

VENDOR PROFILES

By David Crowder

Kelly Wiseman

Starting in spring, when Kelly Wiseman isn't at work as a compliance officer at El Paso's First American Bank, she's tending her bountiful backyard garden.



"As much as I would love to do this fulltime, it doesn't pay the mortgage – yet," she said from her booth on a Saturday morning at Farmers' Market at Ardivino's Desert Crossing. "I had been canning since I was a little girl, helping my mother make sweet dills. We'd make them first for us and then for Christmas presents.

"Then, I got out of it, went to school, got married and did all that." And then, thank goodness, they moved to El Paso and bought a home that came with a big, healthy fig tree in the backyard, and the pickling bug got her again.

"Suddenly, I had all these figs and was wondering what in the world am I going to do with them?" she said. "I started making fig preserves, and that got me back into the pickles.

"So, I started doing pickles again and making them for Christmas presents. My friends said you should try to sell them.

"I thought nobody's going to buy my pickles, but they did! Then, I came up here to Ardivino's."

That was about 12 years ago, she said from behind a table loaded with more than 50 jars of pickled items along with jelly and jams for sale. Behind her is a business sign: Wiseman's Garden Creations LLC.

She's married to Geoff Wiseman, a park ranger at Franklin Mountain State Park, who helped her master the art of erecting a tent, which can be tricky if you're alone.

"He took me out in the front yard and said, 'OK, this is how you do it by yourself,'" she said. "But everybody here's willing to help."

Ask her what's she's making and what she's got, and you'll get quite a list.

Taking a breath, she began, "I have regular dill spicy dills, sweet dills, bread and butter dills, sweet and spicy dills, and I have bread and butter jalapenos, pickled garlic, pickled asparagus, jalapeno jelly, Dijon mustard and, as the season goes forward, I will have more and more.

"I'm hoping that by our next specialty market, I will have my fig preserves. When my peppers start coming out, I will have my orange tai jelly and what I call my Jalapeno Gold which is a habanera apricot jelly."

Asked how she does it while holding down a demanding full-time job, she said both activities require the same skills.

"As a compliance officer, you have to be organized and detailed," Wiseman said, taking a breath. "This does too, but it's fun – if you're organized and detailed."

David Crowder is a semi-retired journalist with itchy fingers who spent more than 40 years with the El Paso Times, Newspaper Tree and El Paso Inc. as a reporter, editor, columnist and photographer.