

Fifty years of flowers at Schroth Brillion Floral & Gifts

By David Nordby, The Brillion News, October 3, 2019



Colette "Collie" Thurwachter has kept Schroth Floral & Gifts in downtown Brillion thriving. Thurwachter has been working there since 1971, two years after her in-laws, Raymond and Marion Schroth opened the store. (David Nordby/BN)

Schroth Brillion Floral & Gifts has been serving the Brillion community for half of a century.

The floral shop on 119 Main Street downtown opened in 1969, and is celebrating its 50th anniversary. Colette "Collie" Thurwachter has been a part of it for nearly its entire life.

Thurwachter married Raymond "Bud" Schroth, Jr., the son of Marion and Raymond Sr., who moved from Little Chute to start the shop.

Marion worked for a floral shop in Little Chute that owned a small corner store in Brillion across from Wieting Funeral Home.

"They went out of business and she bought this from them and then they bought this (building)," Thurwachter said. The building the floral store is in was formerly Miller's Hardware Store.

"They needed more room so they bought this," Thurwachter said.

Thurwachter worked part-time in 1971, and a year later was working full time. She had known the family growing up in Little Chute.

"We had gotten back together in 1971, ended up getting married in 1972," Thurwachter said.

Marion worked at the shop until 1976.

"She taught me pretty much everything I know," Thurwachter said.

From 1976 forward, it was Thurwachter and Bud who operated the store.

"He loved it ... That was his goal in life, to be a florist. He enjoyed the growing part of it the most," Thurwachter said.

Thurwachter says the floral designs and interacting with people became her favorite part.

"Being out with the people, waiting on the customers and working in the backroom doing all the arrangements and the funerals and the weddings and that ... It worked out good; he had his niche and I had mine," Thurwachter said.

In 1984, the couple purchased land outside of Brillion and constructed greenhouses. Bud grew poinsettias, lilies and other plants.

"He did his thing out there and I stayed (at the shop)," Thurwachter said.

Bud passed away from leukemia in 1995. Thurwachter says it was a no-brainer to continue on with the shop.

"I kind of ended up just marrying into it and enjoyed it so much. Every day is a new experience," Thurwachter said.

Currently the shop has Thurwachter, two employees and help from Thurwachter's husband, Tom, and her children.

It is still a full-fledged floral shop that serves weddings, funerals, holidays, and outdoor plants in the spring.

"It's the whole thing, the designing, the being with flowers – I absolutely love flowers," Thurwachter said.

A celebration of 50 years allows for a time to be nostalgic. She says those memories are in her mind even without a milestone anniversary.

"Always think about the good old times. It was easier years ago than now to run a business. Things were easier. Your overhead wasn't quite as much as it is now ... You had more people walking in ... You don't get to meet the people now like you did ... so, I kind of miss that part," Thurwachter said.

Now, she says, computers have changed some of that.

"The orders come on through the computer. People go online and place them online through the website more so than the walk-ins. We still have walk-ins, but you don't have that phone ringing constantly," Thurwachter said.

The look of the products have changed some, too.

"The techniques are different, the designs are different. They've modernized a lot of designs," Thurwachter said.

Even with less interaction than there used to be, Thurwachter says the store still has new generations of customers.

"It's kind of funny because when I first started here I married a couple off then I end up marrying some of their kids off, now I'm starting to marry the grandchildren off," Thurwachter said.

Of course, flowers don't always have to be for special occasions like weddings either.

"There are men that come in every week to buy flowers just because it makes their wife happy, and that's cool, that's nice. I get enjoyment out of that," Thurwachter said.

This week, the store is running a buy one, get one 50 percent off sale. Everything in the store is available for the sale, just not custom orders.

The sale includes C.Ce's, her boutique that Thurwachter opened around eight years ago. The name was first meant to be "Collie's Closet." A domain name under 'C.C's' was already taken, so she added the 'e.'

The boutique includes mostly women's clothing and jewelry.

"That I really enjoy because it's something a little bit different than what I've done for so many years," Thurwachter said.

The boutique attracts high school students up to women in their 70s, Thurwachter says.

"I try to keep a little bit for every age bracket," she said.

Thurwachter is quick to refer to Brillion as her home.

"I've been here longer than I was in Little Chute," she says. "It's a nice place to have a business. It's a nice place to raise a family. It's got good schools. It's got a little bit of everything."

As for the floral shop, she beams when she says that customers often tell her when they pick up orders that it has made their day.

"It's nice to know you make a lot of people happy ... I've had the pleasure of making people's day," Thurwachter said.



Schroth's is in the midst of running a 50th anniversary sale. The store's location downtown was the former home of Miller's Hardware Store. (David Nordby photos/BN)