

# floral management

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## REFLECTING ON A FIRST LADY

> Given how highly regarded the Society of American Florists is in Washington, D.C., for many of us, our March 26, 1990, visit to the White House did not seem so extraordinary. Back then, I was the president of SAF and we were invited there to induct First Lady Barbara Bush into the American Academy of Floriculture. This was not the first time SAF had walked this path. Years before, we'd also inducted Rosalynn Carter and Nancy Reagan.

No, what gave this early spring day such special significance was the gracious way Mrs. Bush received us. The genuine warmth of her smile, the way she welcomed each of us in the receiving line, the refreshments she served in the Yellow Oval Room — a reception area just below the Oval Office — all of this helped us feel, as Americans, that the White House was our home, and it was her honor to be our host.

Her characteristic sincerity came to mind while reading newspaper accounts of her funeral service in April. Addressing the mourners, her pastor, the Rev. Russell J. Levenson Jr., remarked, "What an interesting thing to be a confidant to a woman who has no secrets. What you saw was what you got."

Later in the service, her son Jeb Bush said, "We learned to strive, to be genuine and authentic by the best role model in the world."

It was the quality of authenticity — what you saw was what you got — that made each of us feel special that day at the White House.

The magnetism that bonded us with Mrs. Bush was twofold: our shared love of flowers and our common interest in families. Her love of flowers was evident everywhere we looked. Beautiful bouquets were placed throughout the White House.

From her remarks and the way she lived, we also knew she valued strong families in the same way we did. Namely, that strong families comprise the underlying core of America's strength and character. And here she was surrounded by a roomful of family business owners, the manifestation of what she, and we, held dear.

The personal experience of one of our industry members underscores her sincerity. Three years after our visit, Charles Kremp, AAF, of Kremp Florist

in Philadelphia, was exploring an industry opportunity, but one filled with considerable challenges. Gina, Charles' wife, thought of the challenges and uncertainty Mrs. Bush must have experienced as her husband ran for president. So she wrote Mrs. Bush at their Walker's Point residence in Kennebunkport, Maine, seeking advice. Within a week, a thoughtful, handwritten note of encouragement arrived in the Kremps' mailbox from Mrs. Barbara Bush. The reply was so personal in nature, it remains one of the Kremps' most valued possessions today.

Impromptu events create humorous memories in most families. Such was the case during our White House visit. In the previous week, President Bush had made an offhand, disparaging remark about broccoli that the press picked up. Addressing us, Mrs. Bush let us know the morning of our visit, the broccoli growers had come to the White House with a truckload of broccoli. They wanted the president to know it was being donated to local food banks in his name. We all shared a good laugh over this.

Industry members should go online and search for the New York Times article on Mrs. Bush's funeral. The lead photo has three main components: the casket, the Bush grandsons walking beside the casket as pallbearers, and us, floral industry family members represented by a lovely, pastel casket piece. Thinking back on our 1990 visit, seeing those flowers felt like a warm goodbye hug to a dear family member. A family friend we will always love and cherish. 🌸



**J. Sten Crissey, AAF**, is a former SAF president. In 2006, he retired from Crissey's Flowers in Seattle, his family's 65-year-old business. He is a member of the Floriculture Hall of Fame. [stencrissey@gmail.com](mailto:stencrissey@gmail.com)

### GO DEEPER

See a photo of Crissey's visit with Mrs. Bush at [safnow.org/moreonline](http://safnow.org/moreonline).