Doug Dillon, AAF: 1925 to 2010  (Public)
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In most businesses, there's usually the "numbers guy" and the "people person," but sometimes, if you're lucky, one person embodies both. Doug Dillon, AAF, was that rare exception — someone who could scan a balance sheet and immediately know what to do next almost as quickly as he could make someone he'd just met feel as if they'd been lifelong friends. Dillon's ease with friendships and finances are being remembered as the floral industry and the Dillon Floral Corporation family mourn the loss of their friend, mentor and leader. Dillon, 85, died Thursday, Sept. 30 at his home in Naples, Fla.

Diagnosed with cancer in March 2009, Dillon remained active until about a month ago — but never let the company his grandfather founded in 1875 in Bloomsburg, Pa., or the employees he considered family suffer from lack of attention.

Just the week before last, he checked in with Katy Miller, Dillon's vice president, who was attending SAF's convention, a familiar setting for the former SAF president and two-time industry award winner. Miller said she told him who was there and who asked about him, and he sent along good wishes to all.

"His positive attitude through his illness and strong will were an inspiration to his family as well as all of us in his Dillon Floral family," she said. "He was an unassuming, humble pillar of our industry; I have learned so much from Doug and Dorry both. When Doug was in the office, all was right in the world."

Miller is quick to acknowledge that her mentor would never have wanted the spotlight on himself. His commitment to celebrating — and teaching — others was evident in his many roles beyond Dillon Floral Corporation, where he was president from 1965 until 1991, when his son, Robert, took over.

As a grower and wholesaler of signature roses and other flowers and plants, Dillon served and was honored by the floral industry, both nationally and internationally.

In 1979, he began his two-year term as president of SAF, which gave him its Golden Bouquet Award (now called the Paul Ecke Jr., Award) in 1993 and inducted him into SAF's Floriculture Hall of Fame in 1994. He sat on the boards of directors of Roses Inc., Florists Mutual Insurance Company, the Fred C. Gloeckner Foundation and many more trade associations dedicated to the development of American florists, growers and wholesalers.

"Above everything I remember him as a true gentleman who always dealt with people with respect," said Peter Moran, SAF executive vice president and CEO. "He could glance at P&L sheet, and in seconds, ask a very thoughtful and in-depth question. I. He was such a positive person and after you first met him he made you feel like he knew you for a long time."

In the two years Dillon served as SAF president, Jim Wanko, who was the group's executive vice president at the time, was glad to have this steady calm presence at his side.

"I was a young man in my 30s and Doug taught me that, even in the toughest of situations with some of the seemingly most difficult people, you remain calm and treat everyone with respect and civility," Wanko said of the man he saw many times as "the voice of reason." "It was a steady calm presence at his side.

In the time how large a contribution Doug would make in effecting a smooth transition for all of the Gleekner managers and employees," Simone said of his mentor, gifting buddy and an eternal optimist.

When Del Demaree, AAF, of Syndicate Sales, was elected elected president of SAF in 1981, Dillon congratulated him and then immediately asked if another wholesaler, Sam Pennock, could serve as president for just one day. Pennock had beaten Demaree two years before to become the group's vice president, but a recent diagnosis of cancer prevented him from serving as president. "He said, 'It would mean a lot to me,'" Demaree said. "Doug was always a very thoughtful person and a loyal friend."

Dillon grew up in the industry, attending conventions as a kid and playing with other "flower children," while their parents were busy swapping success stories and business cards. Red Kennicott, AAF, was one of those kids, but his time scampering around the convention hotel halls was when Doug and Dorry were talking shop with his parents. Still, the Dillon operation made a lasting impression.

"I have vivid memories of handling hundreds of boxes of Dillon pompons at our wholesale house when I was in school in the 1950s. That was a time when there were few sources of pompons, and it was a big deal to ship them all the way from Pennsylvania to Chicago by rail," Kennicott said, alluding to the always innovative Dillon way of doing business. Kennicott joined Dillon on the SAF board in the late 70s. "He was always a gentleman of the highest character, and I considered him to be a great role model."
Another industry leader who credits Dillon with leading by example is J Schwanke, AAF, AIFD, PFCI. J’s father, Mel, preceded Dillon’s term as SAF president, and J remembers running with the “Dillon boys” at convention.

A few decades later, Schwanke said it was an honor to be invited to Bloomsburg for floral presentations and be “chauffered” back to the wholesale house by the company president and his dad’s lifelong friend.

It was always great to catch up on the industry with Doug and Dorry and hear of the innovative methods and ideas the Dillons were incorporating,” Schwanke said. “He and my father shared so many of the same values along with an enduring love and respect for the flower industry and all of us in it.”

Mel Schwanke, AAF, echoes the praise for his long-time friend and fellow floral leader, adding that Dillon could not only follow the highs and lows of business, but could also embrace a real roller coaster.

“One of my greatest memories about Doug and Dorry is when Joey and I went to Disney World together and we convinced the girls to ride the Omega track (in Space Mountain),” Mel said. “The girls told us if we made it out of there, they’d never listen to us again!”

Space Mountain-induced screams aside, the results of Dillon’s persuasiveness, Schwanke said, were always for the betterment of the industry.

“He just always had the entire industry in mind,” Schwanke said, “and worked very hard to reason things out and get things done.”

Dillon is survived by his wife, Dorry; three sons, John L. Dillon (Vivian) of Albuquerque, N.M.; Charles C. Dillon (Margy) of Questa, N.M. and Robert W. Dillon (fiancé Reneé) of Bloomsburg; seven grandchildren and two great-grandchildren Layla and Sidney Douglas.

Services will be held in Naples, Fla., at St. John’s Episcopal Church, Tuesday, October 5 at 11 a.m. Services in Bloomsburg, Pa. will be at St. Paul’s Episcopal Church on Saturday Oct. 9 at 11 a.m.

Flowers are graciously appreciated as an expression of love and sympathy.

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