

Creative Occasions Celebrates Fifth Anniversary

February is usually a busy month for florists, but for Vinton small business owner Mark Frye the month sometimes marked by red roses also calls for an anniversary celebration. Frye's Creative Occasions has been in operation for five years at the Lee Street location.

If you had told Frye 12 years ago that he would be leaving his position as a sales representative for Georgia Pacific and would be the owner/operator of a floral shop, he might not have believed you. But his creative eye for floral arrangements began several years ago while he was a student at Radford High School. He worked at Northside Flower Shop in Radford and was primarily a delivery man who also was in charge of sweeping the floors and cleaning the flower buckets. He expressed an interest in floral arrangement to the shop's owner and was allowed to help with funeral sprays and was eventually promoted to bud vase design. This initial experience in the flower shop planted a seed of creativity within the teenager.

His 13 year career with Georgia Pacific helped Frye build a strong foundation for running a business. His work with sales, marketing, record keeping, and inventory control proved to be very useful when he opened his own small business.

For about five years before purchasing his Vinton shop, Frye operated a floral design business out of his home. What began as prodding from friends who had seen his floral work, he booked a



Mark Frye, Owner, Creative Occasions

wedding. For five years he mainly handled the floral arrangements for weddings and special events. Little did he know that this was going to blossom into a full-time profession.

Frye visited Roy Baldwin, director of the Roanoke Regional Small Business Development Center (RRSBDC) in early 2000. He was interested in purchasing Oberchain Flowers, a family-owned floral shop which had been in operation for 43 years. With the assistance of the RRSBDC and his accountant, Frye was able to purchase the small business and take over the operation.

"Given the assistance I got from Roy and my accountant, we were able to crunch the numbers and look at this proposal as a real world scenario," Frye explains. "We could see what kind of business this shop was doing and we could see that it would actually support me and my family while supporting the debt I was about to take on."

Frye's floral shop, just like the Oberchain family's operation, has become a family affair. His wife Debbie is at the shop often and will

always help in a pinch. His 19-year-old son Jared serves as the Saturday delivery man, and the couple's 15-year-old daughter Joanna helps with wedding and party set-ups and works in customer service and sales on Saturdays.

The RRSBDC also helped Frye write a business plan which the small businessman says has been invaluable. He explains, "You need to know what to expect and how you want to approach the business. A lot of that was answered through guidelines offered by the SBDC about how to set goals, about how to determine what you sell, very simple and basic steps on how to get this business started."

Frye is also pleased that his small business is located in Vinton. He explains, "I never envisioned I'd have a shop in Vinton, but I'm really glad I ended up here because it suits me. I like the sense and flavor of a small town where people can come in and you can ask them about what is going on in their lives."

He continues, "Vinton is a great little place. As a business owner, I love this community. Vinton is a great place to live and work. We'd love to have some new businesses come here and be a part of this downtown. Vinton has that kind of Main Street USA kind of feel. I'd like to encourage more people to consider Vinton as a location for unique, specialty businesses."