

WATTERS GARDEN CENTER

A Homegrown Business that Promotes
“Inspirational Gardening Made Easy”

By Tara Fort

Growing up with three sisters in Prescott, AZ and watering the plants in her father’s landscaping and garden supply business, Lisa Watters had no idea at the time that she would be part of a much bigger picture and community mainstay in this small, northern Arizona town. Today, Lisa Watters Lain, and her husband Ken, own Watters Garden Center, the family business that started in 1962. Migrating from their previous locations at Miller Valley Road and Plaza West Drive, as well as past offerings that included a flower shop and a pet shop, the business now makes its home just north of Gail



Our goal is to get customers in the store and explore gardening, and that’s where my job takes over. I work to give them the experience and the enjoyment of being in a garden center.

- Lisa Lain

Gardner Way on Iron Springs Road. Over the years, Watters Garden Center has managed to create an environment that offers practical—and expert—advice, as well as an enjoyable experience for every visitor.

Being surrounded by plants and flowers throughout her high school years proved to serve Lisa well. While she supported herself as a flower arranger during college, she admits that owning the business was never in the forefront of the future for her or any of her sisters. All four girls were encouraged to pursue their own paths



while still taking part in what was expected with the family business. Lisa's path led her to meet her husband at Arizona State University, and to obtain a Master's degree in education at Northern Arizona University. Starting a life of their own away from Prescott, she and Ken moved to California, but soon became disenchanted with corporate America. As with many Prescott natives, it was a natural move to relocate their growing family of four children back to the hometown that was calling her name. Knowing as much as they did about the business up to this point prepared both Lisa and Ken for the move, and their love of business propelled them to take Watters Garden Center to even greater heights.

In 1992, the couple originally entertained the idea of taking over Watters Garden Center. Lisa's dad intent to retire from the business that had sustained his family for over 30 years and presented the idea of ownership to Ken. Slowly, they made the transition into full ownership. Lisa credits her father with her love for the business, "He showed us that hard work is okay. It's a good thing to be out there and to be working hard. You learn how to treat a customer. My dad was terrific at that. He was amazing at building relationships with people in the community. I learned to never settle for 'this is it' and focused always on finding ways to be better." These days, Lisa and Ken continue to improve the business by attending conferences and networking with other



Photo by A Portrait Park by J

business-related groups, and giving back to the community. They continue to serve and make the experience better—the common thread that still presents itself, initiated by her father so many years ago.

As Prescott continues to grow and the community sees the arrival of big box stores that may offer competitive products, Lisa knows that Watters Garden Center offers much more than what others offer in the way of inexpensive plants or bulk packages of flowers. "We are proud of our experience and our knowledge of the industry over time. We love what we do—we love being a nursery and a garden center. I love plants, and I love making things pretty and helping people by making gardening enjoyable. We're not just about selling a plant; we're about helping someone

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Ken & Lisa Lain at Watters Garden Center



find something that makes life better. We work hard to provide the plants that have really survived well here. For us, it's important for our customers to be successful, because if they're not successful they're not going to want to continue to garden."

To spark and foster that interest in gardening, Ken hosts a Saturday morning radio show on 99.9 FM KQNA, manages a weekly newsletter, and publishes a bushel full of information on the store's website and blog including video tutorials, practical articles covering topics like gopher problems and landscaping for curb appeal, and a yearly calendar of "to dos" specific to every month of the year. The well-attended free garden classes are offered every Saturday at 9:30 a.m., and highlight the various plants and conditions suited to the northern Arizona high desert terrain. Customers can follow trends, tips and tricks on the various social media platforms. Adds Lisa, "We encourage people to take pictures on their cell phones or bring in a limb. We do a lot of diagnostics that way." When you do bring in that plant limb, you might just find Lisa herself there to provide the information needed to nurture the plant back to its healthy condition. Social media is, "... the opening of the door. Our goal is to



Gardening doesn't have to be hard. It can be simple and enjoyable. Get out and have fun with it!"

- Lisa Lain



Watters Garden Center 50 Years ago



(Above) Lisa Lain working at Watters Garden Center; (right) Lisa Lain as a child surrounded by a beautiful garden.



Watters Garden Center circa 1976



get customers in the store and explore gardening, and that's where my job takes over. I work to give them the experience and the enjoyment of being in a garden center."

For the upcoming season Lisa offers this practical advice. "The most challenging thing for people to get correct is the watering and the lack of humidity. We have a very unique environment—it's so dry. We have clay soil which means getting the watering correct is critical. We work hard to help newcomers from California and the Midwest who may have relied on humidity figure out the watering for their plants in Arizona." And, for those who find full-blown gardening too challenging, there is still hope. "Container gardening is terrific with big pots and raised planter boxes. It's so much easier to control that environment. Herb gardening is terrific, particularly when you combine herbs with other plants, like mixing Swiss chard and kale with pansies. Gardening doesn't have to be hard. It can be simple and enjoyable. Get out and have fun with it!"

Watters Garden Center shows no signs of slowing down. Every year the business hosts a Rotary fundraiser and serves as a setting for other fundraisers, particularly in the summer with the blooming scents and sounds. Many daytime workers visit Watters Garden Center on a lunch hour to sit on one of the outdoor rockers and enjoy the peace and solitude of the perfect little green spot in the middle of an otherwise hectic work day. For Lisa Lain, every day presents itself with new customers, new varieties of plants and new situations. Being a part of Watters Garden Center is anything but typical. "That's what I love about this business. Every day is different. One day I help customers, and other days I unload the truck, place orders, or plant trees. It's just different every day."

You can visit Watters Garden Center at 1815 W. Iron Springs Road in Prescott and at www.wattersgardencenter.com; 928-445-4519

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