconetti and her cast members took pictures and posted them across platforms, tagging Palace Florists in several shots. “They were posting and tweeting,” Beth said. “It was a lot of fun and a sold-out crowd,” meaning Palace Florists got to be part of a hot party among hundreds of affluent 20-somethings — in other words, potential wedding clients in the not-too-distant future.

More than that, however, the Hermans, who eventually donated 200 roses for the rose ceremony, said they were attracted to the philanthropic angle: The party raised about \$20,000 for two local charities, the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society's National Capital Area chapter and the INOVA Fairfax Hospital Child Life Services.

“The fact that it was a national celebrity attracted us to the event,” Lee said. “But we always try to support local charities and causes that mean something to us or to our employees. So that was a big factor, too.”

In fact, the shop maintains a year-round campaign, Petals for a Cause, to help raise awareness about neurofibromatosis, an umbrella term for three genetic disorders. A portion of sales for select bouquets benefits NF Midatlantic Inc., a nonprofit involved in research for the disorders. That's another cause close to the Hermans' heart, Lee said.

For charitable contributions, “we set a budget every year and we stick to that,” Lee said. “There are some causes that we always give to, and we factor those in first. With the rest, we can support other events, like the cocktail party. But we try to use those factors to decide who to support: Is it local? Does the cause mean something to us?”

Read about one florist who came up with a streamlined application form for donation requests, at safnow.org/moreonline. 🌹