

Arrangements With a Gifted Touch

Mary Jean Stuckey Holt's
Keen Floral Eye



Article by Eleanor Winn Foxworth ❖ Photos by Michaele Duke

When the subject of flower arranging emerges in Williamsburg County, one name readily comes to the fore: Mary Jean Stuckey Holt of Kingstree. Her name highlights any floral list not only in Williamsburg County but in Charleston, Sumter and Lake

City. Now a grandmother, Holt has been arranging flowers since she was a teenager in Indiantown. Camellias, azaleas and other local blooms were fodder for her earliest creations, she recalls, “even those growing on ditch banks.” She’s retained that sharp eye for beauty in unexpected places and will stop her car at roadside to gather wildflowers. Chances are they’ll be combined with elegant orchids for a surprising bouquet.

“I have always loved arranging flowers and having pretty ones in the house,” she explains, adding that Dutch irises, roses and hydrangeas—in pink, blue and yellow—are her favorites for arrangements.

A number of her designs involve white roses, azaleas and bells of Ireland, which were used in a recent wedding in the historic Williamsburg Presbyterian Church in Kingstree. She likewise is commissioned for wedding bouquets, corsages and receptions. Although she gets most of her flowers from wholesale florists, she also uses those from her yard. The reason? She is most conscious of using someone else’s money, so she makes sure every stem she buys is necessary.

It takes three days to prepare for a wedding. For a Saturday wedding, flowers arrive Thursday. “I cut the stems, then place the flowers in water. Then on Friday and Saturday I begin to make arrangements for the bride and corsages and bouquets.” Recently she ordered flowers to be flown in from Holland. They included white and soft pink peonies.

Holt, who took courses in floral arranging at Williamsburg Technical College in the 1970s, is known for her “airy, not-so-packed” arrangements. She’s also known to share her talents for free. She provides arrange-



ments for church services and for those who need an arrangement but cannot pay. She does a lot of her work for charity—indeed, “for anybody who asks.”

“I don’t know that there is anyone quite like Mary Jean,” says Glenda Shuler, noting that Holt arranged the flowers for her daughter Liza’s wedding and will for her son Jonathan’s. “She has a rare combination of talent, boundless energy and thoughtfulness. When these are combined, there is nothing she cannot do. And all is done with such a willing spirit.”

Holt and her husband Carroll have owned and managed Holt’s Jewelry and China in Kingstree for about 35 years and, until recently, a similar store in Lake City. After so long in these communities, it isn’t surprising they’re entrenched in commerce, church and family. The Holts in March received the Merchant of the Year award from the Williamsburg Hometown Chamber. Mary Jean, an active deacon at Williamsburg Presbyterian Church, also was honored recently as Outstanding Woman in the congregation. Her flowers in the sanctuary, narthex and assembly room are testaments to her abiding devotion for bringing natural beauty inside.

But she’s ever modest. “People are so kind,” she says happily. “They say such nice things about my arrangements.” ❖

Eleanor Winn Foxworth, 88, is the author of South Carolina’s Williamsburg and other histories. She lives in Kingstree. Greeleyville resident Michael Duke is a photographer for The News in Kingstree.