

Florist paves way for women in local service organizations

Sheri Trusty 4:07 p.m. EDT March 29, 2015



(Photo: Submitted photo)

FREMONT – When Charlotte Urban first moved to Fremont from Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania, in the 1960s, the city had, she said, a reputation for being unwelcoming to strangers. But that didn't stop her from becoming a part of the fabric of the community and eventually paving the way for women to hold active roles in local service organizations.

"When we first came here, it was common knowledge outsiders were not accepted, but I didn't care. I just pushed my way through and never felt that from anyone," she said. "You have to join things, go to card parties, attend church. I have always felt very, very welcome."

Charlotte and her husband Ed Urban own Otto & Urban Flowers, which they opened in 1962 in what was then their home.

"My husband kept saying that this would be a good place for a flower shop, with all the traffic that goes by," Charlotte said.

Charlotte is a third generation florist. Her father and grandfather were florists in Punxsutawney and her father owned a greenhouse in Fremont before Charlotte and Ed turned their house into a flower shop. They outgrew and added onto the business twice, and their daughter Lynn now manages the shop.

Otto and Urban Flowers has survived decades of economic changes that have forced other local small businesses to close.

"I have a very good staff and we're conservative," she said. "And community involvement has helped."

Charlotte is now semi-retired and is enjoying the opportunity to invest more time into the community organizations that have long been a part of her life. She made local history in a couple of them.

Charlotte was one of the first four females invited to join the local Rotary club, and she served as the group's first female president. She was also the first female president of the chamber of commerce.

Charlotte served about 10 years on the boards of both the School of Hope and the Memorial Hospital Foundation. She is on the Community Advisory Council, which oversees the approval of architectural changes in Fremont's historic district, and she and Ed are former honorary chairpersons of the United Way drive.

She won a Community Service Award for being a part of the town's 1999 sesquicentennial celebration; was awarded Trustee of the Year by the chamber of commerce about five years ago; and was the first Athena Award winner. The Athena Award is a national honor bestowed on women for their contributions to community service.

Charlotte is a longtime Soroptimist member, and it was through that association that she helped establish the Fremont Tree and Beautification Commission in the early 1980s. She is still active in the commission.

The idea for the commission was sparked during a visit back home to Punxsutawney for a high school reunion.

"It's similar to Fremont, and when I was driving through town, I saw all these trees planted in front of stores. They're all over the place now, but that type of thing was new at that time," she said.

She wanted to bring that concept to Fremont, so she suggested it as a Soroptimist project. The idea received unanimous approval and was brought before the city, where it received enthusiastic support from the mayor and the city council.

The group’s success came quickly, earning Fremont the honor of being named a Tree City USA in just a few short years. The city has maintained the distinction ever since, and Charlotte will be attending a Tree City USA recognition event at the Toledo Zoo with a few other commission members next month.

Members of the commission work hard all year long to keep Fremont beautiful. They plant trees and flowers, hang baskets, pull weeds and decorate holidays.

“Our biggest accomplishment has been making the whole city look more attractive. We’ve had a lot of projects and a lot of support from the city and other service groups in town,” Charlotte said. “We’re always looking for fundraising ideas, and we’re always looking for members. We want to be hands-on, so we want as many members as we can get.”

Charlotte welcomes prospective members to attend Fremont Tree and Beautification Commission meetings on the first Tuesday of each month at 6 p.m. at the Fremont Rec Center.

For over half a century, Charlotte has played a part in the history and success of Fremont. To her, community involvement has been a way to enrich her life and the lives of her neighbors.

“It’s been fun. I’ve enjoyed it. I love Fremont and I love the people. I like the geography of the area, with the lake, and I like the historic significance,” she said. “We didn’t have that in Pennsylvania.”

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