



MAGAZINE

- Current Issue
- Past Issues
- News Archives
- Web Exclusives
- Videos

MARKETPLACE

- Classifieds
- New Products
- Florist Books
- Job Board

RESOURCES

- Buyers Guide
- E-Newsletter
- Links
- Sitemap

COMMUNITY

- Blog
- Events
- Photo Gallery
- Send us your photos
- Florist Business Forum



Top Shops: A Floral Family Affair

Westmount Florist's plan for success, and succession, is best expressed by one word – family.

Written by [Colleen Cross](#)

A good hockey player plays where the puck is," Wayne Gretzky once famously remarked. "A great hockey player plays where the puck is going to be." If this is true, Westmount Florist is one of the Great Ones.



Family is Westmount Florist's biggest asset. Front row, from left are Lauren, Christine, Dora, Brent and Stephen Pickrell; in the back row are Peter Pickrell, Danny Lourenco and David Pickrell.

Siblings Peter, David, Stephen and Christine Pickrell and cousin Danny Lourenco together run the family business.

Christine Pickrell and brother Stephen, along with Brent and Lauren, third-generation Pickrells, recently gathered at the florist's downtown store in well-heeled Westmount in Montreal to share some secrets of their success with Canadian Florist. Christine was keen to have the younger Pickrells in on the interview, hinting at the importance of family (and future) to the venerable Montreal business.

The four agree that one word, "family," sums up their business's values and its edge. The name Pickrell is Westmount Florist's most important asset, and that is the legacy of George Pickrell, founder of the business and father of Peter, David, Stephen and Christine.

"He was walking through the conservatory at McGill University and saw a guy growing carnations, and then he was walking a little bit later that day on St. Catherine Street and saw a guy selling a carnation for five cents, and he thought, 'Wow, that's a profitable business.'" George worked for McKenna's for many years, for Pinkerton's, another well-known Montreal family florist, then for Eunice Denby's in Toronto, explains Christine. He then returned to Montreal to manage McKenna's in Cote-des-Neiges. With wife Dora, their four kids under the age of 10, Denby's encouragement, and about \$500 in the bank, he went out on his own in 1962. Dora helped him in the office of that first shop on St. Catherine Street West near the old Montreal Forum, where early patrons included such hockey greats as Jean Beliveau and Henri Richard.

George relocated the store to its current location off Sherbrooke Street at 360 Victoria Ave. in 1976. In 1981, he opened a store in

[in](#) Share [f](#) Like 47 [t](#) Follow 593 followers

[print](#) [email](#) [pdf](#)
text size **A A A A**

RELATED ARTICLES

- Top Shops: Winnipeg's Floral Fixx**
by Brandi Cowen | 01/14/2013
- Top Shops: A Bite Out of the Competition**
by Brandi Cowen | 11/02/2012
- Top Shops: New Business Model Blooms**
by Brandi Cowen | 09/24/2012
- Top Shops: Eco-chic at Sweetpea's**
by Brandi Cowen | 06/08/2012
- Top Shops: Dean's Grows Over Decades**
by Brandi Cowen | 04/24/2012

the heart of Pointe-Claire Village on Montreal's West Island, then in 2001 moved the West Island shop to the edge of the village on Lakeshore Road into an attractive heritage building.

When George retired, he left two thriving, and distinct, stores in the hands of his children.

They run the business in an enthusiastic team effort, respecting what they see as a natural division of labour. "Each of us kind of fell into our department," says Christine. Peter and David, the eldest two, joined the business at a young age after college and travel. Peter and Danny run the store in Pointe-Claire. David does the purchasing of perishables for the Westmount store and oversees the day-to-day design.

Stephen and Christine were older when they joined the business, having already worked in other industries. "We were given a lot of responsibility early on, perhaps for that reason," she suggests. Stephen handles accounting and payroll functions and all other office-related tasks, and Christine is in charge of managing the front store, maintaining the website, purchasing giftware, creating speciality designs and overseeing jobs such as weddings and bar mitzvahs. How were these roles decided? Christine chuckles over the story of duelling bouquets: "Our dad put some flowers on the counter, and told each of us to create a bouquet. He looked at the arrangements and said, 'OK, Steve, you're up in the office, and Christine, you're in design.'"

The downtown store (also the company's head office) caters to an affluent neighbourhood encompassing a large Jewish community, and embraces a traditional, even European, esthetic. A half-million-dollar renovation in 1988, prompted by a customer's suggestion that they cater to that community by updating their look, tripled their storefront area and doubled their sales the following year.

Pointe-Claire attracts a lot of younger customers who have children, and tends toward a more rustic, country style. Customer responses to recent do-it-yourself workshops held at the two stores illustrate the difference in clientele. At the West Island store, the workshops filled up with customers keen to learn to create arrangements in order to save money; at the downtown store, customers questioned the need to learn when they could simply have talented staff create them.

The staff consists of 22 employees, including designers, office, drivers and front store staff, who work downtown, and 11 more, including Peter and cousin Danny at the West Island store. Only one employee, Peter's daughter Lauren, floats between locations.

Generation Next

Lauren and cousin Brent are being groomed to carry on the family business. Lauren, who has been with Westmount for more than eight years, recently returned from Australia to concentrate on the business. Brent, who joined three years ago, currently assists with marketing one day a week while studying at the John Molson School of Business.



The West Island store has a more laid back atmosphere.

At a Glance

Company name:

Westmount Florist

Location:

Montreal

Owners:

Peter, David, Stephen and Christine Pickrell and Danny Lourencon

Years in business:

50

Website:

www.westmount-florist.com

"Brent and Lauren showed an interest in the business, so we are training them to take over. I'm trying to train Lauren to be the 'mini-me' and Brent is going to be the 'mini-Steve,' says Christine, prompting laughs all around. "Now we just need someone to take over Dave's job, to do the purchasing."

Brent and Lauren are in charge of Westmount Florist's Facebook page, and they are bubbling with ideas and enthusiasm about the potential of this social media tool.

They gathered information, consulted their web guru about Google Analytics and did copious research before launching in early 2011. "It's a little hectic that first year, but once you have your stuff together, it gets easier," notes Brent.

"It's really important to have good content and photos," says Lauren. They update the site three or four times a week and blog judiciously, so as not to bombard people with posts. "We blog once a week, like clockwork, every Thursday or Friday . . . and promote it on Facebook and Twitter," she adds.

Brent and Lauren see videos as a promising area of focus after noticing a recent link to their YouTube video on how to pin on a corsage garnered more than 7,000 views.

Social media is only one of many promotional avenues the business has explored over the years. Although word of mouth has always kept customers coming, the Pickrells do not take their customers for granted. One of their most successful promotions is the Bell Centre Flower Play, in which a lucky Montreal Canadiens fan receives flowers each time the team scores three or more goals during a game. Another venture targeted new homeowners: they delivered bouquets to real estate agents, asked the agents to send their clients who had recently purchased a home a gift, which came from both the agent and Westmount Florist, then split any sales with the agent.

They like to get a jump on the trends, too. "We want to be the first to do everything," says Christine, who spends many hours online researching trends, and goes, or sends a representative to, gift shows in Toronto and New York. She has noticed recently a strong trend toward loose, natural looking arrangements, which include natural materials such as birch, rather than structured pieces.

Invoking a European style, popular among the downtown clients especially, the florist sells many hand-tied cut flower bouquets. "We do more cut flowers than actual arrangements," says Christine.

Strict Partnership Agreement

Keeping Westmount Florist in the family is very important to the Pickrells. The business was always there, says Christine, if younger family members wanted to come back to it. "Nobody was ever pushed into it," she says. "That was a big thing in our family."



The downtown store caters to one of Canada's most affluent neighbourhoods.

When George was alive, they hired lawyers, accountants and notaries to help draw up a partnership agreement that details, among other things, the legal ramifications of selling the business, who can and cannot buy it, what happens to shares when one of the partners leaves the business, and steps to be taken if something happens to one of the partners. "It is very strict,"

says Christine. "It stipulates who can come in and who can't."

Ownership in the business begins when family members are given shares; at that point they become partners and are written into the agreement.

"As partners, we're putting our energy into Brent and Lauren right now, who are the ones that so far want to take over the business," says Christine. "Family is the most important thing, and to have Lauren and Brent coming in lets us know George's legacy will continue, which is so so important to our family."

As for future plans, they intend to grow their customized e-commerce website, which is paying off as a sales and marketing tool. They also plan to step up their eco-friendliness by improving their already robust recycling and composting program – at present each designer uses a personal compost bin and a recycling truck leaves the stores every second day full of cardboard boxes and every recyclable material possible.

They also hope to open a third store in 2014, details of which are top secret.

In their more immediate future is Christmas. Ordering started in May, and outdoor work, including creation of their very popular decorative urns, will start at the beginning of November. Their in-house photographer Nick will take pictures in their studio that same month, a forward-thinking process that began when they built their website and continues to provide a stunning portfolio for promotional use. The balance of the decorating is normally finished by mid-November, although it may be pushed up a bit this year due to an important milestone.

This Christmas season marks the Pickrells' 50th anniversary. "We'll do something big," Christine assures. "Because the official date is Dec. 2, we'll celebrate the whole month leading up to Christmas."

Now that's something to look forward to.

[\[Back \]](#)

Advertisers: [Contact Us](#) | [Advertise](#) | [Post a Job](#) | [Post an Event](#) | [Send us your photos](#) |

[Privacy Policy](#) - [Terms & Conditions](#)

Readers: [Contact Us](#) | [Subscriber Centre](#) | [e-newsletter](#) | [Post an Event](#) | [Comment](#) | [Return & Cancellation Policies](#) | [Digital Magazine](#)



© 2007-2013 Annex Business Media. All rights reserved.