

Metro winners have community at heart

Social responsibility is a key component of Jodie McGregor and Stuart White's inner-Sydney business, as Natasha Sherwood reports.

Prospering seems to be the only option for the husband and wife team of Stuart White and Jodie McGregor with the support of the proven and dedicated staff of Jodie McGregor Flowers in Annandale, New South Wales.

Sydney Flower Market's 2005 Metropolitan Florist of the Year is no stranger to success, and previous accolades include the markets' florist of the month award in July 2005 and florist of the year in 2003-04.

McGregor qualified as a florist through TAFE and has worked across the globe, including at hotels in London and Canada.

She says this experience has given her exposure to a broad range of concepts. "I've had a lot of training from all sorts of trainers," she says.

McGregor was involved in high-end floristry in London. "It's just different over there," she says. "Ordering a houseful of flowers for special occasions like Christmas is a normal thing to do."

Seven years ago McGregor started the business from scratch with a vision to create a customer-focused boutique shop.

"I didn't feel like there were (florist) shops that were providing wonderful customer service," she says.

White doesn't arrange flowers. Instead he runs the business side, including marketing and buying supplies from the market.

Because he does not have a floristry background, he initially found buying flowers harder than expected. McGregor recalls having to take back his first market attempt and tell the grower, "He's with me, and if you ever sell him flowers like that again ..."

White has come on board full-time in the past three years to coincide with co-parenting their two daughters, Pirra and Remi.

The couple have five employees, three of whom have been with them for four or more years. The other two have been there for the past 12 months after others left to go overseas.

"We've got good girls," they say. "They treat it as if it's their own, and it's good for our customers," says McGregor. "We need staff who are familiar with customers."

As a token of their appreciation of their staff, McGregor and White have split the \$3000 florist of the year prize money among the girls, despite the fact it was given to them as an advertising package rather than as a cash sum.

"If it wasn't for the girls we wouldn't have achieved what we have achieved," they reason.

Over time they have found different things work best for them. They insist stock must be really fresh and offer a wide range of flowers at a competitive price.

Cards are something they have found work well. "People now come to us as a destination for cards," says White.

"We have a really big focus on community," White says. They regularly support local kindergartens and schools. "We have an obligation to be socially responsible and our customers are really appreciative."

A project introducing personalised environmentally friendly bags, is "creating a bit of fun". If customers send in a photo of themselves using the bags outside Annandale or in a creative way they receive a \$10 voucher.

The future is looking bright for this happy couple and their young family. "What's important to us is we don't want to lose the character of our business," McGregor says.

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BELOW: The team at Jodie McGregor Flowers in Annandale, Sydney, includes Rita Isidori, Leanne Stevenson, Jodie McGregor and Jade Duong.

