

THE POWER OF PINK

Getting hundreds of people into the garden center while supporting a good cause seems like a win-win. Here are three snapshots of successful campaigns inspired by Spring Meadow Nursery's Pink Days/Invincibelle Spirit hydrangea campaign. Each garden center makes the fundraisers their own, getting people excited about everything from hanging baskets to paintings throughout the year.

Pink Days in Bloom, Newfoundland, Canada

It's rare that we take a trip across the border, but Pink Days in Bloom has become a mainstay on the small Canadian island of Newfoundland, thanks to avid gardener Linda Ryan.

"I was looking through gardening magazines and came across the ad for Invincibelle Spirit hydrangea and thought I would try to seek the plant out," Ryan says. "I tried a few garden centers here, and they didn't have them. Then I went to a garden center about 20 minutes outside of the city, Pat's Plants and Gardens, and Pat Puddester is the owner, and she had a ton of them."

Ryan worked with Pat's Plants and Gardens to have the first local plant sale to raise money for the Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation (CBCF), and it quickly expanded.

"That first plant sale we raised \$2,300 in 2011, and the following year I approached a bunch of other garden centers," Ryan says. "Everyone signed on and we raised \$25,000 in the second year."

Since inception, Pink Days in Bloom events have raised more than \$100,000.

YEAR-ROUND IDEAS

Last year, there were 17 different Pink Days in Bloom events that expanded beyond the growing season.

"We have a very short growing season here in Newfoundland; it's only from June to the end of August really," Ryan says. "We've gone beyond that now and extended the Pink Days in Bloom season as we call it even beyond the growing season right up until the end of December."

Last year a garden center launched Pink Poinsettia Days in Bloom to continue fundraising around the holidays, while other garden centers and nurseries joined in on the Pink Tree Project, donating a portion of all pink flowering trees they sell to CBCF.

One upcoming event for Mother's Day this year is a partnership with a local florist to be called Pink Rose Days in Bloom, where they'll donate a percentage of pink variety sales to the cause.

The ideas are endless, according to Ryan.

"I pitch my ideas, and I'm always brainstorming things," Ryan says. "They register their events



through the Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation here in the Atlantic region, and I work with them to work out the details and promote it."

SPANNING INDUSTRIES

The roots of Pink Days in Bloom are in the garden center industry, but other businesses in the community have jumped on board as well.

"In Pat's community [Pat's Plants and Gardens], four retailers cooperate and the whole community gets involved on what's called Pink



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Weekend," Ryan says. "In addition to Pat's Plants hosting, we have her neighbor right next door which is a gift shop, and we have a boat tour just down the road, and a restaurant just down the road. They give a percentage of their sales for that day for the cause."

Pink Days in Bloom "The Little Christmas Fair" brings together more than two dozen artisans and performers, one garden center selling Christmas arrangements, and Christmas Wreaths for the Cure with fresh balsam fir wreaths. This event alone draws more than 800 people in six hours, according to Ryan.

MUTUAL BENEFITS

"Pink Days in Bloom is a really fulfilling way to support the breast cancer community, and it's about raising awareness about breast cancer," Ryan says, "But it's also important in raising awareness about the garden center industry, a wonderful way to encourage healthy, beautiful living through gardening."

Businesses have also used the events as a way to engage employees and contribute to the overall customer experience.

"It gives the employees a satisfaction that it offers them an opportunity to go beyond their everyday job duties," Ryan says. "If you can eavesdrop on some of the conversation during these events people are really connecting, and I think this helps make a lasting impression on the customers and the employees."



One of the biggest changes of heart from Pink Days in Bloom was with one of the starters of it all, Pat Puddester.

"I get goosebumps because I remember this conversation with Pat so well," Ryan says. "She had her garden center up on the market for a couple months, and as soon as the first person walked in the door for Pink Days in Bloom, she said it wasn't for sale anymore."

Pink Day Planning

Since the start of the Pink Days/Invincibelle Spirit campaign in 2010, more than \$903,000 has been donated to breast cancer research, according to Mark Osgerby, PR and marketing specialist for Spring Meadow Nursery.

This includes \$1 donated from every Invincibelle Spirit pink hydrangea sold as well as Pink Day events.

ProvenWinners ColorChoice Shrubs provides a Pink Day Planning Guide for any retailer or grower looking to get involved. Find answers to initial questions and inspiration from participating business in this go-to resource available at www.invincibellespirit.net.

MARKETING

Moneta Farm & Home Center, Moneta, Virginia

For Moneta Farm & Home Center's Pink Day it's all about bringing together the small community of Moneta, Virginia, with surrounding areas for a good cause.

"One of the employees that works here was diagnosed with breast cancer, and she recovered from it, thankfully, so we wanted to do something to honor her and to raise awareness," says nursery manager Darlene Hensley. "That's how it all began."

DECIDING ON A TIME

Five years later, and Pink Day continues to look about the same. It has raised more than \$30,000 since its inception, about \$6,000 per year, for the Breast Cancer Research Foundation.

"There's not a whole lot that we do different honestly," Hensley says. "We have people come in at the beginning of spring, and they ask us if we'll do our Pink Day again."

The fundraising begins in April when cashiers start asking customers if they would like to donate a dollar to breast cancer research. It then culminates with an all-day event in May.

"I know most of the time breast cancer functions are in October because that's the breast cancer awareness month, but we decided we'd rather have ours in the month of May,"

Hensley says. "That's our busy season, and we knew we could attract a lot of people at that time."

The event attracts more than 500 people throughout the day.

"We overflow the parking lot to where we have to park people in the field and ride them up there in golf carts," Hensley says. "And it's a really big parking lot."

SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

The Moneta Farm & Home Center staff decorates everything in pink, and the local church does a bake sale and barbecue to contribute to the fundraising.

Pink Day is free to attend, and then many people buy raffle tickets. The raffle includes things donated from other local business, like a furniture company or an employee who crafts handmade tables.

"We also get in hundreds of pink hanging baskets, and for every basket that we sell, we contribute \$5 toward Pink Day," Hensley says.

Hensley and her team do a lot of advertising for the event including social media, three area newspapers and an appearance on the local television show, Living in the Heart of Virginia.



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With everything going on during the day, it's clear that Moneta Farm & Home Center keeps the cause at the forefront.

"There's a lot of women that have had breast cancer or are going through breast cancer, and we love for them to tell their stories," Hensley says.

"We just like to have a crowd come out because the more people who come out the more people are aware of the problem that we're having and how we're trying to fix it."

GreenScapes Garden Center & Landscape Co., Whitesboro, New York

At GreenScapes Garden Center & Landscape Co., the annual breast cancer research fundraiser has evolved over the years.

For the past four years, the event has taken place around the first weekend of October, with a VIPink Night kickoff on Friday and other festivities Saturday and Sunday.

"When we did it the first year, it was the weekend after Memorial Day, but we're still getting trucks in and people are still gung-ho about spring," says Mollie Wadsworth,



marketing manager at GreenScapes. "So October gets people in here when maybe we're not quite as busy, and we could use a few more sales."

THE PARTY

"On Friday night, we clear all the benches out of our greenhouse, and set up some tables," Wadsworth says. "I had a winery, a brewery and a distillery come in and offer samples. Then we had a whole bunch of food donated from a local pizzeria, we had a band play, and we got the lights going."



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More than 100 people attended VIPink Night last year, some familiar faces and some not-so-familiar ones.

"Last year and the year before we had a lot of people that I've never seen before, but they came and maybe we saw them the next week or month shopping in the garden center," Wadsworth says. "We definitely want to drive people to the garden center."

Wadsworth uses primarily social media to promote the event, since this allows people to quickly RSVP and buy tickets all online.

Community partnerships are also key to the success of the event. Many local businesses donate baskets for a raffle.

"You could spend the 25 bucks to eat and drink and just have a good time, but everyone seems to buy at least \$10 or \$15 worth of raffle tickets on top of that," Wadsworth says. "All the baskets and food and drink samples are donated, so it works really well for our fundraising total."

One of the donations Wadsworth says she really appreciated last year was that of photography.

"We had three photographers volunteer to take pictures of the whole event, and they sent me all their pictures and said I could use them however I want," she says. "I didn't have to worry about trying to get photos, and we have really good documentation from three different points of view."

KEEPING IT FRESH

Each year GreenScapes does a little something different. Last year, Wadsworth had the owner of a local company, Arts & Carafes, join in on the fun.



"We had tables set up with easels, and he did a step-by-step painting," Wadsworth says. "We had 28 people, and we painted pink hydrangeas and sampled wine from a local winery."

A new patio display area in the garden center also acted as the perfect location for another new event feature: a bonfire.

Throughout the weekend, GreenScapes continues the raffle and puts everything pink on sale.

"We have a lot of people that are just coming in to shop, and maybe didn't know anything about it and buy raffle tickets," Wadsworth says. "Or we have people coming in to get raffle tickets and end up shopping, which is the end goal."

GreenScapes donates all of the proceeds from the event and, inspired by local breast cancer survivors, has decided to make a local and national impact.

"We've split [money raised] between BCRF [Breast Cancer Research Foundation], a local cancer center, and last year and the year before we donated some money to a friend that had cancer," Wadsworth says. "What we're going to try to do each year is pick a local family or a person that's affected by it, and just try to give them a little something extra." **LGR**

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