

Matt & Bronwyn Douglas – Kistner's Flowers

This is Kansas Profile. I'm Ron Wilson, director of the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development at Kansas State University.

The floral arrangement has arrived for the funeral service. The grandfather, a lifelong outdoorsman, is being laid to rest. But his casket piece is no ordinary collection of plants. It is a remarkable arrangement of beautiful flowers, intermingled with deer antlers and his actual fishing rod. This personalized floral arrangement was designed and produced by an enterprising flower shop owner with rural roots. It's today's Kansas Profile.

Matt and Bronwyn Douglas are owners of Kistner's Flowers in Manhattan, Kansas. They especially seem to enjoy designing custom-made, personalized floral arrangements for weddings and funerals.

Matt and Bronwyn met at K-State, where she studied psychology and fine arts and he majored in greenhouse management. Bronwyn had grown up in Canada but her mother was originally from Manhattan. Matt came from a truly rural area of Kansas, having grown up out in the country between Americus, population 931; Allen, population 209; and Admire, population 176 people. Now, that's rural.

Matt and Bronwyn got jobs at a flower shop on the south side of Manhattan. The shop was called Kistner's Flowers, having been created by Marie and Ray Kistner in 1946.

After college, Matt and Bronwyn got married and moved to Alaska where she worked in human resources and he worked in a private lodge and greenhouse near Denali National Park. They later moved to Montana.

One day Matt got a job offer at a Montana greenhouse. A couple of days later, Bronwyn got a call offering her a job back in Alaska. And a couple of days after that, they got a call from Kistner's Flowers, their former employer back home in Kansas. Wow, what a week.

Matt and Bronwyn weighed all their options and flew back to Kansas. "We put a lot of prayer into it," Matt said. On January 1, 2006, they became the new owners of Kistner's Flowers in Manhattan. "Of course, the next month was Valentine's Day, and we were wishing the previous owner was around to help," Matt said with a smile.

Fortunately, Marie Kistner still lived nearby. In fact, she became an unofficial grandmother to their children and lived to be 98 years old. The Orr family had purchased the flower shop from Kistners in 1973, making Matt and Bronwyn the third family owners in nearly seven decades. Matt and Bronwyn now live in what had been Marie's house, and Bronwyn's parents also live nearby. That is especially convenient for the grandkids, Matt and Bronwyn's two children Denali and Dawsyn.

Kistner's Flowers specializes in three things: fresh flower arrangements, houseplants or blooming plants for indoor use, and indoor plant management for business clients. The latter type of indoor plant service and maintenance is called interior plantscape. Of course, Kistner's provides flowers for all kinds of occasions and special events.

"We like to serve families with something beautiful," Bronwyn said. In their first year of ownership, Kistner's helped with fewer than 25 weddings. Now they serve more than a hundred annually.

A special challenge is the personalized casket pieces which families might want for funerals for a loved one. “This is a celebration of their life,” Matt said. He and Bronwyn seek to create designs which integrate items that truly reflect the person being remembered. They’ve done arrangements with cooking utensils for women, barbed wire and sunflowers for ranchers, clubs and balls for golfers, and firefighting equipment for a retired firefighter. (I hope he didn’t need that equipment where he was going.)

Through it all is the flowers. “We might go through 600 roses per week on average, plus we have 35 other varieties of flowers,” Matt said. Kistners won the Lux award for best outdoor wedding in northeast Kansas. “It’s service but it’s also an art form,” Matt said. “We want to offer excellent product and customer service.” For more information, go to

www.kistnersflowers.com.

The floral arrangement has arrived for the funeral, and it features deer antlers and a fishing rod just as grandfather would have wanted. We commend Matt and Bronwyn Douglas and all those involved with Kistner's Flowers for making a difference with such personal, customized service. Those are truly special arrangements.

For the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development, this is Ron Wilson with Kansas Profile.