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# Florida grower's orchids comfort grieving parents

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Flowers are traditionally given during times of grief, but Silver Vase Inc. takes these gifts of bereavement to a whole new level. Based in Homestead, FL, the grower donates orchids to the Miami chapter of The Compassionate Friends, an organization dedicated to comforting families grieving the loss of a child.

The idea of "bereavement caught my eye very much because I had never heard of such an organization," said Marcella Lucio, vice president of sales and marketing at Silver Vase. "You hear about organizations about diseases but not for bereavement, especially not for parents who have lost their kids, because it's something no one really thinks about."

Each December, The Compassionate Friends holds a candle-lighting ceremony where grieving family members and friends light candles in honor of a child who has passed away. Silver Vase donates phalaenopsis orchids for table centerpieces at the ceremony and gives an orchid plant to the newly bereaved and to volunteers at the ceremony.

This giveback program began a few years ago when The Compassionate Friends approached Silver Vase about potential donations for the candle-lighting event. TCF had used various types of flowers and plants over the years, but the Phalaenopsis orchids seemed to really strike a chord. Silver Vase received messages from TCF, more than six months after the candle-lighting event, informing them of the incredible impact that the orchids had on the bereaved parents.

Phalaenopsis is one of the longest-lasting orchid breeds and it re-blooms regularly. "These parents are always looking for signs from their loved ones ... and signs like an orchid re-blooming gives them hope that the souls of their loved ones are always with them," said Lucio.

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One parent even tied the orchid Silver Vase had given her to a tree near her son's grave and each year the orchid kept re-blooming, which the mother took as a sign of hope. These orchids "are a symbol that life goes on," Lucio said.

The impact on Lucio and Silver Vase has been greater than either initially expected. "You never think that a plant could bring some sort of peace or understanding to what these people are going through," Lucio said. "That's what is most striking to me because we are a business — we don't deal with feelings overall on a daily basis. [This] gives you a totally different perspective of the business and what our plants mean."

In addition to The Compassionate Friends project, Silver Vase is affiliated with the National Breast Cancer Foundation and each year the company sells special products to raise breast cancer awareness. The company donates 10 percent of these profits to the foundation, and it is estimated that Silver Vase will donate \$23,000 this year.

Silver Vase is committed to selling the best orchids on the market while continuing to give back to its community. "You have to keep a balance of things in life," Lucio said. "Sometimes we get very wrapped up in the business and not much in the community. It's nice to do these things [though]. It's a good feeling, [and] it's great to see that there are so many people out there helping in all these different ways."

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