

The Hobby Loses Another Great One

By Jim Bender

I was contacted on this past Sunday March 29th by Andrew Vuono with some shocking news.

I learned that his father Mark Vuono had been shot and killed Saturday during a robbery at the family jewelry store called Marco Jewelers, a business Mark had started nearly fifty years ago. I still have not come to terms with this yet even as I write this article. It seems so unreal to me.

Mark, Jim Berry, Rich Ciralli and I had just sat a few weeks ago in a restaurant in Baltimore for hours laughing and visiting as we often would do at bottle shows.

After a day passed by, I knew I had to be the one to write the tribute article for Mark. I knew he would want me to. A few years ago, I wrote the article on Dick Watson, another dear friend when he passed. Mark had told me he really liked what I had to say. I never realized I would have to go down this path again.

We all know of the legendary collection that the Vuono family amassed over fifty years. As Mark would always tell everyone: "they are my father's bottles," or "they are the family bottle." You never heard the words "my bottles" come from his mouth. Anyone who ever saw the collection will tell you there will never be another collection like it again. It was a labor of love passed down from father to son.

In 2017 at the Springfield National show I was able to nominate and get voted into the Hall of Fame, Mark and his father Charlie together. This was no easy task, but I knew and had been told by Mark that he did not want to be in the Hall of Fame without his dad.

So, I was lucky enough to get it done for them. They both belong there together for history to remember them. There is a plaque in the upstairs bottle room dedicating the collection to his dad. That is the kind of man Mark was.



Mark Vuono and part of the family collection

At this point in time I could care less about those bottles and now I would like to share with you the man I called my friend.

I first met Mark at one of Norm Hecklers barn sale auctions some 10 to 12 years ago or more.

I spoke to him about his father and how he had made me feel good one day as a kid at a bottle show. I was maybe 12 years old, and was looking at a half pint flask that was priced at \$50.00. Charlie stopped and saw me looking at it and told me what it was and everything about it. I had no idea who he was at the time, just some nice old guy. After that from time to time, Charlie would see me at a show and say hi. Then one day I opened the bottle magazine and saw Charlie's photo and he had bought a flask at Skinners auction for a world record price. Now you must imagine me as a boy saying I know that guy! It was like knowing Superman of bottles.

Mark invited me to come see his dad's bottles so I decided to pay him a visit. This was one of the best things I have ever done in



Mark Vuono standing next to his framed stamp that he helped with.

my life. You see, I saw great bottles, but I also found a great human who would become a dear friend.

Over the years I watched Mark teach anyone and everyone whatever he knew about American flasks. He was very humble about his knowledge, and I will tell you there is no man on this planet that will ever know as much about American flasks as Mark did. He wrote countless articles about them to share the knowledge he had. Every bottle but a few in the articles were from the family collection. He would write "I know of one example," but he never said he had it.

Here again, Mark was a humble man always. When we would sit at a bottle show and someone would show him a bottle from their collection which was super rare, they would say this is the best one of these known. Mark would say yes it really is a great bottle. Most of the time the one he had home was better. I asked him about that one day and he said he learned that from Blaske during a visit to his house with his father. Charlie had brought a flask to show Blaske, and he told Charlie it was one of the nicest ones he had ever seen. Later that afternoon Mark and Charlie saw the one Blaske had, and it was ten times better than theirs. Mark said he realized then how much class Blaske had and he wanted to be like that.

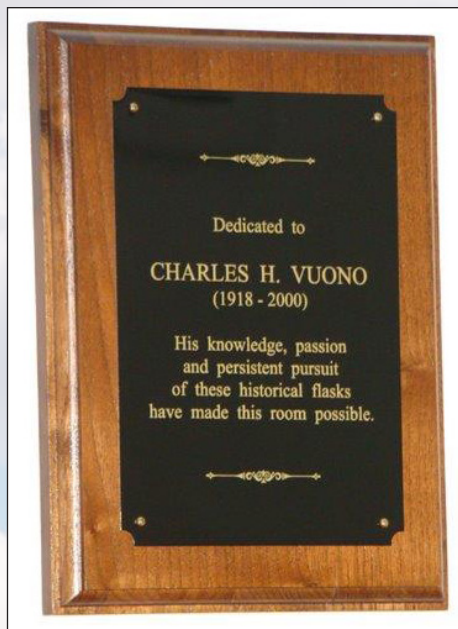
When I was collecting Union Clasp Hands flasks and one would come to auction, Mark would never bid against me. Even if he needed it for the collection. He would tell me I will never bid against you. If he did, he would win every time. It was not always about the bottles with Mark.

Mark understood what real friendship was. When I decided to

sell my Union flask collection I knew where it belonged and that is where it went, to the Vuono collection. I had many people tell me they would have bought it or paid me more. They did not understand that many of the best bottles in the collection were there because of Mark. You see, Mark and I both understand the friendship thing.

Mark, along with his wonderful wife Annie, had an open door for me and anyone I would like to bring down. Over the years I took many people to see the collection, and every time we were treated with the greatest respect and given lunches second to none. It doesn't matter to the Vuono family where you work or how much you have or make. They just like people and treat everyone the same. This is something I admire in them. I guess that's how the family business has lasted so long. During many visits I can tell you I never looked at the bottles, and Mark and I just visited while the people or person I brought would look. Another thing was that Mark felt the bottles should be handled and enjoyed. Many times, I heard him say to somebody, this is not a museum, take it out and look at it when someone would ask a question about a certain bottle.

Sometimes I would go in the kitchen and visit with Annie who was truly Mark's love of his life. Many times, he told me he was blessed to have her. Annie told me one day when she saw the relationship that Mark had with his dad, she knew that was the man for her, and she was right. Mark loved his wife and kids as much as anyone could. He would tell me how proud he was of his sons, Andrew and David. The only thing I feel sad about is he never got to have a grandchild, which was something he often spoke about. He also knew that it had to be right when it happened.



This plaque hangs in Mark's upstairs bottle room. It is a sign of love and respect for his father who started it all. Never again will a collection of Flasks this size and quality ever be assembled

The Mark that I knew and grew to love like a brother was a kind, caring, polite, generous hard-working man. Everything Mark had he earned and did it with the help of his wife and sons. The beautiful home they shared was mostly built by Mark himself. He would chop his firewood from downed trees around the neighborhood. Let me tell you he knew how to stack firewood. The stack's as straight and perfect as you could ever imagine. He also knew how to build a stonewall fence as his yard was surrounded by them, and Mark took great pride in his work.

Not too long ago we were talking, and he told me it took him a lot longer to do the walls now. He said he would work a little and then stop. He said his knees were bothering him.

You see Mark was the oldest hockey referee on the ice when he retired from that part of his life. I believe he was 64 at the time. Many people never knew Mark even skated.

I could sit here and go on and on about my friend Mark, and how nice and wonderful a person he was. Mark will live on in my memories and the memories of the many people he touched.



Mark Vuono and father Charlie talking and enjoying a bottle show circa 1985

I will miss him more than you ever could believe and if I am very lucky someday, we will see each other again and talk about everything we did before.

Not to sound like my mother but if you have something you really want to do in life you should do it. Life can end in a minute and you may not get the chance. The next time you're at a show and someone wants to visit, take a minute and visit. There will always be another bottle to buy, and you may not get that chance to visit again. Over the past few years I had become so busy I missed out on some trips to see Mark. Thank goodness a few months ago I just stopped from life and went down to see him. I will remember that day now forever.

I have also asked a few other of Mark's friends to add their comments to this article. I am sure many people would have liked to but with the publishing deadline, and this being last minute I was only able to contact a few. Please feel free to send a letter to the editor so we can share your thoughts in the next issue.

I will close by saying: Goodbye Mark, I will miss you and I loved you like a brother.

Bob and Marianne Strickhart

When Jim Bender and I co-chaired the 2017 FOHBC National show in Springfield, Jimmy proposed the idea of inducting Mark and his father Charlie into the hall of fame. It was the right move, enough said.

I write and speak about the "bottle family" quite a bit. It's not just words, it's real for me. Many years ago, I was invited to Mark

and Annie's house for a visit. Dick Watson accompanied Marianne and me for that visit and while I had known Mark for some time and enjoyed his company, it was my first visit to see the "stuff" and I never imagined the mind blowing collection I was privileged to see. The flasks were superb, but what I remember most was the warm and welcoming feeling I had in Mark and Annie's home. Like the truly great collectors, Mark never bragged or boasted of what is the finest collection of flasks I've ever seen, and was so willing to answer questions and share what he knew with us all. His knowledge of American Historical Flasks was unrivaled, no one knew his stuff like Mark. He was a straight up guy, full of fun and energy, down to earth and honestly real. Funny how you remember things; I recall that during that first visit when we were eating in the kitchen this terrific feast he had arranged, I had a bit of everything there was to offer on my plate. Mark liked that, he said "you like to try everything and eat well!" I knew I was in the right company.

It was the first of many visits to Connecticut, and he and Annie came to New Jersey a time or two to share in bottle talk but most importantly just the friendship we shared. Mark and I are a year apart in age and we saw eye to eye on most everything. We always laughed and enjoyed our times together when visiting, at shows or on the phone.

The laughter is gone now. It has been stolen from us by a senseless act and our bottle family is hurt, really hurt. I've been around long enough to know that this grief we share can only be somewhat healed with time and prayer. I pray that God can send peace and healing to Annie, Andrew and David. I also pray that we can all get to a time when we don't cry when we think of Mark, but smile a bit



Mark Vuono and son Andrew talking and enjoying a bottle show at the Cleveland, Ohio National.

for the wonderful times we shared. I am thankful for being given the opportunity of knowing this man, a pillar of the bottle family, and the reMarkable privilege of being able to call him my friend.

Jeff Ullman

Mark Vuono was my friend. Many people can say that, and that is a tribute we all hope can be said of us when our time comes.

My first visit to the Vuono home was with my usual bottle buddies Jim Bender and Jim Berry. They had both been there before. I can still remember Mark taking me case to case explaining the collection. That downstairs room is just jaw dropping whether it's your first visit or tenth visit. I'm a mineral water collector and not as knowledgeable on flasks as many of you guys, but he always took time to answer my questions. I sat on the couch looking at the cases and said, "This is an awesome collection Mark!" He just smiled and said, "Well let's go upstairs and see the other half then." I was just blown away! I also think he got a big kick out of listening to Bender, Berry & me busting on each other about all the stupid stories we had. It was always a good time!

Mark and Annie were so gracious. We always went away feeling good and of course well fed! After my first visit, before we left, Mark brought out a small book and asked me to sign it. Apparently, he and his father had asked everyone who visited for the first time to sign it with the date and comment on your favorite bottle in the collection. I put down his yellow green, gloppy, crude Albany Glass Works pint. He read it and smiled. He said, "That's interesting Jeff, that was one of my father's favorites too." I always remember that for some reason.

Annie, you're the best! I always loved our conversations too! I hope to sometime soon be able to give you a hug a tell you in person what I'm trying to say here. My deepest condolences to you and the whole Vuono family. Mark was my friend and always will be.

Matt Lacy

Mark Vuono was more than a great friend and mentor, he was family. Mark was not only a great teacher and story teller, but a life coach. He poured his passion and knowledge into those that knew him. He invested a part of himself into each one of us by sharing his kindness and wisdom. Mark was humble and made time for everyone. He cared deeply about others. Mark was truly the greatest of all time. Many of us that knew him are blessed by the time and memories we share. A tribute to Mark would be to carry on the Vuono legacy by investing in others, encouraging new collectors, enjoying the great friendships we have, and sharing our knowledge with others. Mark's legacy lives on through us all.

Jim and Val Berry

I have known Mark for many years. He was always gracious and friendly to my wife and I every time we visited. Every trip to Mark and Annie's home was a different experience, and their home was always open to anyone who wanted to visit. I went with Jim Bender most of the time. Mark would greet us at the door and say "Here come Abbott and Costello!" That was the nickname Mark gave to Jim and I - although I don't know why!

We would visit with Mark and Annie for hours and never get bored. We heard so many interesting and funny stories. Mark was the only man I knew who could tell you off the top of his head what McKearin's group numbers were for every flask.

As many times that I visited, I would sit and look over the "greatest flask collection ever assembled" and I would see something new to me every time! When we went to shows, we would always look for Mark and Andrew, later meeting up for lunch or dinner.

Mark has been a great friend and fellow collector and will certainly be missed by all who knew him. Our deepest sympathy goes out to Annie, David and Andrew.

