

GROWERTALKS

GT in Brief

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In Memoriam: Katie Kennicott

Chris Beytes

The floral world has lost a gem of a woman, a “pioneer and goodwill ambassador,” as one industry association called her. Kathleen “Katie” Kennicott, wife of Harrison “Red” Kennicott, owners of Chicago-based wholesale floral distributor Kennicott Brothers Company, passed away October 13 at the age of 86.

Hardly just Red’s wife, Katie played a direct role in the company’s success. As the American Floral Endowment stated, “Over more than 60 years of active involvement in the floral industry, she showed a special talent for making strong connections with customers, suppliers and other—connections that have helped to change the face of the industry.”

Here's more about Katie from AFE:

Katie and Red met when both were students at Michigan State University; they married the summer after Red graduated in 1959. While Red went straight into the family business, for five years Katie pursued the career she had prepared for—teaching math to eighth graders.

Eventually, she was drawn into service with Kennicott Brothers as a customer relations representative. This was at a time when, as Katie herself related in an interview conducted in the fall of 2018, “There were no women in the wholesale flowers business at all. Zero.”

She took to it like a duck to water, quickly establishing rapport with Kennicott Brothers’ retail florist customers, who were mostly women, visiting their locations and quickly becoming a friend. She always followed up each visit with a personal note. She visited prospects as well as customers. Many, even if they didn’t become customers, became lifelong friends.

Over a period of at least 40 years, Katie came along with Red to nearly every Wholesale Florists & Florist Suppliers Association (WF&FSA) and SAF annual convention, strengthening the company’s connection to suppliers, as well as to customers, and always giving back to the industry. Together they helped establish and became founding members of AFE’s Legacy Circle, an honorary group of industry members who made provisions for a planned gift to AFE to support the work of the Endowment.

On top of her work for Kennicott Brothers, her other industry activities and being an avid Cubs fan, Katie was a mom to five kids, a grandmother to 14, had 11 great-grandchildren and one great-great grandchild. A son, Stephen, and granddaughter, Paige, are employed at Kennicott Kuts, the network of flower farms, specializing in peonies, that began in Illinois in 1836 and today stretches from Chile to Alaska.

An AFE Memorial Tribute Fund has been established to forever honor Katie and her legacy. Contributions to the

Katie Kennicott Memorial Tribute can be made online at endowment.org. **GT**