



THE Petal Connection

story by Lorraine Barber



The Petal Connection is a local non-profit with an incredible group of volunteers who deliver flower bouquets to hospice patients and seniors in our community. The Petal Connection is a 501 c3 non-profit that partners with hospice and senior care facilities throughout Sacramento, El Dorado County, and Placer Counties to connect with end-of-life care patients. Volunteers create hundreds of bouquets to support 15 local hospice partners. The hospice agencies pick up the flower arrangements and hand deliver the bouquets to patients. Meals on Wheels, Sisters of Mercy, and more than 60 senior living facilities receive flower bouquets created by The Petal Connection volunteers. Seniors who participate in the Meals on Wheels program often call to thank the volunteers personally. The thank you notes are cherished reminders of the “payday” for the volunteers and are displayed on the walls of the flower shop. When you stop by the flower shop, located at 1911 Douglas Blvd #85-175 in Roseville, and watch the volunteers creating the floral arrangements, you can feel the excitement as they work to create a bouquet with repurposed flowers. The volunteers are passionate about helping a community of lonely seniors. In 2022, over 13,000 bouquets were delivered to hospice patients and isolated seniors. The generosity of all the donors and volunteers who create the bouquets brings kindness to lonely people, one petal at a time.

Volunteers come together each week to construct the flower arrangements as a collaborative group. There are over one hundred fifty volunteers, with a waiting list for more volunteers

who would like to participate. Three days a week, volunteers work together to create hundreds of unique fresh flower bouquets. The incredible teamwork of volunteers provides a positive working environment. Their socializing establishes an atmosphere of care between the team members and improves their well-being. Volunteers routinely let Jennifer know how the mission of the non-profit enriches their lives. Helping others less fortunate in our community lifts the spirits of those giving their time and creativity. These volunteers are spreading love, one petal at a time.

Local florists, grocery stores, corporations, wedding venues, and community members donate flowers and containers. The majority of the flowers used to create the bouquets were destined for the garbage. The Petal Connection has a team of volunteers who pick up the flowers from the vendors before they are thrown into the trash. They take all the flowers to the shop, save only the useable flowers, and arrange them into beautiful bouquets for patients. Seventy percent of the materials used to create the flower bouquets are donated. The flower arrangements match the time of year or upcoming holiday and are designed with love and care.

Several local landowners contribute their land as a small area to grow and harvest fresh flowers. Orangevale Food Bank, Hearts Landing Ranch, private property owners, and donations from local growers supplement the flower supply during the spring, summer, and fall months. Volunteers care for the flowers at various locations and cut them when they are ready to be harvested. The fresh flowers increase the "bank" of flowers to facilitate the continued expansion of The Petal Connection's mission.

The presence of flowers triggers happy emotions, heightens feelings of life satisfaction, and affects social behavior positively. According to behavioral research conducted at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, nature provides us with flowers to improve our emotional health.

Researchers explored the links between flowers and life satisfaction in a 10-month study of participants' behavioral and emotional responses to receiving flowers. All study participants expressed "true" or "excited" smiles upon receiving flowers, demonstrating extraordinary delight and gratitude. This reaction was universal, occurring in all age groups.

Flowers have a long-term positive effect on moods. Specifically, study participants reported feeling less depressed, anxious, and agitated after receiving flowers and demonstrated a higher sense of enjoyment and life satisfaction.

Flowers make intimate connections. The presence of flowers led to increased contact with family and friends.

Flowers have an immediate impact on happiness.

The test results show that flowers are a natural and healthful moderator of moods (Source safnow.org).

Sian Wild, a florist and the director of The Flower Lounge, echoes the benefits of flowers triggering happy emotions, particularly from a surprise bouquet. "Imagine turning around someone's day through one simple gesture," she says. "To know they are loved and supported can mean so much that the positive impact of receiving a bouquet can be enough to lift them out of a difficult place or low point." (yahoo.com)

Jennifer Arey, the founder of The Petal Connection, created the non-profit over nine years ago after taking care of her terminally ill grandmother. Hospice would come to the care facility to care for her grandmother, and Jennifer noticed how her grandmother was becoming withdrawn and angry. Jennifer felt helpless and would bring flowers to uplift her spirit. After her grandmother passed, she began to explore the idea of delivering flower bouquets to other hospice patients. Her mother worked as a florist, and Jennifer had learned the basics of being a florist.

Jennifer heard about an Oregon non-profit repurposing flowers for terminal patients and contacted them to see if there was a possibility of establishing an outlet in California. Opening a satellite office in California was not an option, so Jennifer researched the idea of obtaining flowers from local grocery stores before the florist disposed of them into the trash. Jennifer contacted several local grocery stores and wedding venues to dis-

cuss how she could collect the expired flowers before they went into the dumpster. The "shelf-life" of cut flowers is extremely short, but Jennifer knew she could use some old flowers to create "upcycled" bouquets.

Jennifer began working in her garage, creating flower bouquets from "expired" flowers and would pick each salvageable flower to make a bouquet in recycled vases. The glass vases were cumbersome and difficult to transport, so she started to use small 15-ounce aluminum soup cans for the vases. The aluminum cans are clean soup cans covered with burlap and ribbon. The small decorated cans are easier to pack and transport, safe, and more economical than glass vases. The final product was a beautiful flower bouquet that was easy to handle, and the response from the community was overwhelming; thus, The Petal Connection was on its way to becoming one of the most loved non-profits in the Sacramento region.

The City of Roseville noticed The Petal Connection's commitment to the community and awarded a \$20,000.00 grant to support their mission. This grant is a generous boost for a non-profit that looks forward to continued expansion to serve more patients in the community. The Petal Connection is continually exploring additional funding opportunities, sponsorships, and ways to support the mission of bringing kindness to a large community of forgotten demographic in our local area. They are continuously reaching out to the community for support and sponsors.

The Petal Connection volunteers are providing a service that is an act of kindness by making a difference in our community. Terminally ill patients and seniors often suffer from depression and anxiety. Sometimes they live alone, feel forgotten, and have no family to help them with their care and emotional health. The patient's well-being improves by knowing a community of volunteers offers kindness and joy by bringing them flowers to brighten their day. The thank you responses from caregivers and families indicate how the flower bouquets positively impact their day. Seniors call the flower shop to express gratitude and thanks for the flowers. They often say how flowers have a positive impact on their life. If you are interested in helping our mission, please visit our website (<https://thepetalconnection.org/donate-now>).

The Petal Connection is pleased to announce its upcoming event, Art in Bloom, which will feature local artists and floral designers. The event will take place on March 25 at the Coveka Atrium, 9000 Foothills Blvd Ste. 150, in Roseville, from 5:00 pm to 8:00 pm. At this unique event, floral designers create beautiful fresh floral arrangements to interpret the fine art created by local artists. The art and flowers highlight our local talent and will be sold during the event's silent auction, and all the proceeds will benefit The Petal Connection's non-profit mission. Crucial funds raised will enable their volunteers to continue to deliver joy to hospice patients and seniors in our community. Your attendance at this beautiful and unique event would be greatly appreciated. The Petal Connection will be sharing stories on the impact of their mission and how together, we can bring more joy and happiness to those in our community!