

SLOW FLOWERS PIONEER WINS POETKER AWARD

Award recipient works to cultivate and grow flower farmer and florist relationships.

By JANE M. MARKLEY

On a small plot of land near Puget Sound in Des Moines, Wash., a quaint maritime city about 15 minutes south of Seattle, is where master gardener **Debra Prinzing** stops to smell the flowers. Literally. Like the blooms in her suburban garden, the **Slow Flowers Movement** she pioneered has grown organically over the past decade. As an author, educator, speaker and leading advocate for sustainably cultivated American-grown flowers, Prinzing has become the voice for organic floral farmers and designers, encouraging them to differentiate their flowers from imported crops.

Through her movement, Prinzing has begun a national dialogue to help educate consumers and industry professionals about the benefits of sustainable, organic farming practices. Much like the fast-food industry spurred the opposing slow-food farm-to-table movement, the Slow Flowers Movement is fueling a shift to organic locally grown field-to-vase flowers.

To recognize Prinzing's significant contributions to floral design in publications – on the platform and to the public – the **American Horticultural Society (AHS)** nominated her as this year's recipient of the prestigious **Frances Jones Poetker Award**, named for the famed 20th century botanist, horticulturist, author and lecturer.

Q. What does this award mean to you and whom it represents?

A. I am so honored to be among the many illustrious recipients to receive this award. To me, it means elevating the profession and representing a community of organic flower farmers and florists. It's one more credential that validates our hard work and acknowledges that local, sustainably cultivated flowers are gaining respect in the industry. When you know the farmer and his or her story, you have a different relationship with that bouquet in your vase. My hope is that consumers will start to see that there's a better way to do business that can help people and the planet.

Q. What kind of impact, if any, will this award have on your advocacy for American-grown flowers and the Slow Flowers community?

A. Hopefully this award will cause articles to be written and people to post on social media. We are not going to eliminate imports, but I am optimistic that progressive farmers and florists will continue to push the boundaries to stay on top of the flower preferences in the industry. These visionaries are tightening the gap where flowers are grown and how they are consumed.

Q. In your opinion, what role does horticulture play in floriculture, and are the two showing more overlap in knowledge and design?

A. Florists from coast to coast are opening a new generation of retail flower shops and outdoor wedding venues that commit to providing only locally grown flowers. Additionally, savvy nurseries and garden centers view flowers and floral design as an appealing lure to reach new consumers, nongardeners and do-it-yourself crafters with floral design services, workshops and how-to instructions for planning a flower garden for cutting.

Q. Where do you see the floral industry headed with regard to people coming from nonfloral backgrounds, as well as the influence of millennials?

A. I'm working hard to shift flowers away from a low-priced commodity to flowers that offer a reflection to time, place and season; a story about the people who grow and design them; and a human connection to nature. Millennial consumers are looking for this unique floral culture that mainstream is not offering. They want to know who grew the flowers, how they were grown and where they came from. More than ever, people are seeking wellness, beauty and a connection with nature as an antidote to the stressors of life. ■

For anyone interested in learning more or joining the Slow Flowers community, visit debraprinzing.com, slowflowers.com and americanflowersweek.com.

RECIPIENTS OF THE AHS FRANCES JONES POETKER AWARD

- 1988 - J. Barry Ferguson; Oyster Bay, N.Y.
- 1989 - Ralph W. Bachman; Crosslake, Minn.
- 1990 - Georgia Vance; Mount Solon, Va.
- 1991 - Beverley White Dunn; Birmingham, Ala.
- 1992 - James Morley; Oklahoma City, Okla.
- 1993 - Pauline Runkle; Manchester-by-the-Sea, Mass.
- 1994 - Libbey Hodges Oliver; Williamsburg, Va.
- 1995 - Rene van Rems; San Diego, Calif.
- 1996 - Arabella S. Dane; Boston, Mass.
- 1997 - Ralph Null; Columbus, Miss.
- 1998 - Ralph Null; Mississippi State, Miss.
- 1999 - Thomas Powell; Washington, DC
- 2000 - Jim Johnson; College Station, Texas
- 2001 - Rocky Pollitz; Blue Jay, Calif.
- 2002 - Penelope Decker; Sudbury, Mass.
- 2004 - Virginia Beeland Spencer; Birmingham, Ala.
- 2006 - Hitomi Gilliam; Mission, B.C., Canada
- 2008 - Renny Reynolds; Wrightstown, Pa.
- 2010 - Jane Godshalk; Kennett Square, Pa.
- 2012 - Laura Dowling; Alexandria, Va.
- 2014 - Gay Estes; Houston, Texas
- 2016 - MaryEllen J. M. O'Brien; Sheffield, Mass.