

GROWERTALKS

GT in Brief

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In Memoriam: Dallas Johnson

Chris Beytes

GrowerTalks was saddened to hear that we lost Dallas Johnson, namesake of Dallas Johnson Greenhouses of Council Bluffs, Iowa, on January 7, after an illness. He was 78.

Dallas was born in Rapid City, South Dakota, and was an all-state football player at Brandon High School. A teacher, he was introduced to the greenhouse business through his wife Kay, whose parents had a greenhouse in Pipestone, Minnesota. Dallas caught the horticulture bug, and in 1964, he and Kay bought a flower shop in Madison, South Dakota. In 1967, they bought Red Oak Greenhouses in Red Oak, Iowa. His brother, Russell, joined him a few years later after serving in Vietnam.

In 1980, Dallas sold Red Oak to Russell and tried another business in Colorado, but that didn't work out. In 1985, he and Kay bought what became Dallas Johnson Greenhouses. Today his son, Todd, runs the business.

I can't claim to have known Dallas; I met him at his nursery in 2004 and remember him as a bigger-than-life character. I only have one photo (pictured): a blurry shot of him whizzing past me on a tow-motor, cigarette dangling between his lips. I recall he had a big laugh.

I wanted to know more about how Dallas came to be in the flower business, so I called Todd Johnson. He's the one who gave me the details above. I then asked for his own impression of his dad:

"He made a huge impression on me. He taught me the business from Day 1," Todd said. "I went to college for business, but I didn't know anything about the growing side of it. He taught me how to grow, he taught me how to run it ... he taught me everything I know about the business."

I mentioned Dallas' big personality. Todd agreed.

"He had a huge personality. He was bigger than life. I haven't met a person yet who, when I tell them I'm affiliated with Dallas Johnson Greenhouses, doesn't tell me a story about Dallas or inquire about him or say how much they love him."

As for that laugh, Todd called it iconic.

“You could tell he was in the room when you heard that laugh.”

I first learned of Dallas’s passing by Mike Gooder of Plantpeddler in Cresco, Iowa. Knowing Mike was good friends with Dallas, I asked for his memories of the man:

“He left a lasting impression wherever he went and with whomever he met,” replied Mike via email. “There are a select few with whom I have ever had the privilege of a friendship which can equate to Dallas. Actually, none are truly like him—and that is probably a good thing!

“He was hardworking, bold, brazen, fearless, innovative and always building. Although most only knew Dallas for his infamous laugh, I got to know his personal side. He and his family have grown to be close friends, especially during the time he lost his daughter, Shawn, in a plane crash in 2007. You see real leaders emerge at times like this; their strengths and vulnerabilities. He revealed the real Dallas: a caring man that believed first in family, then the business, and love for all things that involved these.

“Somewhere in the mix of life there was always time for golf; greenhouse guys need balance, you know. He leaves behind two legacies: one is his family, the other he built from the ground up, and is now run by his son and his family. He will be missed, but always loved for all he brought to those around him. Good luck, God!”

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