2011 American Academy of Floriculture Inductees

Jenny Behlings, AAF, PFCI, SDCF
In 1984 Jenny Behlings opened her shop, Jenny’s Floral, in the heart of the small town of Custer, S.D., and has been pumping her energy into her community since. Behlings says community service is just a way of life for her family. Husband Tim is a county councilman; brother-in-law Brian is a former sheriff and current fire chief and Jenny’s active with the Custer ambulance district as director, the fire department auxiliary (former president), and the town’s garden club, where she’s held numerous offices. Churchgoers count on her to lead crafts-making exercises at vacation bible school or help out with donations and decor. Behlings served several terms on the board of the Custer Chamber of Commerce, which named her the 1999 Individual of the Year.

At the state level, she rallies fellow florists as vice-president for the South Dakota Florists Association (SFDA), sharing her design expertise and leadership acumen. In 2009, the South Dakota Center for Enterprise Opportunity named her SBA Women in Business Champion. So enamored and inspired by her story, the center asked Behlings to return to its event in 2010, where she presented “Where Am I and How on Earth Did I Get Here?” Behlings received her formal floral design training at the University of Minnesota-Waseca. She enhances that training through the SFDA, Teleflora, and American Institute of Floral Designers (AIFD).

A South Dakota Master Florist, Behlings mentors floral students and conducts design seminars through community groups, including the FFA, garden clubs, rotary clubs, and women’s and seniors’ groups, and at floral conventions. Her talks to consumers cover “Valentine’s Day Roses” and “Orchids for the Home.” Her industry programs cover competition designing, high-altitude gardening and business planning. She provides mentorships to floral students and presents programs at high schools about plant propagation and design.

Don Coleman, Jr., AAF
When it comes to giving back to his Tucson community, Don Coleman Jr., co-owner of Mayfield Florist, really rolls up his sleeves — and has convinced hundreds of residents to do the same. Since 2003, Coleman has worked with the local Red Cross to host a blood drive and offer a dozen roses to each presenting donor. It’s held on the anniversary of his son Sean’s successful heart transplant at four months old, during which a blood transfusion kept him alive.

Now a teenager, Sean often joins his dad, uncle Greg, aunt Kelly, and grandfather Don Sr. at Mayfield Florist. There, Don is the numbers guy, who focuses on financial management, floral technology and interaction with peer-to-peer groups, including the one he founded, the Next Level Floral Group. Coleman is on Teleflora’s RTI Advisory Board, has served as president of both FTD District 8K and the Allied Florists of Tucson, and been a board member of the Arizona State Florists Association.
The University of Arizona political science graduate remains a bit of a policy wonk with a strong interest in local, state, and national politics. In 1992, he ran for Tucson City Council. In his community, Don is the past president of Saint Cyrils School Board, the Tanque Verde Optimist Club and the VIP Breakfast Club of Tucson. He recently joined the Centurions, a group of 100 business leaders in Tucson that raises money for a local hospital serving low-income residents in Tucson. Last year, the group raised more than $350,000. In his first year, Coleman won the group’s Rookie of the Year Award.

**Greg Coleman, AAF**

Greg Coleman could school fellow florists on how to simultaneously give back to the community, develop the next generation of florists, do free marketing and recruit free holiday labor. Those are just a few of the things the co-owner of Mayfield Florist accomplishes twice a week at local high schools in Tuscon. There, for the past two years, Coleman has taught floriculture to sophomores, juniors and seniors, who often donate more than 750 hours of labor to the shop during the holidays.

The volunteer gig is the perfect microcosm of how Coleman combines his love of flowers, family and community at every chance he gets. As a part of a family deeply devoted to serving important causes, Coleman serves on the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation of Southern Arizona. Both his brother Tom and sister Leslie died of the disease, and the Coleman family has made cystic fibrosis a primary benefactor of the shop since mom, Pat, first opened the doors in 1982. Since her death in 2002, Greg, his brother Don and father, Don Sr., have built the store to be one of the top 100 Teleflora shops in the country, a Tucson institution and the business that looks beyond the bottom line to see its impact on the community.

Greg also serves on the Catalina Foothills School District Foundation Board, which raises nearly $500,000 each school year. He’s active with the local PTA, helping with fundraising and decorations. His green thumb doesn’t get a break at industry events, either. Greg served as the design room manager at SAF’s 1999 convention in Tucson. He’s been procurement chair for several Arizona State Florists Association conventions and remains active now that his board stint has ended.

Coleman majored in political science at University of Arizona and completed a summer internship with a legislator on Capitol Hill. Fortunately for the industry and Tuscon, Coleman chose petal pushing in his hometown over paper pushing in Washington.

**James Daly, AAF**

When Jim Daly talks, it’s almost always an absorbing, enriching conversation. That’s because as vice president of Floralife, a division of Smithers-Oasis, Daly is always...
eager to share the latest advances in floral foam and floral food — and make his audience want to soak in every detail.

Jim has been immersed in horticulture since high school, when he got a job at Floralife. The industry has benefitted greatly from Daly’s contributions to numerous flower and plant care manuals, in which he demonstrated his deep knowledge of chemistry — a fascination that also began in high school and continued as he earned a Bachelor of Science in Mathematics and Chemistry from Elmhurst College and a Masters in Biochemistry from Illinois Institute of Technology.

Jim’s talents are not confined to the lab, however. He also has a MBA from the New York Institute of Technology. He has been equally active on the business side of Floralife, working on the marketing and promotion of scientific advances within the care and handling and post-harvest field.

Jim’s ability to fulfill dual roles is often in full force at industry events — where he is equally likely to be found giving a presentation on post-harvest care to attendees or participating in executive and committee meetings. He began volunteering his expertise and time to the Society of American Florists in 1998, when he joined the Government Relations Committee.

Daly served two terms on that committee and also served on the SAF Wholesalers Council. His industry involvement includes membership in the OFA – The Association of Horticulture Professionals, and the Wholesale Florist & Florist Supplier Association.

Within his local community, Jim works with and donates to the Savannah Philharmonic Symphony Orchestra and the Savannah Children’s Choir. Ever the educator, Daly volunteered as a tutor in 2007 for SC Gear Up, a nonprofit that seeks to increase the number of low-income students in South Carolina who are prepared to enter and succeed in post-secondary education.

Kimie Miyamoto, AAF

At the age of five, surrounded by the bleak landscape of post-war Hiroshima, Kimie Miyamoto recalls finding a flower growing out of the blackened earth. That same year, she began learning the intense art of Ikebana, Japanese-style floral arrangement, from her mother. She took her education abroad at 18 — learning European floral design in France and Italy, while also teaching Ikebana and the art of Japanese calligraphy.

In 1976, a young and fearless Miyamoto asked Donald Trump if she could set up a high-style flower shop in his Grand Hyatt Hotel in New York. Two years later, she opened the Kyoto Garden Florist in the Grand Hyatt, where for the next 17 years she impressed the hotel’s luxury-expecting guests and thousands of brides and partygoers.
From 1980 to 2001, she provided flowers for the United Nation's General Assembly. She proudly served as the florist for the Twin Towers lobbies in the World Trade Center, creating massive 10-feet tall arrangements. She still considers getting those huge installations in place every Monday morning by 9:00 a.m. as one of her proudest achievements.

In 2004, Kimie moved her shop to the New York Flower Market and changed the name to Flora Design, Inc. From the 3,000 square-foot-space, she has been serving brides and grooms, teaching her weekly classes and welcoming editors from bridal magazines, including Modern Bride and Manhattan Bride, who love including her work in their glossy pages.

She’s won countless awards at the New York Flower Show for her Ikebana and wedding work, participating in the event for 15 years. Kimie and her father helped introduce curly willow to American florists, and she often takes time out of teaching and designing at the New York Flower Show to donate hundreds of curly willow branches to schoolchildren. She enjoys encouraging them to experiment with the whimsical natural beauties at home and school. In 2008, Kimie gave curly willow and bamboo away to visitors of the Japan Day Festival in Central Park.

She has volunteered on the Ikebana Society for many years and served as its chairman from 2003 to 2009. After 50 years of creating art with flowers, Kimie says she’s still soaking in new information, while honoring her roots with Ikebana traditions.

**Shelley Pease, AAF**

When Shelley Pease held her first annual Designing with the Stars event at Shelley's Flowers & Gifts in November 2010, she was doing what she does best: bringing folks together for a good cause, having fun and thinking creatively to get more people loving flowers. Pease raised $820 for her local Waldoboro, Maine, food pantry, to which she usually donates supplies at the holidays.

She is often in motion, whether in the backroom of her shop or as she walks the halls of Congress annually during SAF Congressional Action Days. When Pease does take a seat, it’s often to share her retail wisdom on an educational panel at an industry convention. She also serves on the SAF Consumer Marketing Committee. Within her community, Pease regularly volunteers to do coastal cleanups, count votes in town elections, participate in Chamber of Commerce fundraisers and support her local Cub Scouts.

Pease opened her shop in 1982, shortly after graduating from the University of Southern Maine with an associate’s degree in business. She deepened her design knowledge at the Simons School of Floral Design in Wellesley, Mass. and further
sharpened her floral chops studying with Phil Rulloda and Gregor Lersch at intense three-day workshops.

An FTD Master Florist and a Maine Master Floral Designer, Pease once described her approach to education this way: “Hard work to get you where you’re going...education so you know what to do when you get there.”

Her contagious energy keeps classes and networking events lively at Maine State Florists’ and Growers’ Association, the Waldoboro Business Association and the regional Chamber of Commerce. Her staff also benefits from her leadership and loyalty to their own growth. In 2004, Pease was a finalist for best small business employer of the year in the Stevie Awards for Women in Business. She was nominated by her employees, who lauded Shelley for encouraging employee camaraderie, offering educational opportunities to her staff and her concern for both their mental and physical wellbeing.

Susan Wilke, AAF, PFCI
In Susan Wilke’s three decades in the floral industry, she’s been a retailer, greenhouse owner, designer, merchandiser, spokesperson and wholesaler. Each role has provided a platform from which to share her passion for flowers and expertise at making them irresistible.

Currently with Karthauser and Sons Wholesale Florist in Franklin, Wis., Wilke’s voice is heard round the state and the industry. A member of SAF’s Professional Floral Communicators-International (PFCI) since 2001, she now serves on the PFCI Board of Trustees. For 15 years, Wilke has championed Wisconsin florists as spokesperson for the Wisconsin Floral Marketing Council. At the Wisconsin and Upper Michigan Florists Association, she served on the design school committee and coordinated programs throughout the region.

Each year, Wilke donates her design talent and serves as ringleader for horticulture speakers at the Wisconsin State Fair. Her tireless energy has helped keep the 11-day event in the news and also brought the Grand Champion Floral Challenge to Wisconsin. As the competition’s emcee, Wilke dispensed floral facts, fielded questions and provided a play-by-play description of the design action.

Her giving spirit and petal passion extends to her community, where she heads up an annual poinsettia donation to the local VA hospital and leads design classes at a nursing home. Viewers of the local Fox affiliate know they can count on her decor and gift-giving advice at all the major holidays and local high school students get to her live performances at career days. School administrators consider her “a go-to source” for event centerpieces and silent auction donations. Even when she’s clowning around she’s helping others and promoting flowers. For parades and community events, Susan’s alter ego, Primrose the Gardening Clown, is a natural
joy-dispenser — handing out flowers and making a difference in the lives of everyone around her.

J. Robbin Yelverton, AAF, AIFD, PFCI, CF
Take one look at the Facebook page of J. Robbin Yelverton and you’ll see the spunk, talent, humor and hard-working drive that make his business a Detroit-area favorite and his presence in demand at industry events.

Yelverton and his partner Jerome Raska, AAF, AIFD, PFCI, CAFA, CF, have made their business, Blumz...by JRDesigns Floral & Event Professionals, a vital player in both downtown Detroit and Ferndale, Mich. To see his floral creations — both for customers and at industry events — it would be easy to say flowers are his life, but that would ignore the contributions he makes to the Detroit and Ferndale communities.

He and Raska have devoted a large chunk of their 10,000 square-foot Ferndale location to a “community room” where Yelverton has hosted events as diverse as pancake breakfasts, cocktail hours for event planners and blanket drives for a local AIDS support group. He also is a member of the Detroit Regional Chamber, Michigan Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, the Eight Mile Boulevard Association and the Midwest AIDS Prevention Project.

Yelverton shares his seasoned business advice and award-winning talents with the industry through the AIFD National Symposium, SAF’s Flower Factor blog, regional and state floral trade associations as well as wholesale and retail audiences. He has also designed for two presidential inaugurations. Yelverton took home the 2010 Designer of the Year award from the National Alliance of Floral Associations, an honor that joins his 2006 Designer of the Year victory from the Michigan Floral Association.

A Southern gentleman, Yelverton holds a Masters of Science degree in Ornamental Horticulture from Mississippi State University, but his first teachers were his grandmothers, who shared their love of African violets and planted the seeds for a career that continues to bloom.