

Norrie's Gift & Garden Shop Celebrates Its 25th Anniversary

The history of this amazing enterprise, including details on the dedicated "Dried Flower Ladies" is summarized below.



Jean Beevers

What eventually lead to the creation of Norrie's Gift & Garden Shop were the entrepreneurial adventures of Jean Beevers, a trained botanist and enthusiastic supporter of the Arboretum. She came to UCSC with her husband, Harry, when in 1969 he was hired as a professor of biology and is known as one of the leading plant physiologists of the 20th century. To popularize Arboretum flora, Beevers gathered dried *Leucadendron* cones, *Protea* and *Leucospermum* flowers to sell at florist and craft shops. She soon teamed up with Shirley Beneke, a retired florist, and they, along with several other women, became the "Dried Flower Ladies." For several years, the group created wreaths and other plant-inspired gifts to sell at local venues. After a while, they organized dry flower workshops to supply the annual Wreath and Gift Sale held each November at the Arboretum-- these workshops are still thriving today.

In January 1990, Dean McHenry, founding Chancellor of UCSC, suggested the possibility of a portable building to house a gift shop. The initial funding of \$10,000 came from Elspeth Bobbs, an ardent supporter of all things botanical. She became an enthusiastic about the Arboretum after her cousin, a member of the Native Plant Society, described the wonders of the place and she heard an inspiring speech by then Arboretum Director Ray Collett.



Elspeth Bobbs

With their experience in selling dry flower items, Beevers and other ladies of the group offered design ideas for the gift shop's floor plan and stock of merchandise; they also worked out budget details that enabled them to launch the shop as a "start-up" business. Their vision included the bottom-up management style that, though experts say doesn't often work, is very successful to this day, thanks to Norrie's dedicated volunteers.

In 1992, the University announced cutbacks in funding for the Arboretum, so making a revenue-producing gift shop became imperative. A second gift was donated by Elspeth Bobbs and, to honor her generosity, the shop was named after her eldest daughter, Norrie, who died in a tragic automobile accident. The *Winter 1993 Arboretum Bulletin* published the first request for volunteers to staff Norrie's Gift Shop. The buying team was given a third gift of \$5,000 from Elspeth Bobbs for outfitting the store. Local artists contributed as well. Russ Rogers, a furniture maker, kindly donated his time and talent to design and create the beautiful sales counter, and artists in the area were contacted about selling their work on consignment. Soon watercolor paintings, intricate woodcarvings, and hand-painted shirts filled the space. The shop focus was always on nature-related items—from jewelry, pottery, and kitchen items to cards, gardening books, and plants grown at the Arboretum.



Though the outdoor areas of Norrie's Gift & Garden Shop have been redesigned over the years, the building itself remains virtually the same as when it officially opened May 1, 1994, in time for Mothers Day. Then the front of the shop showcased arrangements of *Protea*, *Leucodendron*, *Leucospermum*, and *Banksia*, and, after local newspapers covered the event, the number of visitors increased. The following year *Sunset Magazine* designated Norrie's as a great place to shop for nature-related gifts "away from the madding crowds."

In late 1999, a grant from the David and Lucile Packard Foundation enabled the Arboretum to hire a consultant on museum and botanical garden shops, but, unexpectedly, the primary recommendation—to hire a store manager—resulted in lower profits and fewer volunteers. Norrie's quickly returned to the all-volunteer model and revenues improved. In 2006, *Sunset Magazine* again promoted Norrie's by listing it as one of "5 great stores for Creative gifts" throughout the west coast.



In 2019, Norrie's outdoor area was extensively remodeled and secured to house plants now for sale year-round. The October 12 grand reopening showcased the large selection of a variety of plants supplied weekly by the Arboretum's nursery: Australian, California Natives, New Zealand, Salvias, South African, Succulents, and plants from many other regions. You'll also find decorative items, including garden art, dish gardens, and hand-crafted wreaths. A list of plants available, updated monthly, is on the Arboretum's webpage (www.arboretum.ucsc.edu). The Arboretum greatly appreciates and thanks the dedicated volunteers and loyal customers who have made Norrie's a successful and wonderful place to shop.