

# D. Jay's Flowers & Gifts



Owner: Donna Jay  
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**D**onna Jay is a busy woman. She and her husband, Lance, have eight children and are always at school for one sports event or another. Donna is also finishing her last semester of college and works as a Program Director for Turtle Mountain Tribal Employment and Training. Though free time was limited, she decided to take a risk and open her own business.

"A few months before I decided to open the flower shop, my sister died unexpectedly at the age of 30. I believe her death made me realize life is too short not to go for your dreams."

Donna had always wanted to own a business. While in college, she took an entrepreneurship class and did a business plan. She chose a flower shop for her project because of her interest in flower arranging. She says, "My mother taught me flower arranging and it's always been a hobby of mine." But Jay still needed help to make her plan a become reality, so she went to the bank prior to submitting the loan package. Then she turned to Betty Hamley, who runs the satellite center of the state Small Business Development Center in Belcourt. "She helped me complete my business plan so my husband and I could take it to the bank."

Jay, who is originally from Rolla, knew she had competition because there is another flower shop in town, two doors down! She says, "The feasibility study I did showed that Rolette County has a population that is large enough for two flower shops. Having the store located in the middle of Main Street with huge windows to display our products is perfect. And customers like to compare quality, variety and pricing."

Donna Jay says a lot of her ideas came from her mentor, Nancy Larson, owner of The Flower Box in Minot. "She really took us under her wing and provided technical assistance to our entire staff. Without Nancy and her staff, D. Jay's wouldn't be what it is today."

Her favorite feature in the store is the gazebo and bistro table by the window where families can do their floral planning for all occasions while enjoying a cup of coffee. Jay does everything she can to offer something unique, like incorporating personal items into floral arrangements.

Donna and her husband are also contemplating opening another, totally different business in Rolla and possibly a second, smaller floral shop in Belcourt. For now, she won't quit her day job as program director. Her husband is employed as a medical technician at a lab, so they hired a couple of staff people, and Donna and Lance work at D. Jay's after their regular jobs, holidays and weekends. In the year since they opened, the store has done well, drawing many customers a day from Rolla, Belcourt, Rock Lake, Dunseith, Rolette, St. John's, and Cando. Still, it is a challenge with their busy family and professional lives.

"I want to be a positive role model for my children. People look at you differently and see someone who will accept the challenge and risk of owning a business to make the community a better place. It's really not difficult to start a business; it just takes a lot of determination and help from family and friends!"

**CONTACT: Betty Hamley & Bandy Poitra, SBDC, Box 900, Highway 5 W, Belcourt, ND 58316, 701-477-2607, hamleyb@utma.com, www.ndsbdc.org..**