

Local

Florist wills estate to A&M

Floral art blooms on campus

By CINDY GEE

Buddy Benz sent flowers to Texas A&M University early this summer when he retired, but his wasn't just any average bouquet. They haven't wilted and are blooming bigger than ever.

Benz, a Texas A&M alumnus and floral design specialist, made flowers his life. In fact, his theories of floral design, world-wide lectures and demonstrations made him famous.

By the time Benz was ready to retire, his estate included a renowned school of floral design which had operated since 1945 and the copy rights and publishing rights to three successful books on floral art. But none of his heirs were interested in taking over the business, Benz decided.

That's when Texas A&M, his alma mater, came into the picture, and became the sole heir of the estate.

The three books are the only ones in the floristry field that have ever been reprinted, and are recognized around the world as the best, florist Jim Johnson said.

Benz chose Johnson, his former student and florist for 14 years, to teach his course at Texas A&M.

Johnson said he felt there is enough training for people entering floristry, so he decided to sell his business in Indiana and move to College Station.

"There's nothing better than working with Aggies," he said, twisting his curly mustache. "They're enthusiastic and they really seem to know where they're going and what they want. They're the fuel of my batteries, that's for sure."

Benz floral design course, a two-week, intensive study from 9 a.m.-5 p.m., teaches students the design and mechanics involved in making flower arrangements.

"It's one thing to know proportion and line and rhythm," Johnson said, "but it's another to know how to anchor those flowers."

Seven students, from California to Louisiana, completed the first class held at Texas A&M in August.

"It's been like money in the bank for me. I learned so much," said one of the students, Joel Baker, who worked at a San Antonio florist shop for six months.

"I didn't know if I would be that good," he said, "and now I do all the designing. It gave me the confidence I needed."

Johnson is a real asset to (the)



Jim Johnson teaches students the finer points of floral arranging in a two-week intensive

course. Johnson's most recent class included students from as far away as California.

school. He got us interested in art. You'll start to see things that you've never noticed before. Even if you don't become a florist, it's worth taking the class just to know Mr. Johnson and let him open your eyes."

The floral designer works with his medium, flowers and plant materials, just like an architect works with concrete, steel and glass, and like a painter works with oil or a clothing designer with silk and wool, Johnson said. The principles are the same no matter what medium is being used.

Johnson teaches flower arranging by making an example in the classroom applying the principles of design. The students then make up their own designs. Eighty percent of the students' time is spent standing at their desk and making arrangements, Johnson said.

"All of the human emotions are expressed through flowers, so a florist needs to know how to deal with people," he said. "What could be more emotional than funerals, weddings, having a baby, getting a promotion or celebrating an anniversary? We talk a lot in our class about dealing with people."

"It's one of the few businesses in the world where you still work with your hands and with people on a one-to-one basis, and where you can be creative and express your managerial talents all at once," he added.

The two-week course is offered through the Office of Continuing Education, but students who would like to take floral arranging for an elective credit can do so on a semester basis.

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