



Jena Oh, left, and Mariah Baird returned to the MSU campus from a national floral design competition with top honors. They plan to pursue careers in floristry and prepare for their profession in class and through part-time jobs at the MSU Florist.

Floral Design: *a Labor of Love for MSU Students*

By Bob Ratliff

They do it because they love flowers, but for two MSU students, floral design also has other rewards.

Junior Mariah Baird and senior Jena Oh are both horticulture/retail floristry management majors. Baird is from Starkville, and Oh grew up in Seoul, South Korea. Despite their diverse backgrounds, they share a passion for flowers.

"I grew up helping my grandpa do flowers for weddings and other events," Baird said. "He was a high school principal, but he worked with flower arrangements as a sideline."

Oh has been in the U.S. for four years and at MSU for one. For her, the retail floristry program is an opportunity to "do what I love," she said.

The two students both work at the University Florist on campus, and both were recognized by the American Institute of Floral Designers (AIFD) at the organization's 2006 Symposium in Washington, D.C.

Baird and Oh collected the overall highest scores among a total of some 50 students from 15 universities and colleges taking part in the student challenge at the symposium.

Baird finished among the top three in the dried arrangements category, while Oh did the same in the sympathy category. They also were among the leaders in the remaining categories: flowers-to-wear, flowers-to-carry and centerpieces.

Preparation for the national competition included a dozen practice sessions with professional designer Jim DelPrince, an

associate professor of plant and soil sciences and adviser for MSU's AIFD chapter.

"Since students in the competition never know in advance what the specific design challenges will be, repeated practice in executing basic design principles is critical," DelPrince said. "As their honors indicate, Mariah and Jena practiced a great deal."

In addition to the preparatory session, Baird and Oh benefited from their part-time work at the University Florist, where their supervisor is business manager Lynette McDougald, also an AIFD-certified designer and student chapter coadvisor.

"Their consistent work in all five categories made the difference in bringing home the top honor," McDougald said. "Consistent design is what our retail teaching shop is all about."

MSU is among only a very few U.S. universities offering degrees in floristry retail management. The campus florist is a full-service commercial enterprise, but it serves primarily as a hands-on instructional laboratory for students in the Department of Plant and Soil Sciences seeking retail floristry training.

Baird and Oh agree that it provides training for a profession they want to be part of after graduation.

"There are so many opportunities, including product development, working for a floral wire service and operating your own shop," Baird said. "You just have to figure out what works best for what you want out of life and go in that direction."