**Linda Owen Pruitt, Proprietress, Hand's Nursery is the recipient of Mississippi Nursery and Landscape Association’s**

**2022 Nursery Person of the Year**

In 1976 at the tender age of 24, a young mother with two small children, moved to Magee, Mississippi, and bought the local plant nursery.  She had a natural love of plants, flowers, and nature, an incredible work ethic, artistic flair, and a servant's heart.  She was a perfect fit for the business and soon expanded the nursery, began selling Christmas trees, and developed a Christmas market.  Previously closed four months of the year, her nursery opened twelve months a year, six days a week.  She has worked those six days per week plus part-time on Sundays, twelve months per year, for 47 years.  She reared three sons while working, carrying the youngest as a tiny baby on her back while helping customers.  She inherited her work ethic from her father and her kindness and humility from her mother.  She imparted her heart of service to all three sons, all of whom became medical doctors.

In addition to the sale of plants, trees, and unique garden decor, her nursery provides numerous services to the community of Magee and beyond.  She offers the highest quality plants and products, and customers drive from other cities to take advantage of the quality and lower costs the nursery provides.  Businesses in other cities rely on her for their plant care and maintenance.  The nursery offers plant installation, irrigation installation, lawn mowing, weeding, trimming, leaf blowing, pruning, lawn maintenance, and other miscellaneous services.  She makes house calls to help customers with garden designs and plant selection.  Customers bring sick plants to her to diagnose and treat, and she will keep plants "hospitalized" at the nursery until they recover.  She also dispenses education and expertise for the asking.  She receives texts from customers with photos of plants, asking her to identify them.  A recent customer at the nursery asked for the Latin name of poinsettia as she rang up another customer's sale.  "Euphorbia pulcherrima," she replied without looking up from the register.

The eldest of five children, she was born to a career U.S. Air Force father who served in Korea and Vietnam and his supportive wife, a wonderful cook and homemaker.  Born on an air force base in Fort Worth, Texas, she attended elementary school in England, middle school in Louisiana, and graduated high school in Japan.  Exposure to such diverse cultures with their distinct plant life, art, and history shaped her character and affinities.  Through her role as eldest child, given her innate sense of helpfulness, service to others became second nature.  She became generous and self-sacrificing, often to her own detriment.

To safeguard her health, her husband, also a medical doctor, will regularly whisk her away for vacation.  While others are marveling at the Normandy memorial, the Arc de Triomphe, or the ancient walls of a tiny Tuscan village, she will be found taking photographs of lavender, sunflowers, or olive trees.  She is never happier than when visiting the gardens of Versailles or Rodan.  She is always drawn to the natural beauty of the world, finding it more compelling than anything made by man.

Despite encouragement from her husband to slow down or cut back her work hours, she continues her full-time vocation of serving customers and enjoying her love of plants.  A youthful 70-year-old with a bum knee, she is uniquely humble and relentlessly pleasant with a steely determination to persevere.  Persevere she has and persevere she will.  For nearly half a century, plant lovers in south central Mississippi and beyond have been much the better for it.

Congratulations to Mrs. Linda Owen Pruitt recipient of Mississippi Nursery and Landscape Association’s 2022 Nursery Person of the Year!

