

2015 Retail Florist of the Year

Lilium Floral Design

After only seven years in operation, business-minded shop owners, Lisa and Ron Pritchett, win our 13th annual title.

By Amy Bauer



(above)

Lisa and Ron Pritchett opened Lilium Floral Design in 2008. Lisa left her travel-intensive career in the pharmaceutical industry and cashed in her 401(k) to make their dream come true. Ron has kept his full-time job as vice president of sales for a manufacturer of electrical conduits.

(top)

Lilium Floral Design is located in a former bank building the couple purchased in 2009. Once a deserted retail area, today it is again bustling with restaurants and a Whole Foods Market. To capture the clean, modern aesthetic of the shop, the Pritchetts painted the outside gunmetal grey and displayed a large image of a Lilium arrangement. *Photo: Jason Kindig Photography*

The opening of **Lilium Floral Design** in Colleyville, Texas, in July 2008 fulfilled a decades-long dream for **Lisa** and **Ron Pritchett**. Ready to leave her travel-intensive career as a corporate trainer in the pharmaceutical industry, Lisa cashed in her 401(k) and began the business from her home before purchasing a former bank building in this Dallas-Fort Worth suburb the following year and transforming it into Lilium. Despite the opening's coinciding with the Great Recession, the business has thrived. Revenue has increased between 20 percent and 30 percent each year, and last year the business registered a 35 percent increase in dollar volume over the previous year.

"I came to this not afraid of the business itself, but I was new to the industry," Lisa

describes, noting that she seeks the advice and support of her local wholesale partners and other suppliers. The full-service shop tests every new flower variety or batch from a new supplier to ensure that the longevity will satisfy customers. If stems don't last in the test vases in the shop, Lisa won't repurchase.

"There's nothing better than having a customer call and ask, 'What is this? I've never seen this before!' We try to source flowers and textures that are unique because it makes it more fun for the customer," Lisa shares.

If customers ask why Lilium's prices are higher than a competitor or a grocery store, she explains the products that Lilium has invested in and stands behind.

Its record of success, stunning floral design, and commitment to sales and customer

service led to Liliun Floral Design's designation as **2015 Retail Florist of the Year** in the annual contest co-sponsored by *Florists' Review* and the **Wholesale Florist & Florist Supplier Association (WF&FSA)**. WF&FSA member **Equiflor Corporation**, of Miami, Fla., nominated the shop.

lilium's roots

When the Pritchetts were first married, they told friends they hoped to one day open a flower shop. Ron had worked for a nursery during high school, preparing Christmas trees, and Lisa had a longtime love of flowers and gardening. That love was instilled, in part, by visits as a child to her uncle **Edgar Scott's** flower growing operation, **Lytle Flowers**, in Lytle, Texas, where he raised tulips, roses, *Irises*, *Gladioli* and other blooms.

The timing was right in 2008. Lisa was tired of long weeks on the road, and Lisa and Ron's son, **Austin**, was getting ready to play high school baseball. When the couple ran into some high school friends who asked, "Did y'all ever open that flower shop you talked about?" they knew the time was right.

While Ron maintains his job as vice president of sales for a manufacturer of electrical conduit, Lisa manages Liliun full time. Ron takes a week from his full-time job at Thanksgiving to help with Christmas installations and time off at Valentine's Day to help with deliveries, when it is all hands on deck. Daughter **Taylor Pritchett** leads the design team.

sales calls spur growth

While Lisa can do everything from design to delivery and serves as Liliun's quality control officer, she says her time is best used when focused on her skillset: sales. "I spend as much time as I can in

"The more time I'm out [making sales calls and visiting customers], the faster we grow."

— Lisa Pritchett



(above) Liliun's entryway features a modern checkout area, behind which is a wall of shelving that displays striking vases and artwork. A table in the entryway features seasonal fresh flower arrangements and a selection of local magazines in which the shop advertises.

Photo: Jason Kindig Photography

(left) Liliun-branded folders featuring various fliers and postcards – full of eye-catching photography of Liliun's work – are used for sales calls, sales presentations, wedding shows and vendor fairs.

front of our existing customers and reaching out to new customers,” Lisa shares.

She spends at least part of every day in the shop, but she’s out on sales calls or visiting customers an average of three days a week. Some are cold calls, some follow-ups on referrals and others are visits with existing customers to get feedback about what the shop is doing well and what it could do differently.

“The more time I’m out, the faster we grow,” Lisa explains.

exponential growth

The shop has grown more swiftly than the Pritchetts even expected, and they are in the process of expanding by enclosing the space formerly used for the bank’s six drive-through lanes. The renovation and expansion will essentially double Lilium’s space, from 2,900 square feet to approximately 5,900 square feet.

“We are just bursting at the seams,” Lisa notes. “I thought it would take us forever to grow into our space, but it hasn’t.”

Lilium’s staff consists of 10 full-time and four part-time employees, including three full-time and one part-time designers and three full-time and one part-time delivery drivers.

Once renovations are completed, Lisa anticipates hiring two additional designers and two additional delivery drivers, one full time and one part time.

She also has her eye on a nearby piece of property to potentially build a freestanding warehouse to corral the shop’s wealth of wedding, event and Christmas supplies.

Lilium is a custom shop and doesn’t keep ready-made arrangements in its cooler. If someone walks in and needs an arrangement immediately, “I always tell them, ‘We’ll make it up for you, and if you don’t like it, you don’t have to buy it,’” Lisa relates. “I’ve never had anyone not buy.” She has found that ready-made arrangements for the cooler waste labor and stems, and many times they don’t fit the need for which a customer is shopping. Here are three Lilium-style arrangements she has made especially for customers.

Photos: Jason Kindig Photography





corporate christmas

One of Lilium's fast-growing services is the installation of Christmas florals and décor for area hotels and corporate properties. This lucrative segment has grown through Lisa's sales work and word-of-mouth, as residents and businesses experience Lilium's décor at area venues.

This past holiday season, Lilium served multiple hotels and corporate properties, installing 37 trees and a wealth of décor, double what they had installed the year before.

"That's a side of my business that I didn't expect to grow so quickly," Lisa says. "We've been working on growing fresh floral sales with individual and corporate customers, but Christmas has really taken off."

During weeks that include commercial holiday installations, Lilium staff members know that everyone is expected to give their all. Lisa also hires area high school students to pitch in. Similarly, everyone takes part as décor is taken down after the holidays.

Between Nov. 1 and Christmas Day last year, Lilium staff members worked straight through with just Thanksgiving Day off. Then with Christmas falling on a Thursday, the shop was closed four days.



(above)

Business for Christmas installations has doubled since 2013. In 2014, Lilium set up 37 trees and an extensive amount of décor.

Photo: Jason Kindig Photography

(above right)

Lilium employees work extended hours during the holiday season, only breaking for Thanksgiving Day. Lisa motivates them by providing food and encouraging a good night's rest.

Photo: Jason Kindig Photography

(top)

Holiday installations have grown to be a large part of Lilium Floral Design's business. This past holiday season, one Fort Worth hotel contracted the business to handle all of its décor. The job took 25 people two full days to complete. Lisa says next year a sister hotel in Dallas will also use Lilium's services.

Photo: Jason Kindig Photography



To keep the staff motivated throughout the holiday season every year, Lisa brings in food, and she reminds everyone to eat breakfast and to get good rest each night.

"I have great, great employees. They are loyal, and they get excited when they see it all come together," Lisa shares.

profit sharing and other perks

Such loyalty is no doubt also engendered by Lilium's profit-sharing plan, offered to all employees. Lilium also gives full-time employees, those working at least 35 hours per week, 10 days of paid vacation after one year with the company.

Staff members receive bonuses at Christmas and Valentine's Day based on those holidays' sales, and accident-free drivers can earn a safety bonus at the end of the year. Employees also receive customized shop apparel, all of which is black with the signature Lilium logo.

The profit-sharing program is based on Lilium's results throughout the year, though there isn't a set target. "It has definitely encouraged loyalty and longevity," Lisa relates. "It also has made staff members think more about efficiency because they see how



one of lilium's biggest fans

Lilium Floral Design was nominated for 2015 "Retail Florist of the Year" contest by **Equiflor Corporation**, a fresh flower grower, importer, distributor and marketer of cut flowers in Miami, Fla.

"Lilium Floral Design is a unique and innovative retail florist company, with creative marketing and customer service strategies that stand out in our industry," says **Yvette Speziani**, director of marketing at Equiflor Corporation. "They won our 'How Do You Say Corazon' video contest (in fall 2014) and are a proven innovative marketer."

Lilium co-owner **Lisa Pritchett** says Equiflor's 'Corazon' roses, which she purchases through her area wholesalers, have been popular with customers. Lilium created educational marketing pieces about 'Corazon' to teach her customers about its garden rose qualities: the lush, wide-open fragrant blooms and an above-average vase life. Lilium created customer care cards that read, "Hi, I'm a Corazon rose. I'm unique because ..." and list the features of the variety.

From its state-of-the-art distribution center close to the Miami International Airport, Equiflor Corporation distributes its nationally branded fresh cut flowers via a network of wholesale flower distributors across the U.S. and Canada. The company's flowers are packaged and distributed under five trademarked names: Rio Roses, Baby Rio Spray Roses, Rio Carnations, Rio Ice and Rio Specialty Flowers.



(above)

When it came to naming the business, the family weighed dozens of options before son, Austin, who was studying Latin at the time, suggested the Latin word for lily, *Lilium*. The Pritchetts designed the logo themselves, choosing the striking *Sarracenia* (cobra lily, pitcher plant).

(above right)

Lilium has designed separate instructional cards for cut arrangements, green plants and orchids. The backs of Lilium's message cards also include care instructions, as well as contact information in case recipients have questions.

(top)

Lilium's space includes a private 12-by-15-foot conference room for wedding, event and sympathy consultations as well as staff meetings.

Photo: Jason Kindig Photography





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everything eats into the profits. We are having conversations about that.”

As a result, Lisa says, Liliium is buying smarter and has less waste. Staff also focus on routing drivers efficiently. “We strive to be as profitable in every department as possible,” she says.

marketing strategies

Liliium advertises in upscale local magazines, and Lisa also purchased a 30-second video ad at the Colleyville Cinema Grill, which runs in all eight theaters before every movie.

Early on, Lisa partnered with several luxury car dealerships to provide weekly flower arrangements for their lobbies, and this helped Liliium reach those high-end consumers. She also created a discount offer redeemable at Liliium to include in the dealerships’ thank-you packets for new car buyers.

Normally averse to coupons, which Lisa says tend to create transactional customers interested only in scoring the next deal, she made an exception for these targeted partnerships. She says the special offers have won her long-term clients.

ordering ease

To make ordering flowers from Liliium as easy as possible, last year Lisa created an online order form on the shop’s website, www.liliiumflorals.com. She shares that this has been a popular option with customers, who simply fill out the relevant fields and click “submit.”

All receipts are sent via email, and in many cases, an arrangement photo can be included. The shop uses an iPad to photograph every arrangement before it leaves the

Liliium Floral Design at a glance

Owners: Lisa and Ron Pritchett

Location: Colleyville, Texas, a Dallas-Fort Worth suburb

Established: 2008

Number of locations: 1

Shop size: 2,900 square feet (currently expanding to 5,900 square feet)

Employees: 10 full time and 4 part time

Clientele: Liliium Floral Design serves many high-end clients, and its customer base includes slightly more women than men. Most are in

the 35-to-70 age range, and bridal clients are typically between 25 and 35 years old.

Revenue generators: 40 percent everyday floral; 60 percent weddings and events, and holiday décor. The shop averages four events per month.

Average fresh flower sale: \$100 to \$125

Average wedding floral bill: \$5,500 to \$7,500 (up from the \$2,500-to-\$3,500 range two years ago)

Minimum for delivery: \$50

Number of delivery vans: 6, all black with the Liliium logo

Delivery radius: 50 miles

Delivery fees: \$8.95 to \$14.95, depending on distance

Gift assortment: Liliium limits its giftware options; Lisa’s research showed retail makes up only 6 percent of most florists’ revenue. Liliium’s assortment includes hand-fired glassware by a California artist; locally made jewelry and lingerie; and the Lafco candle line.

Website: www.liliiumflorals.com

Social media presence: Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest



Winston, a wheaten terrier, is Liliium's mascot and canine greeter.
Photo: Jason Kindig Photography

shop, which also allows Lisa to review them in case a customer calls with questions or concerns.

Walk-in customers get a chance to interact with designers, and sales staff are encouraged to ask questions to get to know these visitors: When is their anniversary? Are they new to the area?

Though the design studio isn't in view of the retail area, Lisa has every designer come to the sales floor, introduce him or herself and show the customer the arrangement "they specifically made for them." This personalized service creates an experience for the customer, not just a sales transaction.

"There are a lot of very talented people in this industry in our area," Lisa says. "I think it's the customer service that sets us apart." ■



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