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# SUNFLOWER FARMS

Photography by **John Kanuit**

The patio fireplace glows cheerfully as dawn breaks and Ron brings a hot cup of coffee to Wendy. They warm their hands. The birds begin to sing in the trees set swaying by the gentle morning breeze.

Fantasy?

Not at all! Thus begins the day at Sunflower Farms, the nursery within a garden.

Acquired by the Akiyama family in 1975 as a successful wholesale nursery, the business evolved over the years and became a beautiful retail

garden and retreat. Settled in the midst of suburban Torrance, Sunflower Farms features a rustic gift shop, landscape design studio and all the services your garden has ever needed.

Themed gardens featuring a wide array of trees, shrubs, vegetables, herbs, berries, succulents, cacti and drought resistant plants are displayed throughout the property. Currently on display are an edible garden, drought tolerant garden, desert garden, Zen garden, formal garden, shade garden and tropical garden. Look for a Japanese garden, butterfly garden and Bible garden in the near future!

Themes such as these are the inspiration for the landscape designs that Wendy creates. Her conceptual design sketches are done based on client photos, site visits and interviews. Once completed, she walks clients through the gardens, pointing out the plants in the design so the picture of their new garden gets clearer and becomes reality. Some clients actually frame the sketches!

An early childhood love of art and nature led Wendy to aspirations of interior design, but after meeting and marrying Ron Akiyama, son of Rolling Hills and Airport Nurseries founder



Tom Akiyama, she fell in love with exterior design. Now she creates artistic concepts using the shapes and colors of the plant world as her palette.

Ron is a graduate of South High, where he played varsity football and baseball. Wendy is an alumna of Narbonne High, where she was a varsity cheerleader. Both attended Long Beach State. Wendy graduated with a degree in journalism and Ron left his senior year in 1975, when he acquired Sunflower Farms. He is now semi-retired and Wendy continues the tradition of establishing lifelong relationships with their clients and customers. Many have had multiple homes landscaped and now the little toddlers who used to come in with their parents are having their first homes landscaped. The legacy continues.

Today, their oldest son, Russell, a graduate of Hofstra University in New York and a former defense analyst in Virginia, has come home and is now co-owner. During the last two years, he has been busy taking the company into the information and social media age, establishing community outreach and recognition and creating and marketing product development.

In addition to Russell, Ron and Wendy also have a daughter, Lisa, and another son, Matt, who all grew up and helped out at the nursery. All three attended Bishop Montgomery and still live in the South Bay. There are now three grandchildren: William, six years; Emma, one and a half years; and Rhett, three months.

The tradition of beauty and peace at Sunflower Farms has entered its third generation of ownership and the future looks fresh and bright as the nursery continues to strive to be an asset and a blessing to the South Bay community.