

GROWERTALKS

GT in Brief

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In Memoriam: Del Demaree

Chris Beytes

The floral industry lost a notable son on January 2 when Delmar “Del” Demaree Jr. passed away. Del was the chairman of Syndicate Sales, and past president of the Society of American Florists (SAF) and a past chairman of the American Floral Endowment. Del was 85.

Raised on farms in Michigan and Indiana in the '40s, Del's first taste of being an entrepreneur was when he sold chickens from the family farm door to door. His father spent four days a week farming and three days on the road selling giftware to florists. It was around this time that the family business was born. After high school, Del got married, started a family, served as a manufacturers rep for several hardgood companies and graduated from Indiana University.

During his early years with the family business, Del learned the values of stewardship and hard work, as well as honoring customers, creditors and employees. He also understood and modeled the importance of volunteerism and community service.

When his father retired in 1967, Del became president and greatly expanded the company's floral product lines. He also sought out solutions to other challenges. For instance, in 1981, to combat slowdowns in the supply chain, he formed Hurryin' Hoosier Transport, a delivery system that integrated customer route calling with weekly deliveries anywhere in the United States. Syndicate was the first company to use barcode shipping to add a new level of transparency, accountability and efficiency to the supply chain. Del also pushed Syndicate to become among the first in the industry to implement online ordering.

His leadership and service spanned across industry organizations as well, including SAF, where he served as president from 1981 to 1983; AFE, where he was chairman from 1992 to 1993; and the Wholesale Florist & Florist Supplier Association (WF&FSA), where he served as treasurer and director. Del was inducted into both SAF's and WF&FSA's Halls of Fame. He was also extremely active in his community of Kokomo, Indiana.

When he wasn't serving the floral industry and his community, Del took pride in being together with his family. He is survived by his wife, Libby, five children: Trip, Laura (a past AFE Chairwoman), John, Anne and Sarah, and 16 grandchildren.

A memorial tribute to Del has been established through the American Floral Endowment. Donations can be made online at endowment.networkforgood.com/projects/71074-donate-to-afe. **GT**