

# GROWERTALKS

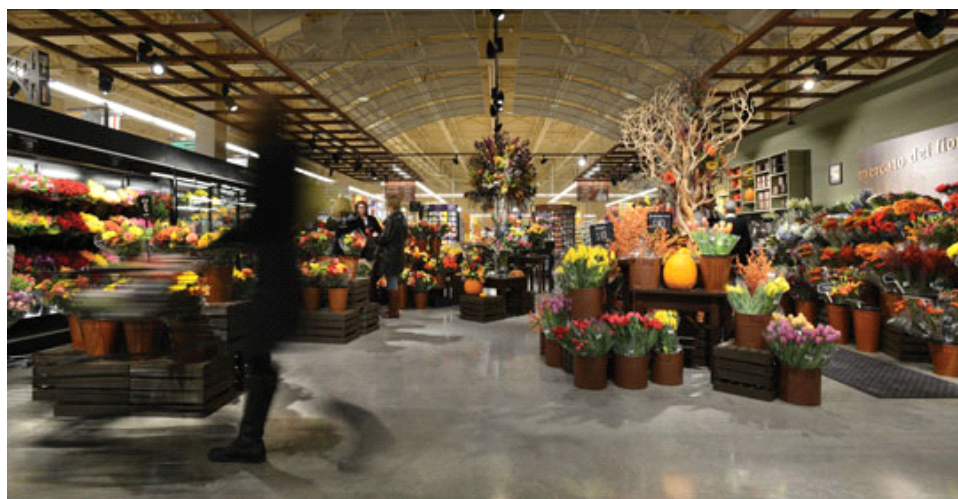
## GT in Brief

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### The Future of Grocery Floral

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*Photography by Mark Widhalm*



If you live in Chicagoland, you've heard the buzz about Mariano's—a new grocery chain that opened its first store in the northern suburbs in 2010. On October 29, Mariano's (which is owned by Milwaukee-based Roundy's Super-markets, Inc.) opened its 13th store in the Chicago area. Jessica Ortiz, events manager for Mariano's, said that the company's goal is to open five stores per year, and the Wheaton store pictured here is the fifth one for 2013.

Boasting a complete "neighbor-hood shopping environment," Mariano's offers many amenities that other local grocery chains don't—including an Italian coffee shop, a wood-fired pizza oven and a sit-down sushi bar. The company's motto of "Shop well. Eat well. Live well." also carries over into their high-end floral department. But not "high-end" as in "pricey;" it's "high-end" as in "quality." Floral Merchandiser José Llera said that the prices are lower than a traditional florist because the company deals directly with the growers, allowing them to keep the pricing comparable to other grocery chains. (Large mixed bouquets were selling for \$15.00.)

Most of the offering consists of cut flowers and potted plants that switch out depending on the season, and they plan on having annual bedding plants for sale in the spring. Although they didn't want to divulge who their grower suppliers are, Rebecca Eckblad, Director of Floral, did say that they get all of their roses from Passion Growers out of Colombia. Mariano's is the only store in the Chicago area that offers Passion

roses—which can be seen every year at the Rose Bowl, adorning the arm of the newly crowned Miss America, and being used to tell hopeful beaus and sweet-hearts whether they're “the one” on “The Bachelor” and “The Bachelorette” TV shows. To celebrate their grand opening, Mariano's was selling different varieties of Passion roses for \$1.00 a piece, and shoppers were scooping them up by the armful.

So, how is Mariano's floral department different from other grocery chains? José said that all of the floral employees are at least a Level 2 floral designer who truly know plants and can design a custom bouquet on the spot. Mariano's also provides floral arrangements for special events, like weddings funerals and baby/wedding showers. **GT**