

'The human joy department': How Omaha wedding flowers get a second life with seniors

Emily Nitcher



The workers at Second Chance Bouquets collect flowers used at weddings and funerals and repurpose them for deliver to Omaha metro seniors.

NIKOS FRAZIER, THE WORLD-HERALD

Kevin Cloward steered the cart of orange, red, yellow, pink and blue flowers toward the front doors of Richmond Terrace.

On a Friday and Saturday in late June, these flowers decorated weddings in downtown Omaha and Louisville. By Sunday at 1 p.m., volunteers from Second Chance Bouquets had rearranged them and placed them in new vases creating bouquets of varying heights and hues.

The flowers' second act bring color and life into residents' rooms at Richmond Terrace, an assisted living and memory care facility in Bellevue.

As soon as Kevin pushed the cart into the entryway, curious residents stopped to ask him about the flowers.

"They're free," Kevin Cloward tells them. "Is there one you like better than another one? Color-wise?"

"Thank you so much," the resident said to Kevin. "They're all so beautiful."

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Kevin Cloward steers a cart full of donated flowers into Richmond Terrace in Bellevue. After one wedding, Cloward was able to collect enough flowers to fill three cars.

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"How are you doing?" Kevin asked a male resident. "You heard we've giving out free flowers and you want a pair, don't you?"

As more residents wandered in, they smiled. They thanked Kevin and the other volunteers who walked around the facility looking for more residents who might want a bouquet.

The interactions only lasted a minute or two but Kevin said it's why he and his wife Eva started Second Chance Bouquets.

"It's the look on the faces of the residents when they get the flowers," Kevin said.

The flowers will last longer than the brief interactions. They will sit on dressers, windowsills or tables as a reminder that someone thought of them.

Since the nonprofit's founding in 2017, the Clowards have made 11,562 deliveries to people living in 45 different assisted living and nursing homes throughout the Omaha metro.

While beautiful, Kevin said the flowers are just an expression of the nonprofit's larger mission.

"I don't look at us in the flower business," Kevin said. "I look at us in the human joy department."

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When Eva Cloward builds a bouquet, she does so in her hand before she places the flower in the vase.

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It was Eva's idea to start the nonprofit. She saw a video online about a similar organization in another state. The video made her cry.

"And I'm not a crier," Eva said.

Eva said sometimes families don't visit their loved ones in assisted living communities or nursing homes because they think they're being taken care of.

"We need to do this for the residents in the nursing homes," Eva said. "Just to bring them some joy."

Kevin liked the idea. So did Eva's friend, a florist.

"She said, 'Oh my gosh, I throw away so many flowers after an event. This would be good,'" Eva said.

Less than two months later, the Clowards picked up enough flowers at a wedding to fill three cars.

"We kind of jumped into the deep end of it," Eva said. "We weren't really doing small potatoes."

Second Chance Bouquets does some advertising on social media but it's mainly florists that recommend the service to brides, grooms and event planners. The Clowards also attend one bridal show a year.

They've also picked up flowers from funerals and big events like the Aksarben Ball and Gov. Jim Pillen's inaugural ball.

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Eva said people are often excited that the flowers won't go to waste at the end of a wedding or event.

"It's a lot of money that they're throwing away and they don't know what to do with it," Eva said. "So everybody was very excited."

At the end of a wedding reception, normally around 11 p.m. or later, the Clowards and other volunteers pick up the flowers and take them back to the Clowards' garage.

Often the Clowards and other volunteers pick up what they call "beach balls," giant floral arrangements that decorate the churches or venues where the weddings are held. They take those arrangements apart and build smaller bouquets in donated vases.



Kevin Cloward of Second Chance Bouquets doesn't see himself as working in flowers, but working in the "human joy department" when he delivers old wedding flowers to seniors

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The Clowards, who don't have any training in floral arranging, approach the task differently from one another. Eva picks up individual flowers and arranges them in her hand. Kevin likes to build them in the vase.

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"Once you have beautiful flowers, you're going to make beautiful bouquets, right?" Eva said. "You can't go wrong with the beautiful flowers."

Given the late nights, Eva and Kevin said it can be hard to find volunteers willing to help pick up the flowers. One year, Eva and Kevin picked up flowers from multiple weddings every weekend from June to November. They've had to scale back since then.

"You don't want to get burned out from doing good," Eva said.

The Clowards have found reliable volunteers in Terri and John Beadleson.

"It happens to be two of my favorite things: flowers and seniors," Terri said.

Terri and John have been to weddings in Bennington, Council Bluffs and throughout the Omaha metro to pick up flowers. Terri said families are often overjoyed that flowers from their day will continue to bring more joy in the rooms of seniors.



Two key volunteers for Second Chance Bouquets, John and Terri Beadleson, walk through Richmond Terrace to donate flowers to residents

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"The flowers are so beautiful," Terri said. "You hate to see them go in the garbage can."

People interested in donating flowers, vases or time, can email secondchancebouquets@gmail.com or visit the nonprofit on Facebook or Instagram.

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