

Backgrounder

Just Beginnings Flowers Society: From behind prison bars to victory bouquets for the 2010 Olympic & Paralympic Winter Games

JUST BEGINNINGS FLOWERS SOCIETY

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OUR STORY

Just Beginnings Flowers (Just Beginnings) is a Canadian registered non-profit society with a mandate to provide floral design training, work experience, and job placement in the floral industry for people with multiple barriers to employment including single parents, women who have experienced violence in their lives, persons returning from prison and those recovering from drug and alcohol abuse

Just Beginnings is both a full-service florist shop and a floral school. We are a social enterprise dedicated to using business profits to:

- create community social benefits that make a difference in the lives of individuals; and
- promote environmental sustainability.

With over 55 years experience, Just Beginnings is committed to providing exceptional design, excellent customer service and good value.

Just Beginnings grew out of "Beginnings," North America's first floral design training program and flower shop in prison, that June Strandberg developed and implemented in the Burnaby Correctional Centre for Women, a maximum security prison located in Burnaby, British Columbia, Canada. The program, called "Beginnings" to signify hope for the inmates, began April 1, 1990 and operated for 14 years, changing the lives of hundreds of women in the British Columbia prison system.

Just Beginnings founder and an award-winning Canadian florist, June Strandberg's love of flowers goes back over 59 years when she began working for her uncle's flower business and greenhouse after school. When the Burnaby Correctional Center closed, Strandberg founded Just Beginnings Flowers to continue her legacy of positive social change through flowers and floral training

Just Beginnings will partner with Margitta's Flowers of North Vancouver, British Columbia to produce the athletes' bouquets for the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games in Vancouver and Whistler.

Just Beginnings is located in Surrey, British Columbia, a suburb of Vancouver.

ABOUT THE FLOWER SHOP

The flower shop has an excellent reputation in the community for quality customer service and products. The target markets are:

- wedding customers who are socially and environmentally conscious; and
- corporate customers who have sustainability goals.

ABOUT THE TRAINING SCHOOL

The floral training program is an intensive six-week course, which exceeds industry standards and is registered with the Private Career Training Institutions Agency (PCTIA). It includes classroom learning plus on-the-job training in the flower shop. Graduates from the program have both a solid grounding in floral design and a good understanding of the retail floral industry, which gives them an advantage in the job market.

In addition to the job training, students find that working with flowers is emotionally healing. This, combined with the life skills coaching they receive, helps student participants to improve their self esteem and self confidence. This, in turn, leads to a high probability that our graduates will be successful in their new employment, of the 12 students trained in 2008-2009, eight are presently employed and two are on maternity leave.

The students come primarily from the Surrey area, however, some have come from Greater Vancouver and Vancouver Island.

Typically, the students are recovering from addiction, newly released from prison, exiting the sex trade, recovering from post traumatic stress disorder and/or are facing other serious challenges to employment.

The training school also offers training to those who are making a career transition because they are no longer able to stay in their usual line of work, they have become unemployed due to economic downturn, layoff or lack of marketable skills.

OUR COMMITMENT

We are a social enterprise dedicated to using business profits to create community social benefits that make a difference in the lives of individuals and promote environmental sustainability.

Environmental Impacts: From inception, Just Beginnings Flowers has been committed to sustainable environmental practices. Some examples are:

- We use only growers who use environmentally safe products and practices.
- We use only environmentally safe products in the store and school.
- We teach the students about using environmentally safe products.
- We use only glass containers and encourage our customers to recycle them.

Social and Economic Impacts: Social and economic impacts of the Just Beginnings Flowers program include

- The graduates develop financially stable lives and therefore no longer place a financial burden on societal systems such as correctional facilities, courts, police, and social assistance.
- The graduates make positive financial contributions to society through payment of income taxes, increased purchasing power and GST & PST payments.
- In some cases, employment and improved self esteem make it possible for women to take care of their children, thus reducing the financial and social costs related to children in the care of the Ministry of Children and Families.

THE VANOC AWARD

In March 2009, VANOC awarded the joint venture partnership of Margitta's Flowers and Just Beginning Flowers the victory bouquet contract for the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games nightly celebration ceremonies in both Whistler and Vancouver. We will assemble and deliver almost 1,700 bouquets for the winning athletes.

Although small entrepreneurs, Just Beginnings Flowers and Margitta's Flowers presented VANOC with years of personal experience and strong connections in the provincial floral industry. They demonstrated a commitment to producing an excellent product in a timely sustainable manner using best practices. Just Beginnings School will hire graduates and students to prepare the bouquets.

"It's like an Olympic medal for our training school clients," says Strandberg -- founder of Just Beginning Flowers Society, a social enterprise located in Surrey, British Columbia. "It will be a phenomenal experience," she says, "the clients need that, and who would have thought we could get that for them."

OUR COMMUNITY PARTNERS & FUNDERS

For the Just Beginnings flower shop:

- **Phoenix Drug & Alcohol Recovery & Education Society:** Just Beginnings is located in the Phoenix Building and since the beginning, the Phoenix Society -- for drug and alcohol recovery and education -- has demonstrated a strong commitment to the success of the social enterprise. The board and senior management of Phoenix believe that the flower shop creates a positive ambience at the entrance to their building which benefits the Phoenix residents and students.
- **Vancity and the Vancity Community Foundation:** a public foundation that gives grants to charitable organizations, with a particular focus on affordable housing and homelessness, community asset building and non-profit social enterprise. The flower

shop receives funding, support and mentoring through the expertise of the Vancity Foundation staff.

- **City of Surrey:** Just Beginnings received a grant that enabled the purchase of a reconditioned refrigeration unit for flower storage in the store.
- **Enterprising Non Profits:** an organization that provides grants and resources to non-profits organizations for technical assistance along the entire business development path. Just Beginnings received funding to hire a marketing consultant to conduct market research and prepare a marketing strategy.

For the Just Beginnings training program:

- **The Cooperators :** an insurance and financial services agency - Just Beginnings would not have been able to launch the training program without the assistance of a grant from the Cooperators.
- **Status of Women Canada:** A federal government department that provides funding for job readiness programs. Just Beginnings was recently granted funding for the creation of a life skills program for trainees in the program.
- **Coast Capital Savings:** a credit union with strong commitments to community, provided Just Beginnings with the seed money to start a bursary fund.
- **Soroptimist International Surrey/Delta:** A volunteer service organization that works to improve the lives of women and girls – provided funding for bursaries to support students
- Several **other local businesses and associations** have contributed funding and resources.