

GOTHAM GIGS



ANDERSON and volunteers salvage flowers the morning after weddings and events.

BUCK ENNIS

CAROLINE ANDERSON

BORN Upper East Side

RESIDES Carroll Gardens, Brooklyn

EDUCATION Bachelor's in art history, Brown University

PEDDLE POWER At the beginning of BloomAgain, when volume was lower, Anderson would deliver the flowers by bike. Now one of her marketing ideas is to decorate others' bikes with the BloomAgain logo to increase the visibility of her no-waste flower mission.

BUDDING RELATIONSHIPS One of BloomAgain's 1,500 volunteers learned about the organization as a recipient. After BloomAgain supplied the flowers for a Mother's Day lunch for victims of domestic violence, the woman found herself so buoyed by the bouquets that she decided to give her time.

Petal to the mettle

An art gallerist finds a social and ecological mission rescuing bouquets

BY CARA EISENPRESS

Caroline Gates Anderson was setting up a pop-up art show at a floral shop in Brooklyn when she fell in love with flowers.

Anderson, who had run an art gallery and been director of photo research at Scholastic, started taking flower-arranging classes at New York Botanical Garden. She was dismayed to realize that beautiful arrangements at stores and events were being tossed into the garbage long before the flowers wilted.

"Waste is a natural phenomenon of the flower industry," she said.

And so, almost as soon as she got hooked on flowers, Anderson set out to save them. Five years later her nonprofit, BloomAgainBklyn, repurposes flowers into about 450 arrangements per week. It delivers them to New Yorkers who could use some joy, such as residents of nursing homes and families in shelter.

"It says to a population that is vulnerable that 'You are important, and you matter,'" she said.

Her mission has attracted donor partnerships with high-end shops, such as Opalia Flowers, Stems Brooklyn and Tin Can Studios, that donate their still-fresh arrangements; retailers, including Trader Joe's, that send their unsold inventory; and event planners, who offer clients the option to donate blossoms the morning after a wedding or a big party.

For big-ticket events, donors cover transportation costs as well as an additional \$450 to \$1,500 contribution to BloomAgain, which has an annual budget of \$154,000.

Together with a partner and her husband, as well as help from New York Cares, Anderson began to build BloomAgain's capacity. It counts 1,500 volunteers, who pick up, arrange and deliver flowers to recipients at institutions including the Cobble Hill Center.

"I can't believe she's offering free delivery of flowers to residents when I know how expensive that can be," said Louise Dueno, the nonprofit health center's director of therapeutic recreation. The 360 residents, Dueno added, say the visits by those bearing the flowers are as welcome as the bouquets.

Anderson keeps finding new ways to serve people. She noticed that arranging flowers was a beneficial activity on its own.

So BloomAgain runs two design and arrangement workshops a month for members of at-risk populations and even corporations, where arranging is a popular activity for employee-volunteer programs.

Right now Anderson is focused on getting the word out to ensure BloomAgain's survival.

"There has to be a nonprofit organization that saves the flowers," she said. "It's a no-brainer to do it, but not a no-brainer to make it work." ■

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