

BUSINESS

Blooming obstacles abound for florists as Mother's Day looms

By Jaclyn Giovis | South Florida
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South Florida florists are feeling the pinch of higher fuel prices and the slow economy as they start delivering bouquets for [Mother's Day](#), traditionally among their busiest days of the year.

Flower shops have been coping with increasing gas prices by raising delivery charges to some areas as much as \$3, passing the extra cost along to the customer.

"It's costing a lot more to fill up our vans," said Gary Young, manager of *Flowers and Found Objects* in [Fort Lauderdale](#). Even though Mother's Day business and annual sales are up so far from last year, gas is becoming so expensive that raising the prices became necessary, he said. "The one thing we are selling is service," Young said. "Delivery is a huge part of the service."

The Las Olas Boulevard florist, which requires a \$50 minimum order for delivery, recently raised delivery prices \$1 or \$2. Delivery fees range from \$7 to \$25.

For another florist shop owner, Mother's Day orders are off to a steady start, but sales for the year are down at least 25 percent.

"I'm doing sales now that I did four or five years ago," said Vince Petrovsky, owner of *Heaven & Earth Floral* in West Palm Beach.



Flowers are marked for delivery at [Field of Flowers](#) in Davie on Thursday. Extra delivery vans had to be rented for the [Mother's Day](#) rush. (Sun-Sentinel/ Carey Wagner / May 8, 2008)



ON THE WAY OUT: Mickey Shannon and Fernando Chavez prepare to load a shipment of flowers for customers at Field of Flowers in Davie. Staff photo/Carey Wagner

To deal with the decline, he raised delivery charges in February from \$1 to \$3. Customers now pay \$9 to \$26 for delivery. Petrovsky said he also cut back on the extra staff usually hired to help fill Mother's Day orders. And soon he plans to start a vase recycling effort to help creatively trim costs.

Still, he said, the 20-year-old business isn't in dire straits and customers have been pretty understanding about delivery price increases.

"They still want to spend something," Petrovsky said. Mother's Day customers are, however, opting for less expensive arrangements, he said.

But the sputtering economy has taken a larger toll on other florist shops: *Florida Rose* of Fort Lauderdale, for instance, will have its last day on Mother's Day, after giving up the battle and agreeing to be acquired by *Field of Flowers* of Davie.

"Business for your mom-and-pops flower shop has not been good," said Dennis Matson, owner of the 12-year-old *Florida Rose*.

Increased competition from the Internet, megaflorists and big-box retailers have put pressure on sales, he said, but the rising gas prices and current economy haven't helped at all.

Matson said his one-delivery-truck operation was no match — in terms of customer service or cost efficiency — for Davie-based *Field of Flowers*, which has a fleet of refrigerated trucks.

Nevertheless, the struggles of *Florida Rose* have presented an opportunity for *Field of Flowers*, which has a broader reach and the ability to serve customers with faster delivery, he said.

In addition to the Davie store, *Field of Flowers* operates fresh flower superstores in [Coral Springs](#) and [Boca Raton](#). During the past few years the company has acquired *Vizcaya Florist* in

Plantation, *East Coast Floral* in Davie, *Grants Florist* on Las Olas in Fort Lauderdale and *Through the Grapevine* in [North Miami](#).

"I'm sensing that there are more smaller florists that are feeling more pressure," said *Field of Flowers* owner Donn F. Flipse. "There probably will be more opportunities like this [acquisition] coming up."

Even for his larger operation, though, Flipse says the flower business is getting more expensive to operate.

When he opened 18 years ago, Flipse said he offered free delivery services, though it wasn't long before he charged a \$5 fee and eventually raised that fee. Three years ago, the company switched to diesel trucks for better gas mileage and recently, it raised delivery charges again, from a flat rate of \$11.50 to \$12.95.

This Mother's Day, the florist is working harder than ever for every sale, even those placed in other cities which he must fill "at a [commission] discount," Flipse said. "In a good, strong economy, we would be less anxious to fill those orders."

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