

Roonie's Place celebrates 30 years of business in Wauneta

Written by Wauneta Breeze

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Roonie's Place opened after Jo Arenz made a joking comment at Thanksgiving dinner 30 years ago. Today, she's still providing floral arrangements, balloons and gifts in the Wauneta area. (Sheri Hink-Wagner | The Wauneta Breeze)

By Sheri Hink-Wagner

The Wauneta Breeze

Sometimes only partially serious comments become a reality and a 30-year long staple of the community. Roonie's Place opened its doors 30 Valentine's Days ago. At Thanksgiving dinner in 1983 owner Jo Arenz said she originally suggested buying the floral shop, which had been closed for some time.

At the time her husband, Ed, had two very crafty aunts and through their conversations they talked about how fun it would be to open a craft store. Arenz said she jokingly suggested buying

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the flower shop in Wauneta.

To her surprise, the rest of the group jumped at the idea and by January 1984 they had made the decision to purchase the shop and open their doors in time for Valentine's Day 1984. They made it happen and Roonie's Place filled its first Valentine's Day order that year. Roonie's official open house was held a couple weeks later, on March 1, 1984—on her daughter Courtney's birthday.

Arenz said she's seen a lot of changes in the floral industry in the past 30 years, but that some things remain the same. Sure, prices have gone up and freight is more of an issue, but the core of her business remains the same.

When Roonie's was first getting its start flowers would arrive from Denver on the bus and Arenz would pick them up as they drove through on Highway 6. Then, when the bus stopped coming through she would order them via UPS. Nowadays she gets her flowers delivered by FedEx. She can place a flower order by 2 p.m. MT and have them the next day—a convenience that works well for a small town flower shop.

Her only hang up is if the need for flowers comes after 2 p.m. on Friday and she needs to find flowers over the weekend. She's found other area florists helpful in that regard, whether that means a trip to Imperial or McCook for stock.

One of the most common requests at Roonie's Place is for funeral flowers. Arenz said, "It's sometimes difficult to work with people as they grieve, but it's a special time to share with them too. I've learned there are no 'right' words."

Arenz speaks of her clients and their departed loved ones with a compassion that those who know her have come to appreciate and expect. As Arenz puts it, "my family has grown up here," and Wauneta is her home.

Arnez said Memorial Day has become one of her favorite holidays, not because it is a boost to her business, but because it gives her the chance to talk to and catch up with those who have

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moved out of town. She delivers approximately 60 arrangements to the cemetery each year and she enjoys hearing from past Waunetans when they call to order flowers to be delivered to their loved one's grave. She said she enjoys the opportunity to reflect back on those who have passed.

The three busiest times of the year for Roonie's Place are Valentine's Day, Memorial Day and Mother's Day. "I truly appreciate the community's support the past 30 years," said Arenz. "Everything I sell here are things people don't 'need' or that they can live without, but the community supports me anyway."

After 30 years in the business Arenz said she is in her "third generation of love" as she's started serving her first customer's children and grand children.

In order to keep up with the flower needs of the community throughout the year Arenz keeps a modest stock of red roses, three or four colors of carnations, daisies, mums, alstroemeria lilies, greenery, helium balloons and some crafts and gifts throughout the year.

Roonie's Place is open Monday through Friday from 10 a.m. MT/11 a.m. CT to 4 p.m. MT/5 p.m. CT. However, Arenz said 90 percent of her business comes via telephone so phone calls are forwarded to her home or cell phone 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

When commenting back on the past 30 years Arenz said, "It's been good. I feel blessed to get to know people I would have never known."