

Phyllis Cheney – Flowers & More

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

Let's go to a beach in Florida. A wedding is taking place on this beachfront location, complete with beautiful floral arrangements. And where do you suppose these flowers came from? They came from halfway across the continent in rural Kansas. It's today's Kansas Profile.

Phyllis Cheney is the owner of Phyllis' Flowers & More in Chapman, Kansas. Hers is the flower shop which supplied this wedding. As of this writing, her shop is closed due to the coronavirus pandemic, but Phyllis plans to reopen after the pandemic is over.

Phyllis grew up at Atwood. She met and married her husband Greg and studied floriculture and horticulture at K-State before going to Scott City where they farmed for many years. They had a daughter named Vickie who especially enjoyed dance as a child. Vickie grew up and moved to eastern Kansas. She met and married Jeremiah Woods who lived near Chapman. Eventually Vickie's parents – Phyllis and Greg – decided to move to Chapman as well.

One day, Phyllis and daughter Vickie were looking at houses in Chapman when they noticed an open building downtown. Vicki had been working as a dance instructor at Fort Riley but was thinking of opening her own dance studio.

"This is perfect," Vickie told her mother. "It's going to need some remodeling, but we can do it," she said.

Vickie and Jeremiah bought the building and remodeled it. The back side of the building became the site of Vickie's dance studio, called Downtown Dance and Tumbling. Phyllis opened a flower and gift shop in the front side of the building. She called her shop Phyllis' Flowers & More.

Phyllis had previously worked part-time in a flower shop and always had an interest in floral design. Phyllis' Flowers & More is a floral, gift and boutique shop. Her business offers Kansas products such as gift baskets, blown glass work, Tonja's Toffee, wooden puzzles, handmade soaps and other handcrafted items.

When it comes to floral arrangements, personal service is an emphasis for Phyllis. This is especially evident when it comes to funerals.

"I like to do something that tells the story of the person's life, not just simply flowers," Phyllis said. When her own father died, she helped design a personalized floral arrangement. "Dad was an avid fisherman, and he always helped out during wheat harvest," Phyllis said. "I knew our local florist really well so she let me do the design," Phyllis said. It included a cane pole and a bobber on a spray of wheat, with a sign that said "Gone Fishin'."

"When I do a funeral spray, I try to learn as much about the person as I can before the family comes in," Phyllis said. "If they are former military or have a special hobby, I try to bring in something that depicts that person's life," she said. She has designed a funeral floral display with toy John Deere equipment for a retired farmer and used quilt squares for a former quilter, for example.

Phyllis especially enjoyed doing her granddaughter's wedding flowers. Phyllis also recalled a local girl who was planning a beachfront wedding in Florida and ordered flowers online, but found the flowers were not at all what she expected. She asked Phyllis to put together silk flower arrangements on short notice, and Phyllis was able to get it done.

It's a long way from Chapman to the Florida beach, but Phyllis Cheney's arrangements made the wedding special. That's impressive for a floral shop located in a rural community like Chapman, population 1,393 people. Now, that's rural.

For more information, go to Facebook and search for Phyllis' Flowers & More.

It's time to leave the beachfront in Florida where Phyllis's flowers helped decorate this wedding site. We commend Phyllis Cheney and her daughter Vickie Woods of Downtown Dance and Tumbling, for making a difference by bringing their talents and entrepreneurship to rural America. I hope their businesses will grow and flower.

And there's more. Tonja's Toffee was one of the products featured in Phyllis's shop, and it is part of a special legacy. We'll learn about that next week.

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