

MAKING GOOD THINGS HAPPEN

Sun shines on flowers and weddings

By SUE JOE
Starkville Daily News

For eight years, Ray of Sunshine Flower and Bridal Salon on University Drive has delivered floral arrangements to people's doors and just last year the shop opened its bridal salon to help women plan the biggest day of their lives.

"We decided that this would be a nice complementary business since we do so many weddings," said Von Montgomery, owner.

Future brides can shop for their gowns, as well as jewelry, shoes and dresses to fit their bridesmaids. Ray of Sunshine also offers alterations to ensure a proper fit.

"In the bridal salon, the most emphasis right now is prom and wedding gowns," Montgomery said.

In addition to wedding and prom services, Ray of Sunshine provides flowers for different occasions.

"[We have everything] from wedding to everyday-occasion flowers, as well as funerals," Montgomery said. "The flower business is very strong."

Montgomery said Valentine's Day brings in the most business of all holidays, and roses make up 80 percent of all flowers sent on that day.

For the bridal shop, most of Montgomery's business comes during the current prom season.

"We have so many from small areas that come and shop, such as Kosciusko and Tuscaloosa," Montgomery said.

Among the floral arrangements inside the shop, shoppers can find candles, gifts and products crafted by Mississippi artists.

"We have a variety of Mississippi-made products: pottery, food products, birdhouses and bird-baths," Montgomery said.

Before opening her shop, Montgomery said she wanted to work in the floral industry because of her own interests in color and texture.

"I had always thought that at some point I would like to incorporate a bridal shop with a floral shop," she said.

"The majority of what we do is deal with people in a very joyous and happy time. Flowers are



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Floral designer Tiffany Alred arranges a Mother's Day bouquet during work Friday at Ray of Sunshine.

always such a wonderful gift. They relay an emotion a majority of people can't put into words. A person is happy and excited to receive [flowers]," she said. "The joy when they see them delivered to the door is what it's all about, not the fact that it cost \$5 or \$50."

However, working in the floral industry also has its depressing times.

"We had to do casket pieces for two young sisters who were killed," Montgomery said. "It was tough because I couldn't help but feel the sadness for that mother's

and father's loss. I have children that age, and I realize it could have easily been me. That stayed with me for a long time."

While flowers carry their own special meaning and significance, weddings offer similar impact, Montgomery said.

"A wedding day is the most wonderful day in a woman's life. It's really exciting when the mothers see their daughters walk out the first time in a wedding dress. Some mothers cry," she said.

Because of the bridal salon, Montgomery said she gets to

spend a lot of time getting to know brides and their families.

And likewise, prom season brings young women into her salon to prepare for their special night.

"Prom is another exciting time. It's a lesser version of a wedding because it means the girl is close to graduation. All of it is a happy, fun time," she said.

As her business grows, Montgomery says she must continue to improve its services. Although she has not given much thought to expanding further, she would open

a formal wear shop if the area needs one.

"I want to get all the kinks worked ironed out and a better idea of what girls want. You have to pay attention to fashion to make sure you're buying appropriately," she says. "We've given ourselves this year to get it sorted and to get a better feel for the whole concept."

Although she does not plan to open a new shop soon, Montgomery said she would like to remodel Ray of Sunshine and

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increase its space.

"We've received a lot of compliments on the atmosphere, how relaxed and homey it is," she said. "I want to keep it in that perspective so when the mothers come, they can sit in a comfortable chair and observe their daughters in a nice atmosphere. We want them to know that we truly care whether they're looking their best."

And while Ray of Sunshine tries to keep its clients looking good, Montgomery said she competes with the many floral shops in Starkville and the surrounding area by providing an alternative for her customers.

"We try not to get too sure of ourselves, but we do feel like we offer a good product. We are always searching for a better or alternate way of providing a different look,"

she said. "We go to a lot of seminars and design shows where panels of designers come and share their knowledge with us.

"We also offer good service by providing a friendly atmosphere where [customers] can come in and by showing them our merchandise."

For Montgomery, attracting more customers is one of her hopes for the future.

"I hope to see a time when people are more aware that we're here for the bridal business," she said. "I would like to see it grow in volume where it's convenient for Starkville and the surrounding area to come here and shop with us.

"We've been very pleased for three years to be selected the best florist by the People's Choice contest in Starkville," she said. "It's an honor, but we can't take it for granted."

Editor's note: Sue Joe is a senior communication major at Mississippi State University.