

## Guest Column: The Faces of Hospitality

Most of us who live here start as visitors but then are captivated by the Islands' magic, inspired to create an island life. This series of columns will help put faces to small businesses – restaurateurs, innkeepers, shopkeepers, artists, tour captains, and other entrepreneurs who make our communities so unique and vibrant.

Carol Wetzel never intended to start a farm, but when she and husband Allan looked out to the bay over their fallow hay field, they knew they could do better and pretty much immediately dug in to grow the Little Farm on Olga Road. Plus, Carol pointed out, since their location brings so many people right by the farm, why not create a space for locals and visitors alike to share the beauty of flowers? “Our focus is making amazing products and growing the most beautiful flowers we possibly can for picking, enjoying, and to provide backyard flower farmers with bee friendly plants to plant in their gardens; plants grown with great passion and love right here on the Little Farm.”

Carole's favorite part of living in the San Juans is that every store and restaurant is original and a local owns and operates it, with great passion and hope. She loves the talented people who inhabit these islands year-round, choosing an alternative lifestyle to express their talents. In addition, she says, “I love visiting with tourists and seeing them year after year when they visit our farm. Sharing what we are doing, why we are doing it, how we are learning and getting better at flower farming with each year and giving joy to others. That is the greatest pleasure, handing over a bouquet or providing the experience of cutting flowers and making bouquets or sharing a lovely homemade bar of soap. It's all about joy here, a lovely reprieve in a nutty world.”

### *How does tourism benefit the Islands?*

Carol says, “Tourism is absolutely the life blood of this island. Without it, we would have few restaurants, cute stores, or art studios. Visitors bring our island diversity in thought and world experience. I just love the ladies who work so hard at the Visitors Bureau to spread the word about all that our islands have to offer visitors. The Visitors Bureau is critical to getting the word out about what to do and enjoy on our islands.”

Starting a farm at 60 has been physically challenging for Carol, but she loves a project. “I travel around my farm noticing and paying attention to every inch of my soil, every bug on a plant, every bird that flits by, and every weed that needs to get gone. The Little Farm is a huge world to discover and learn from, instilling humility and joy in all that I am. Very Emersonian philosophy here.” The work might be literally work for Carol, mangling her fingernails as she weeds, but she finds inspiration in hopeful, smiling people. Something

she can find plenty of in our island communities. Hope is what helps us navigate uncharted waters and will get us through again.

Read this and other Faces of Hospitality here: [www.visitsanjuans.com/member-resources](http://www.visitsanjuans.com/member-resources)