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Big spring Flower and Garden Show put off by pandemic worries

BY DEBBIE ARRINGTON



## It's not only vacation travel, sporting events

and music festivals that have felt the impact of the coronavirus outbreak. Coronavirus concerns have put a damper on spring gardening, too.

Less than a month before its scheduled Cal Expo return, the 36th annual San Francisco-Northern California Flower & Garden Show will not go on, said producer Sherry Larsen.

"Look at our demographics. Many of our patrons are in the vulnerable group," she said. "Exhibitors are traveling from as far away as Maine. We've got three weeks to go. We don't know where we'll be at that time. We had to look at the potential impact."

Larsen officially made the call March 10, informing her vendors and exhibitors of their options. One of Northern California's largest events of its kind, the show expected to fill four buildings at Cal Expo and was set for April 2-5 as a major kickoff to spring gardening. It would have been only the second time the San Francisco Flower Show was held in Sacramento.

After nearly a year of planning for the April show, the cancellation happened rather quickly. (For more information on tickets, go to norcalgardenshow.com.)

Larsen said one major group pulled out, taking its 30-by-100-foot demonstration garden and an afterhours event with it. It wasn't just the big companies that were worried about how coronavirus might affect attendance; event volunteers also were worried.

"We got calls from gardening groups," Larsen said. "Many members wouldn't volunteer; they were afraid to be with the public. It's true concern. Who knows what will happen?"

Instead of requesting refunds, most participants are choosing to roll over their reservations until next year, Larsen said. "Right now, we're getting a real good response. Everybody says, 'We're there next year!"

As the head of Cal State Shows, Larsen also produces other major home and garden shows. That includes the upcoming Fine Living Expo set for Roseville's new Placer Valley Events Center on the Placer County Fairgrounds. The expo is planned for Aug. 14-16 at the \$34 million facility. Larsen expects some of the vendors and exhibitors scheduled to appear at the spring San Fran-NorCal show to shift to the late summer expo.

"Exhibitors rely on events for their income," she said. "This other event may not have the same level of attendance, but it will be a good event. Under the circumstances, this Plan B will work for most of our attendees."

In addition to home and garden, the Fine Living Expo will feature travel, wineries, fashion and lifestyle exhibitors. Like many in her industry, Larsen is hopeful that coronavirus will not be a concern for Sacramento area patrons in late summer.

In the meantime, she's already working on the 2021 flower show.

"Everything will be OK," Larsen said. "I'm excited. I've got another year to promote."

Debbie Arrington, an award-winning garden writer and lifelong gardener, is co-creator of the Sacramento Digs Gardening blog and website.