

Love is in the air thanks to Wood River florist

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
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On the day before Valentine's Day love is in the air, and someone who knows all about that is florist Jeffrey McElroy, who for four decades has serviced customers.

McElroy started Jeffrey's Flowers by Design 10 years ago and the business is going strong at 322 Wesley Drive in Wood River.

McElroy applies a different touch to his work, using years of design experience.

He admits he does enjoy seeing people come in to get that special flower for a loved one on Valentine's Day. Some may almost view McElroy as the doctor of love with his special creations.

"I love what I do or I wouldn't have stayed in it for 41 years," he said.

In the floral business, customer service is most important and the owner said to succeed in the business it is necessary to find people who are nice and want to take care of the customer.

"You don't have to spend a fortune to get the point of love across," McElroy said. "One or two flowers can get the point across."

Normally at McElroy's side is his well-known dog Ralph. When long-time customers come in, McElroy jokes that often Ralph is the first person they want to see. If a photo is being taken, often the dog jumps up to be in the picture.

The Wood River floral owner said his aunt and grandmother both were flower people and led him to the love of what ultimately became his life's work and passion. Every special occasion growing up, flowers were always important to his family, McElroy said.

McElroy graduated from Alton High and began working in the floral business when he was in high school for Bill Hennings at his shop. At a young age of working in the profession McElroy was told he would never make it in the business and he used that as motivation to work even harder. He received his horticulture degree at Danville Junior College. He also had 32 years of experience working for Dick's Flowers in Wood River. He said Dick Strack, the owner, was his mentor and taught him an incredible amount about the business. "He was the best boss I ever had," McElroy said.

The design part of the business is what McElroy said he thinks separates him from other florists.

On Valentine's Day McElroy said roses are most popular. For seven years, the floral owner said he has kept delivery prices the same.

Today, men receive a lot more flowers than before.

One of McElroy's favorite stories was one where a person filled up a huge vase with six dozen roses.

Another customer purchased one rose for his sweetheart on Valentine's Day and other special occasions. When he died, his wife came in to order flowers for his funeral and McElroy told the woman she had to get red roses because those were his favorites.

The day before Valentine's Day is always crazy busy, McElroy said. Today and Saturday he said he will enjoy people and the smiles on their faces when they pick up their flowers.

Since the beginning of time, the Wood River floral owner said flowers have been simply: "A way of someone saying I love you."

