

GROWERTALKS

GT in Brief

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In Memoriam: Richie Borella

Chris Beytes



Richie Borella, long-time (20-plus year) grower for Norman Keil Nurseries in Saint James, New York, on Long Island, passed away in May after being diagnosed with late-stage brain and lung cancer. He was just shy of his 74th birthday.

Richie was born into a horticulture family—his parents founded Borella Nursery in Nesconset, New York, which is where he cut his teeth. But he really excelled when he joined Norman Keil Nurseries more than 20 years ago. Norman Keil Sr. said that Richie was an excellent grower and he'd been running their 30-acre Setauket farm until last year. Up until his passing, he'd been training their

younger growers.

Norman Keil Jr. broke the news to his staff in a heartfelt letter on Sunday, May 17, just after Richie died, writing, "There are simply no words that do justice to what he meant to this company, to this industry and to all of us personally. He was one of a kind—as a grower and as a human being."

Norman wrote that Richie told him of his cancer just the previous week, taking only about 20 seconds to do so ... "and then spent the next 30 minutes talking about the perennials out in the field and how he was working to pass along his knowledge to the next generation of growers he was mentoring. That was Richie. The plants always came first."

"He was a character. He was a wonderful person," said Norman Sr., who knew Richie for more than 50 years. Norman Jr. confirmed that in his letter, writing, "You could always spot Richie—the perfectly combed hair, the gold chain, the half-buttoned shirt, and without fail, hands stained blue from the fertilizer he had just been mixing. He was proud of that."

Norman Jr. added, "He loved his cars—his Cadillacs, his old pickup truck—a good cup of coffee and his antiques. But above all, he loved his plants and the people who shared the same dedication to growing." **GT**