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Giving Dreams an Address

The Cost of Convenience

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Flowers sit in vases, awaiting orders at King Florist and Gifts in Moraga.

Photo Andy Scheck

If the florist turns them down, they call the customer and say they can't fill the order." That would not be a pleasant phone call for a customer to receive on Feb. 14.

Many of the online companies present themselves as full-service florists, posting an extensive list of beautiful floral displays. "No florist could possibly have all of those arrangements," said Ganch. "They're wire services, with employees and overhead. They cannot respond to your special requests. The quality of the flowers you get may not match what is shown in those photos." Kahn added that if the online company insists that she deliver the arrangement for free, she will not do it.

Los Angeles-based JustFlowers.com, an online broker,

and Teleflora, a delivery service out of Los Angeles, did not return calls or emails seeking comment.

So, you may not be talking with a florist when you order flowers by phone, and you may not be getting what you think you are getting, or when you expect it. That does not sound like the basis for a successful business model. Jennifer Sparks, vice president of marketing for the Society of American Florists, the Alexandria, Va.-based industry trade association, explained how to stay a step ahead of the rogue operators.

"When you ask about scams, the main concern is the issue of deceptive listings where companies list themselves under a variety of fictitious florist names with a local phone number," she said. It is unlawful in Cali-

fornia to advertise a fictitious shop name that includes, say, an Orinda geographic reference, or a phone number that consumers perceive as being local but is forwarded to a business in another state.

But not only national companies operate this way. "Many are also local florists who decided to become aggressive by reaching consumers on a nationwide level through toll-free numbers and the Internet," said Sparks.

Then what can you do to avoid being taken?

"Deal only with shops that list a street address with their phone number," she said. "When you call the florist, ask for directions to the shop. If they hesitate, consider that a red flag. And ask the florist to itemize charges. Most charge a delivery fee and sales tax in the state where the order is being taken, in addition to the price of the arrangement."

The one suggestion that all three agreed upon: deal directly with a local florist, with a local business address.

"A lot of the time, consumers want to support a local floral business but don't know where to go," said Sparks. "Florists need to focus on catering to the local customer to make sure they know the shop is there to serve them."

"You can question us about the details of your order," said Ganch. You know you are talking to a real, local person. You know us.

"And you can hold us accountable."

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Lamorinda Weekly ordered flowers online and received them on time. Though the arrangement looked similar to what was ordered, it contained fewer roses than shown online, and the \$88 final cost included a \$14.99 service charge.

Interim Town Manager

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Priebe realized this was the type of challenge he was interested in at this point in his career. "There are a lot of skills that can be transferred," he said, "such as team management, or dealing with people and community issues." He compares his approach to that of a coach watching all his incredible players doing what they do well, "and making sure we are all moving in the same direction to achieve the vision of the council," adds Priebe.

The interim manager knows he will need to learn a lot of technical elements, but on the people side, his many years managing the Moraga police department has been good training. "I know what I don't know, and I also know who knows. So I rely on those people with trust and confidence." Priebe says he will continue

to keep his door open and encourages residents to contact him if they want to talk.

Priebe says he will make what the council decides happen, whether it is regarding the Rheem Theatre, the Hacienda de las Flores, hillside and ridgeline regulations, infrastructure maintenance, or the purchase of video cameras for the town. When the camera discussion started about a year ago, then Chief Priebe was not completely sold on the idea.

"I have always seen them as a tool to solve crimes but until now have not felt the interest to invest funds for them," he said. "I am thrilled the town wants to give MPD more tools and I am anxious to have it completely vetted in public discussion. MPD has always provided police services at the lowest cost per

capita on the County and is consistently one of the safest communities in the state, so selling the idea of more officers or new technology has always been difficult. The council and public support for cameras is appreciated and will be brought forward with my full support."

Keimach warned Priebe that the hardest part will be letting go of his former department. When she "passed the baton" to him, instead of a police baton, she gave him a thin wooden conductor's rod. But the police department is still close to Priebe's heart. He says that he still has his radio and gun accessible and a police jacket in the back of his car. "In case of a police emergency and if reinforcement is needed, I am available."