

Flower Finds

A burst of color at the Broad Street Market.

BY
NORAH GRIFFITHS JOHNSON



Rather poetically, in November of last year, the west end of the Broad Street Market suddenly looked as if summer had shown up half-a-year early.

Credit goes to D. McGee Design Studio, the embodiment of Dolores McGee's lifelong love of plants. Her stand is now the first thing market-goers see as they enter the courtyard end of the brick building at the market.

"It's surprising the number of people who come through the doors and say, 'Wow! Look at all this color! What are these?'" McGee said.

With an arresting display of buckets brimming with vibrantly colored blossoms and greenery, the stand is hard to miss (or resist). As we talk, she shares a colorful and particularly formative experience she had as a child.

"I was lying on the ground in my grandmother's garden, gazing up through the flower heads waving atop their long green stems," she said.

The beds, she said, were exploding with irises in blue-violet, dazzling yellow and peach, juxtaposed with white dahlias and zinnias.

In addition to her grandmother, McGee credits former market flower vendor, Margaret Koccevar, and a few other people along the way, for nurturing her love of horticulture.

"My grandmother was really the key to my interest, and I ignored it for decades," McGee said, laughing. "I think you tend to do that—especially my generation. You tend to not look at the things that make you happy. You look at the things that will make you money, without realizing they don't necessarily make you happy."

Following the more traditional track, McGee pursued an HR career that spanned 25 years.

"I mean, how far removed is that?" she said.

But, during this time, she took dozens of horticulture classes—from botany to biology, plant ID, soil development, landscape design and sustainability, to name just a few.

"Had I been smart about it and taken them all from one institution, I'd have another degree," she said. "But I still had fun."

Gradually, McGee began sharing her knowledge and love of plants with the world, eventually branching out to events, workshops, weddings, a range of custom floral design. Through this, she slowly built a client book via mostly word-of-mouth referrals.



Along the way, she took classes at Longwood Gardens and attended conventions and seminars to bolster her knowledge of the mechanical elements of elaborate floral design—think 10-foot arches composed of greens bedecked with dangling tendrils of aromatic blooms and exotic varieties of orchids. Sometimes, if you're lucky, you can spot a custom-ordered, miniature version of this sort of thing sitting at McGee's stand, waiting for a lucky customer to pick it up.

As her knowledge base grew, so too did her creativity. In the early days, McGee admits it took some time to hit her stride and really develop a signature style.

"I tried to mimic the FTD thing, and that didn't really work for me," she said. "But then I started doing what I wanted, and people really loved it. Then my imagination just sort of went wild."

Since opening, her biggest challenge is one common to many fledgling businesses—figuring out what and how much to stock.

"It's one thing to do events," she explained. "You know exactly how many flowers it takes to do x-number of bouquets, centerpieces, etc. But figuring out what people who come to the market will buy? Sometimes what I *think* will sell just sits there—like red roses!"

She quickly gestured towards a bucket where a few unlucky blooms still lingered, days after Valentine's. So far, she's discovered, it's the more exotic, unusual, varieties that seem to

most consistently strike the fancy of market-goers.

For awhile, development and logistics surrounding set-up and the opening of the stand took the majority of McGee's focus, but she is gradually getting back into doing workshops and events, which present a great potential for the creativity that she loves.

In addition to all this, each year, she conducts a number of educational presentations for horticulture groups throughout the area. Sustainability—specifically around diminishing the effects of storm-water runoff, preventing soil erosion and combating non-permeable surfaces—is her sweet spot.

"That's my thing," she said, grinning. "I am *very* committed to this effort."

So, amid the splendor, what are her favorite flowers?

"Tropicals," she said, without missing a beat. "I *love* tropicals. They are so wonderful to work with."

People tend to assume, she explained, that orchids and other tropical varieties are extremely delicate.

"But they aren't really, especially if processed and handled properly," she said. "And many of them will dry well—maybe not to their live form—but to something that is usable and just as lovely as when they were alive." **E**

D. McGee Design Studio is located in the brick building of the Broad Street Market, 1233 N. 3rd Street, Harrisburg. For more information, call 717-756-0503 or visit www.dmcgeedesignstudio.com.

Flowers from D. McGee Design Studio. Vases by Quiet Clay.



HELP WANTED

Unemployment rates in the Harrisburg region are at their lowest point in decades, but it's not all good news.

BY LIZZY HARDISON

Are you hiring in Harrisburg? Join the club. Ten years after the Great Recession, the capital region has jobs that it does people to fill them. Harrisburg's metro area logged a 3.8 percent unemployment rate in August, signaling its ascent to full employment—that economic idyll where every willing, able job seeker can find work, at a living wage to boot.

But it's not just the employment rate that's booming. Other indicators suggest the regional economy is at its strongest point in a decade. Data show that the region's workforce is slowly growing, as people who gave up on finding jobs once again seek work. College graduates report more confidence in their employment prospects, and business owners feel more optimistic about the economic climate.

Many of these same trends are true across the United States, where unemployment hit 3.7 percent in October—a 50-year low. But even as Harrisburg keeps pace with the national economy, it out-performs other parts of Pennsylvania. In a report published earlier this year, researchers at Penn State found that diverging economic fortunes are creating “two Pennsylvanias”—one with sluggish job growth that incentivizes out-migration; the other with a fast economy that draws in new residents with the promise of jobs. Harrisburg, aided by the fast-growing economies in Lancaster and Philadelphia, is part of the latter.

“Honestly, south-central Pennsylvania is a good place to be right now,” said Jesse McCree, executive director of South Central PA Works, a workforce development organization. “We've heard from more employers in the last 12 to 24 months who cannot find people to fill jobs. And we're seeing a lot of employers who want to improve job quality and invest in their workers as an asset.”

A “tight” labor market—one in which jobs outnumber job seekers—tends to tip the scales of power towards workers, who can hop jobs or bargain with managers to secure better pay and benefits. Employers, on the other hand, say they can't hire fast enough. Kathryn Sandoe, chief communications officer for the Lancaster County Solid Waste Management Authority (LCSWMA), said a months-long worker shortage has created a crisis in the waste industry.

“We're operating at a high vacancy right now,” Sandoe said. “We have more waste to move than ever before, but quality truck drivers and equipment operators are at a premium.”

Other employers agree that the worker shortage is dampening productivity, especially in the building trades professions, where a growing construction market stresses a shrinking labor pipeline.

“We have work scheduled four, six months out almost all the time now,” said Seth Maurer, who owns a hardscaping and outdoor contracting company based in Susquehanna Township. “We have to turn a lot of jobs down.”

The competition bodes well for job seekers, whom businesses want to woo with new incentives and job perks. Maurer's company has increased its average starting wage to \$16 an hour—\$3 above the regional industry average, he said. They've also added healthcare benefits and one week of paid vacation. LCSWMA raised its entry-level wages this summer and is touting its comprehensive benefits package in ads and interviews.

NO EXCUSES, ONLY ACTION



will just hang in for six weeks, you will form that new habit. You know, the non-lazy habit of being active versus sitting on the couch watching TV all night. Recognize that your body may hurt a little when you begin a new exercise program. This is normal. That initial soreness will fade if you keep at it. But avoiding exercise until you feel good again does not work. If you have concerns, talk with a qualified health professional to be sure you are starting and working at an appropriate level or to address those injury concerns.

Step 2: Pick something you think you will enjoy and enlist a friend. If you choose an activity you know you will hate, you are sure to stop. But if you pick something you believe you will like, you have a shot. The friend part—misery loves company? No, having someone to help hold you accountable for your workouts will ensure you stay true to the plan this year.

Step 3: Realize that you will need to carve out some time in your schedule for this. I know what you are thinking—“I am too busy with work and life.” So is everyone who exercises. But they made the conscious decision to make exercise a part of their weekly or daily routine. No excuses anymore—only action!

There you have it—*the* blueprint for success with exercise this year. I just took away your excuses, objections and rationalizations. The next step is getting going. Here is to actually achieving those health and wellness goals this year. **B**

A few simple steps will get you moving this year.

BY DR. ANDREW ZANG

It's January, so everyone must share their perspectives on health/fitness and tell you how/why you must begin to exercise this year.

Why must you/we/us wait until the turn of a calendar year to begin to exercise? It's silly that we make these “resolutions” to be or do something this year and yet so often fail. But why is that?

Is it because of lack of commitment to the process? Do we fail because we are lazy? Because we simply are not willing to put in the work? Lack of time?

Habits form and are *very* difficult to break. It is much easier to simply sit than to get up and move, but it shouldn't be. It should be second nature to move and be active for our overall health and wellness.

So why is this *the* article you must read? Because it is going to tell it to you straight. You know the health benefits of exercise. You know you should be exercising to improve how you feel. You know that, if you just exercised, you would have less pain and an easier time completing daily tasks. So, that is not where I am going to head with this.

I am going to tell you exactly how to succeed. How to move and feel better. And how to get back to enjoying life again.

Step 1: Understand that it is not going to be easy. You are going to have to put in some work if you wish to make gains. And, yes, starting out *will* most likely be difficult. But if you

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