

Martha's Vineyard business brings joy to people — one rose at a time.

Morrice Florist launches The Kindness Project

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Emily Coulter decided the world needed more kindness. And roses wouldn't be a bad place to start. — Susan Safford

Emily Coulter at just 33 is seldom without a bright smile and a welcoming, easygoing manner no matter how busy she may be. With a happy family including her husband, Ben, and two little girls at home and both sets of parents nearby, one might guess she hasn't a care in the world.

But with the responsibility of running the busy Morrice Florist business she purchased in 2014, juggling work and family, and seeing her mom through a recent health challenge, Emily is well aware that every life can have its ups and downs.

Then came this summer with extreme heat and drought, heavy traffic and jarring accidents, politics filled with sound and fury, and news of terrifying violence around the country and globe. Little wonder that she finds herself tossing and turning some nights, despite her naturally sunny outlook.

That was when she hatched the idea for The Kindness Project, using roses to bring some joy and reassurance to people, and to remind them that the world is good, not really the heartless and scary place it can sometimes seem to be.



Polly Simpkins was one of the early adopters, buying a rose to give away.

“I really just thought in the middle of the night that it would be nice for us to give back to the community, to bring people love and kindness,” Emily said.

The State Road, Vineyard Haven, shop is an oasis of cool serenity, delicate aromas, charming gifts, and exuberant blooms. Front and center are dozens of roses — traditional red, pink, yellow, pristine white, even lavender.

We chatted in the sun-dappled greenhouse at one end of the building, a cool, woody world of its own with a high glass ceiling and lush houseplants all around. Emily outlined her concept, a wonderfully sweet and simple one. The shop would offer a free rose to anyone who would give it away to bring a little joy to someone else. Her staff members loved the idea and quickly got behind it. One helped her come up with the name – The Kindness Project.

Emily ordered extra roses and launched the heartfelt giveaway in mid-July. The staff got the word out through newspaper listings, social media, telling customers and everyone they knew. They posted a sign out front, inviting the First Family to “Come in and learn about our Kindness Project.”

Emily encourages participants to consider carefully when choosing a recipient.

“Think of someone who could use a pick-me-up, someone going through something, someone who had a really bad day. Or it could be a friend that had a horrible night waitressing.”

A rose may be given to any loved one, a favorite family member, a close work pal, or to someone as a warm gesture of appreciation and gratitude, she added. And that college girl behind the counter who serves your coffee every morning or the mechanic changing your flat tire could be perfect choices.

Emily is especially hopeful that some people will take a rose and present it to a perfect stranger, like the woman who visits Tulip Tuesdays, buys a bunch for herself and another for a stranger.

“It could be anyone. You could come in and get a rose and walk down the street until you find the right person to hand it to.”

Emily devised a characteristically creative way to keep track. She cut little squares of paper, painted them dreamy pastel tones, and stacked them on the counter for those who take roses to record their names. Later, she’ll string the names together and hang them.

“It’s a way to have something to show for what we’re doing,” she said. “A chain of kindness.”

Emily reported that the response to the rose offer has been modest, that fewer patrons than she had expected have taken a rose for someone special. But those who have done it have been delighted.

Polly Simpkins of Vineyard Haven, a staffer at MVYradio and originator of the Cup of Karma series, had no question about her recipient.

“I am giving a rose to Laurel Redington because she is such an inspiration to our Island. And she is such a treasure in how she expresses her engagement in our Island community,” said Polly, who works closely with Laurel at the radio station. “I love her!”

Days later, Polly shared how gratified she was by her friend’s response.

“It had been a long, hard week at work,” Polly said. “I left her the rose so she’d see it when she came in. She was so happy. She said the rose was the one thing that made her smile that day.”

Writer Wendy Brophy stopped by in between errands, browsing thoughtfully through the color selection before choosing a deep pink rose for a friend and former work colleague.

One woman agonized whether to give a rose to her hard-working daughter-in-law, a friend fighting a legal battle, or her beloved six-year-old granddaughter. She was overjoyed to learn she didn’t have to pick only one.

“You can come in every day,” Emily laughed.

When she hears stories of how pleased rose recipients are, Emily knows the project is doing just what she hoped for.

“People love to know they’re being recognized and appreciated,” Emily said. “It makes people feel good.”

Although she initially planned to end the giveaway after Labor Day, Emily said she might extend it through fall if it gains popularity.

Staffers are mystified as to why more people have not participated. They guess it may be anything, from heavy traffic and summer chaos to shyness, but they feel confident the project will catch on.

And despite the slow start, Emily is happy with The Kindness Project.

“I love that we’re doing it,” she said. “Hopefully we will affect more people’s lives with it. The more popular it becomes, the more excited we are about it.”