

The Gazette

This bud's for you: Retired florist offers seniors free flowers

August 16, 1985

When florist John Cornfield, 91, retired from his Notre Dame de Grace flower shop four years ago, he decided to turn over a new leaf.

Now, instead of selling flowers, he gives them away to senior citizens.

"It makes people happy," says Cornfield, who turns 92 on Sunday.

Every morning a large box containing 300 to 400 flowers, worth up to \$300, is delivered to his MacDonald Ave. apartment. Cornfield sorts them out, places them in a basket, gets in his car and drives to the Golden Age Association on Westbury Ave. in Snowdon.

He arrives around 10:30 a.m. and grabs a table in cafeteria. He then spreads the flowers out, and hands them to members. By noon, the carnations or roses are gone.

The seniors "appreciate it. They give me good wishes," he says.

Cornfield also makes weekly flower excursions to brighten the lives of Cote St. Luc seniors at King David Residence, Maimonides Hospital Geriatric Centre, and the Aristocrat Residential Apartment.

"One hundred and twenty years he should live. He's such a nice man," says Lena Albins, receiving her daily supply of carnations.

"It's beautiful and I love it," says Ethel Nuzbaum, who is "65 plus."

"He puts a smile on their faces," says social worker Vivian Reisler.

Cornfield's daily excursions help give people a sense of self-worth, Reisler says.

"It's marvellous what he does for the seniors here. He doesn't realize it," says bookkeeper Marjy Reisler.

The flowers are provided by Cornfield's sons. Son Al operates a flower shop in Town of Mount Royal, while son Ben runs a wholesale flower business in Dollard des Ormeaux.

"The least we can do is supply him with flowers," said Al Cornfield. "We don't look at the cost."

The elder Cornfield was so attached to his shop which operated for almost 60 years before he retired that a 1981 trip to Florida was his first holiday in 52 years.

Rose Feldman, who's "old enough," brings the flowers home every day and puts them in a vase. The flowers are greatly appreciated by seniors who live alone, she says.

But some people have begun to take them for granted, Cornfield says.

When the flowers aren't trimmed they say: "What's the matter? No trimming?" And others, used to getting two or three flowers, complain when they only get one.

Cornfield says he rarely gives flowers to men.

If men who've never brought flowers to their wives finally bring some home, their wives might think something strange is going on, he says.