

## CRBJ STAFF

**Publisher**  
Matt Winters  
mwinters@crbizjournal.com

**Editor**  
Jonathan Williams  
editor@crbizjournal.com

**Office Coordinator**  
Sarah Smith  
ssmith@eomediagroup.com

**Group Publisher**  
Kari Borgen  
kborgen@dailyastorian.com

**Advertising Director**  
Sarah Silver  
ssilver@dailyastorian.com

**Layout/Design**  
Matthew Vann

## NEXT ISSUE

**Publication Date:** May 18, 2022  
**Advertising Deadline:** May 9, 2022

## CONTACT CRBJ

**Submit news:**  
editor@crbizjournal.com

**Website:**  
CoastRiverBusinessJournal.com

**Coast River Business Journal**  
205 Bolstad Ave. E. Suite 2, P.O. Box 427  
Long Beach, WA 98631  
Phone 800-643-3703

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# Meet the Merchant

Interview by Abbey McDonald amcdonald@dailyastorian.com

## River City Flower Farm

Since moving to the North Coast, Autum and Zach Peyton have laid down roots in the community through their work at River City Flower Farm.

Located in the Nehalem River Valley, their bouquets and natural products can be found at the Manzanita Farmers Market, the Astoria Sunday Market and Wild Grocery & Cafe in Manzanita.

The farm is also part of a Community Supported Agriculture program, and they will have a retail space at the Astoria Food Hub.

Coast River Business Journal asked Autum Peyton about her experience running a flower farm on the North Coast. Her responses have been edited for brevity and clarity.

**Q: How did you get started?**

**A:** It was kind of fate I guess. We moved to the Oregon Coast and had a piece of property we wanted to do something with. Both of us had spent quite a lot of years in Seattle and were accustomed to being able to get fresh flowers at the farmers market. We just met that need, essentially. The more we did it, the more success we had and it just ended up being something that the community was ready and willing to support. And it was nice because we weren't piggybacking on anybody else locally. We weren't taking from others. We were providing something everybody didn't have already.

**Q: What was it like setting things up?**

**A:** I am a classically trained chef. So I spent 15 years in the restaurant industry and my friends in the restaurant industry heard that I wanted to start a little side of the road flower business and that's what I originally thought was gonna come from this. I was just gonna grow a backyard flower farm, a couple of rows of cute things and make a little shack on the corner and sell a couple of bouquets. And somebody through the grapevine heard that I was trying to do that and they offered me a piece of property, and that's Jared (Gardner) from Nehalem River Ranch. And he offered us the startup property to start the business which has been a huge facilitator for us because it's very hard to acquire small acreage with water. It's been all about the community. It started with just us talking about it, and then somebody's offering to sell our flowers in their shop, and then offering a spot at the farmers market and then offering, now, a space at the food hub. So it's just been one opportunity that we've taken after another to get us to where we're at.

**Q: It's nice to hear that there's been community support for it.**

**A:** A lot of people don't think about where their flowers come from, but they worry about where their kale or their meat or their eggs come from. And not like everybody's buying bouquets for their table con-



Autum and Zach Peyton are the owners of River City Flower Farm.

### River City Flower Farm

Autum and Zach Peyton, owners  
rivercityflowerfarm.com  
503-368-3766 or rivercityflowerfarm@gmail.com

tinually, but still, the amount of flowers that are sold throughout the world on a daily basis should cause people to think about the CO2 effects and things like that of shipping flowers from all over the world. So that's our main focus at the food hub: to pull that attention, the education aspect back to flowers and how they're raised and how they're cared for.

**Q: Can you talk a little bit about the food hub?**

**A:** We're basically just bringing local flowers to the forefront. There'll be eggs and produce and meat and fish and things from all over the valley that (the hub) provides. And so flowers just fit the bill and are another one of those items that people can come in and see that they can take ownership knowing that it came from somewhere local, that gives them more opportunities to support the community. And then it's also fun, because there'll be a lot of education opportunities there because we're partnering up with the North Coast Food Web. And they are a big proponent of education for small businesses out here so it'll be nice to kind of cooperate with everybody and work

together. I think it'll be kind of like a mini Pike Place Market, in a way. It'll be like a nice indoor arena for everybody to come together and meet again and learn about products and learn about how to grow flowers, or learn about where their fish comes from, or learn how to do something and successfully sell it with all the tools needed at your fingertips. A big part of the food hub is giving other people the opportunity to grow and to give them the right tools.

**Q: Are there any tips you've learned along the way for people who are trying to grow flowers?**

**A:** Starting with something simple, like sweet peas or sunflowers. Something that you can put right in the ground and watch grow and watch flower. Something that doesn't take a lot of effort is the best way to start out so that you're rewarded. It's such a broad question, because it kind of depends on where you're going to go. Are you going to grow a cutting garden? Are you going to grow a vegetable garden? Are you going to grow a seasonal garden? You know, so that's kind of where we're gonna step in, and we're gonna give people more education about flower growing. Asking questions is always super important. Like, you can go online and get internet information and read the package and stuff, but actually asking a local extension office or one of your local fellow gardeners that's been doing it for a long time is gonna have so much more valuable information for how your growing climate is.