

GROWERTALKS

GT in Brief

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Three December Passings

Chris Beytes

David Austin Sr. OBE VHM, famed rosarian who brought us Davis Austin Roses, passed away peacefully at home December 18. He was 92. All those letters after his name speak to his success and fame as a British rose breeder: OBE means “Officer of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire,” a British title given for contributions to the arts or sciences. VMH is the Victoria Medal of Honour, awarded to British horticulturists deserving of special honor by the Royal Horticultural Society. David, founder of David Austin Roses Limited, spent 75 years in the rose business, breeding more than 200 English roses during his career, and almost single-handedly brought back the old English style of rose—big, full and fragrant—but with the benefits of modern roses. Today, the company is run by David Austin Jr.

Melvin “Mel” Schwanke, a nationally recognized florist, passed away December 17 at home at the age of 92. Mel married into the floral industry after World War II when he married JoEllen “Joey” Green and joined Green’s Greenhouse in Fremont, Nebraska. He was active in the floral industry, both at the local and national level, even serving as president of the Society of American Florists (SAF) for two years. He was an executive of the Nebraska Florist Society for 45 years. Mel is a member of SAF Hall of Fame. One of Mel’s children, J Schwanke of Grand Rapids, Michigan, grew up in the family greenhouse and today is a noted designer, presenter and consultant. He founded the website uBloom.com.

Nola Wagner, matriarch of Wagner’s Greenhouses & Garden Center in Minneapolis, passed away December 18 at the age of 87. Nola was a flight attendant for Northwest Airlines in 1955 when she met Richard Wagner, who worked in the family’s greenhouse and field vegetable business. Nola and Richard expanded the business into flowers, added retail sales and incorporated the business in 1967. Today, the fifth-generation business is run by sons Ron and Scott and her grandchildren. **GT**