

Mark Vuono May Be Gone, but Will Never Be Forgotten

*A tragedy for his family,
his friends, and the hobby*

Edited by Ralph Finch

Mark Vuono meant so much to so many. Like a great smile from a man who shared his time and expertise with everyone, whether seasoned flask collector or a brand-new hobbyist. A man with a wonderful family, which included many hundreds of people across the entire country.

In 2017, both Mark and his famous father, Charles, were inducted into the FOHBC's Hall of Fame, honoring them for their "continuing contributions to the antique bottle hobby."

But on March 29 the local newspaper blared: "Mark Vuono, 69, owner of Marco Jewelers in Stamford, Conn., was fatally shot at his store during an afternoon robbery, police said. According to reports, a customer entered the 6th Street store and discovered Vuono suffering from apparent fatal gunshot injuries around 2:30 p.m. Saturday."

The next day, the local newspaper, as well as local TV stations, noted that Mark: "was a fiercely devoted family man who loved his country and was deeply trusted by his customers," and "The Stamford community is mourning." Now, the hobby is mourning.

Mark's father, Charles H. Vuono, predeceased him by more than a decade.

Mark is survived by his wonderful wife, Annie, and their sons, Andrew and David. It was only last October that Mark's mother, Grace, died at the age of 96.

For the *Maine Antique Digest* I wrote a long obituary for Charles (which the family framed and placed on the wall). I never imagined that I would ever write one for Mark. Mark was much more than being just mere mortal, to the hobby he was a giant. He was everywhere, at many shows, often on Facebook, and a steadfast regular columnist for *Antique Bottle & Glass Collector* magazine.

For many of us "old-time" collectors, a highlight of our hobby memories will always be the first time we were invited to the Vuono home and swooned as we stood in awe before the incredible flask collection put together by the family.

And you weren't just welcomed as inconveniences, nor as friends, but like old friends. Family couldn't get a warmer welcome. A favorite memory was when a dozen people were invited to visit, and another collector heard of it. Thinking it was an "open house," which it wasn't, he just showed up, uninvited. Still, the Vuonos brought him in with their usual warmth, and the guy got the bottle tour of his life.

A few friends add passing thoughts:

John Pastor and Liz Maxbauer: "We were profoundly saddened to learn of Mark's passing. Our hearts go out to his family; Annie, Andrew and David. It is a tragic loss for not only his family, but also for the hobby and everyone who had the privilege of knowing him.

"It is virtually impossible to over-emphasize the love and respect that fellow collectors had for Mark. His passing has left a void that can never, will never, be filled. The bottle world grieves at the loss of this incredible person, friend, fellow collector, teacher and mentor that Mark was to untold numbers of collectors, whether young or old, novice or veteran. Mark was, without question, one of the greatest ambassadors that this hobby has ever known.

"Liz and I have countless special memories of Mark and his family that we will always cherish. Mark was a dear friend, a mentor and leader in every conceivable way.

"My late father and I were set up next to Mark and his father, Charlie, thirty-six years ago at the 1984 FOHBC Montgomery EXPO. That is my first recollection of meeting Mark. Both Mark and

his father were true gentlemen and we thoroughly enjoyed meeting them.

“At the time, I was a poor, starving college student and quickly spent all of the money that I had at the show. At the end of the show, Mark and his father gave us a Udolpho Wolfe’s Schnapps bottle that we had admired on their table. I still have that bottle today and cherish it for that memory.

“We all have to keep in mind that it is the people, not the glass, that have made this hobby great. Especially during times like this, we all have to be mindful of the fragility of life, appreciate the time that we have, and hold close the memories of those whom we have lost.”

Jeff and Holly Noordsy: “Just getting my thoughts together after a fitful night’s sleep. It’s inconceivable that Mark is gone and I first want to pass along my deepest sympathies to Annie, Andrew and David. He loved you all very much.

“I met Mark in the mid-to-late ’90s when he purchased a colored Washington-Taylor quart that Holly and I were offering on eBay. Knowing the Vuono name, I was flabbergasted that he would buy anything from us. I immediately packed the flask and sent it to Stamford for his approval. Several days later I received a long and gracious note from Mark thanking me for sending the flask before he had even had a chance to write a check and letting me know that he loved the bottle. Mark was deeply appreciative that I would send a flask of this value (\$1,150 if I recall) without having been paid, and he would introduce me to folks by telling them this story. (Quite frankly, I think he thought I was nuts :-))

“Over the years I was fortunate enough to spend many hours at Mark and Annie’s. They were fabulous hosts and, of course, the flasks are beyond compare.

“One of my greatest memories of Mark came when he moved the flasks from his Mom’s home and merged them with his



TOP: From left to right are Mark Vuono, Carl Pratt, and Mark’s father, Charles Vuono, circa 1985.

BOTTOM: One of your reporter’s proudest items, this stunning sheet of U.S. stamps issued in 1999, and autographed to me by Mark Vuono. The stamps show different methods of American glassmaking, including pressed glass, free-blown glass, and art glass. Several of the free-blown pieces shown are from the Vuono collection.

own collection. As most of you will recall, the flasks were displayed in Mrs. Vuono's basement and one day she called to let Mark know that the basement was flooding. Mark went to the house and found that the flasks housed on the lower two shelves were literally floating in the knee deep water. Amazingly, only one flask was damaged (a blue Washington-Taylor quart, I believe) but the decision was soon made to move the flasks to Mark's safer and more secure location."

Tom Lines: "The heart-wrenching news I heard about Mark's passing has left me hollow.

"I don't remember the first time I met Mark but I know it would have been with his dad Charlie at a show somewhere. The time I recall most vividly was at the Mansfield Show in the early 1980s when they came by my table and commented about a flask on my table. It was a pint Washington-Taylor in a deep cherry puce with an applied top.

"We talked about the flask for a minute or two when Mark asked "Why are you selling this one?" I replied that I was preparing for an upcoming auction by selling a few top-shelf pieces. Charlie responded "Well it must be a killer piece you're wanting because this is an exceptional flask." Mark added "I would put this one back on my shelf if I were you because you don't know if you'll even get the one you're after." Sage advice for my young collecting ears.

"I re-boxed my flask and kept it a number of more years, and, as Mark speculated, the item I wanted went above my limits anyway!

"I was fortunate to visit his home back in the spring of 2001 when I went north to bid on the purple Corn For The World out of the Merritt Vanderbilt auction. Mark was the perfect host and friend that I will miss. I send my heartfelt condolences to Annie and the boys (men) along with prayers for peace and comfort."

Bob Stern: "Mark and I had essentially no interaction between the late '70s and a brief meeting two years ago at the Baltimore show, where he remembered me from the Courtney Sale at Garth's (in Delaware, Ohio). We communicated a few times after that and then, because my son lives in Stamford, I called him last August when we were in town visiting. He left work and met me at his house.

"We spent two-and-a-half hours together and it was one of the most special encounters I've ever experienced. It was as if we had been the closest of friends for the



An image of Mark standing next to one of his beautiful display cases of Historical Flasks.

past forty years. Mark talked about how thrilled he was that I had come to visit and he couldn't have been more gracious. I told him how truly grateful I was for his warm welcome and heartfelt hospitality.

"We shared so much during those few hours that day, packing in the forty years that we had missed. We talked a few times after my visit, always trying to figure out a time we could get together again. I feel a deep sadness due to the loss of a long-time friend, despite the decades between our actual times together."

Kim and Mary Kokles: "We are so, so sorry to hear of Mark Vuono's passing,

especially in such a senseless act. When Mary and I jumped back into bottles, there was no one kinder and more welcoming than Mark.

"He freely shared his knowledge and time with a couple who needed guidance at that time, and we immediately felt like we had known him forever. I cannot imagine Mark being any less than what we saw in him — a good family man, a man who always made you feel welcome with his smile, an avid collector with no hidden agenda when sharing information, a man who thought he could never feed you enough, and a man with a kind spirit. Even though it felt like we had known him forever, we have regrets we did not.

"I don't think I ever met someone who seemed like a friend so quickly. I think it is easy to see the impression he left on us and he will never be forgotten. Our legacy will be to treat others as he treated us. We hope it helps to know how he was thought about as a member of his bottle community, but more importantly, as a member of humankind."

The quotes below were edited from Facebook:

Helena VonDrakenstein: "I have been in the hobby since 1969 and have heard his name mentioned many times over the years. I never knew him, but for sure can understand his passion. Sadly I will never have the chance to meet him in person."

Dana Charlton: "Mark Vuono. A man whose name and memory will be written in bottle collecting history as an icon of the hobby. Mark was humble, generous with his time and knowledge, brilliant, charming, honest, and special."

"I knew Mark for over forty years, and he, his family, and I were friends. I always enjoyed visiting with Mark at bottle shows and at his and Annie's home to see his flask collection. Those are treasured highlights."

“The news of Mark’s passing is sorrowful beyond words. I will miss Mark’s flask posts – always something sublime – his coveted compliments on mine, and his beautifully written magazine articles.”

Mike Stephano: “Measure a man by his character, not by his possessions, but by the strength of his words, and how he faces the world. Mark, as my friend, above all things was a statesman. A spokesman for our hobby, an icon to all. Mark’s character was one that accepted and encouraged all collectors, even the younger starry-eyed kind that I was the first time I set foot in his home so many years ago. His warmth and that of his wife, Annie, and his boys, Andrew and David, to open their home so often as they did to any who wished to come, to spend time, to laugh, to eat, to drink, to spin tales, to bond and to share in the huge well of knowledge and experience that he had acquired himself, through his father before him, and the many pioneers of our hobby at the time. Mark, you’ve been my mentor and friend for quite some time now. I hurt for your family, such a tragic end, for myself and the sense of loss I feel, for all of us who had the privilege of knowing you and spending time with you through all these years, sharing in your love of the hobby, of friendship and family.”

Jack Stecher: “So very sorry to wake up this morning and hear that such a great man has passed. I was privileged several years ago to visit his home and view his collection while on our way to a Coventry show. Although not a flask collector personally, I was amazed to see such a beautiful collection. Mark took time to describe many of the flasks and what historical background they possess. A special day to remember. Mark and his wife were very gracious and welcoming people.”

Greg Sweet: “I remember placing a bid on eBay for a scroll flask. Mark messaged me and said he saw that I was interested in the scroll. He said what I had bid was too high for that flask and suggested waiting until another came along. So I



Mark, standing next to the stamp, “Mold Blown Glass”, that he helped make a reality. Three of the items depicted on the stamp are from the Vuono collection.

watched the flask and as I remember it finally went for quite a bit more.”

“About a week later Mark contacted me asking if I still had an interest in the flask. He said he had one for sale and it was mint. I bought it, and for less money. Who does that other than a true gentleman who loves to see people thrive in such a hobby.”

Daniel Baldwin: “I remember the first time I visited with Mark and Annie, I was a young collector with a focus on bitters and inks. I was awestruck. I recall sitting on the couch just staring at what was in front of me, overwhelmed and nervous. Mark encouraged me to study, note the differences within molds, and was more than willing to answer any question I could throw at him.”

“I thought I had overstayed my welcome, but no such thing. Annie had prepared food.”

“Each and every time I visited after, Mark was more than patient, inviting and willing to teach. I wish I had visited more, an open invitation was always on the table.

With Mark’s advice and direction, just over a year ago I seriously started acquiring better flasks. Mark was a mentor, and a friend. And, in general, one of best I have had the pleasure of knowing.”

Louise Krasniewicz: “I knew him in high school when we dated for several years! What you are saying about him now was true then. He was fun and kind and generous. Fifty years later and I still remember details of our good times together, including freezing at his hockey games, his bravery wearing a pink sweater when no other guy would dare do that, that fancy yellow car, and his love of languages, especially French.”

Jamie Houdeshell: “I’m not sure when I first met Mark and his father but it would have been sometime in the 1970s, when I was a teenager. These men were class personified. I was carrying a flask back to my table at the 1984 Montgomery show and I remember Mark asking me what I had purchased. I don’t remember the flask anymore but I remember Mark being genuinely interested in what a 21-year-old collector had purchased. That is what I mean by class.”

Michael E. Anderson: “Having been in the bottle collecting community for fifty years, I certainly knew Mark Vuono and his deep passion for collecting. I never had any real conversations with him over the years, as we did not share the same passion for flasks and yet I saw him almost everywhere I went. I will never forget how nice of a person he was and he will be remembered in my eyes for his infectious smile and propensity for his professional character. Always, always, always the professional.”

Dave Kam: “I was a novice flask collector and only knew Mark from the Facebook pages. I met him a couple months later at the Manchester national show. His speech about the hobby that weekend was very inspirational and his love for sharing his knowledge was undeniable. After that show we became friends and I now own several fine flasks because of his generosity. He was a true patriarch of the hobby and just a fine human being.”

Robert Girouard: “The first time I ever saw Mark he was with his dad, sitting front row center at a Skinner’s auction bidding on flasks in the Edmund Blaske sale back in 1983. I was sitting right behind him and I sat there in awe, watching him and his father buy flask after flask and competing for nothing but the best of the collection.

“I was a newbie back then, going home with two common flasks, \$50 apiece. I never met Mark or his father on that day but came to know Mark soon after that auction. Mark’s enthusiasm for early bottles and glass was contagious and we shared countless wonderful conversations over the years about a subject that we both loved so much.

“Mark was not only generous with his knowledge, he was eager to share it with anybody who showed interest, especially new collectors. Mark was the kind of person and collector we should all aspire to be. So if anything good can come from this senseless tragedy, let Mark’s memory

inspire all of us to live up to his standard and to be the kind, sharing and generous person that Mark so clearly was.”

Mike Newman: “Mark Vuono was such a genuine guy, and so open with his hospitality along with Annie, Andrew, and David. To be such an icon and the biggest fish in the bottle hobby pond, his modest and uplifting disposition made all of us feel like our mediocre collections were at a level right there with him. Even when we had a bunch of clunkers.”

Rich Tucker: “I first met Mark at the National Bottle Show in Las Vegas in 1988. It was Mark and his father, Charles. I was a new collector with a lot to learn, and I soon learned that Mark was a great mentor. We crossed paths at many bottle shows and the old live auctions. I learned to seek him out to learn about flasks and collectors. He always said “every flask has a story.”

“And then there were the open houses held in conjunction with Norm’s barn sale and the Keene bottle shows. Annie loaded the kitchen with mounds of wonderful food and Mark held court in the bottle rooms. This huge two generation collection is such a treat to visit but so enhanced by the knowledgeable host.

“Even a new collector with a beginner’s question would always be carefully answered by Mark Vuono, a trained teacher in his first career. This is born out in his many articles about historical flasks in the *Antique Bottle* magazine. I was always amazed at how he knew in whose collections great rare flasks resided and who had which colors of that flask. An amazing memory meant for storytelling and history lessons.

“It’s fortunate that Andrew has acquired a love and knowledge of the collection and it would be wonderful if it becomes a third generation legacy.

Antonio Picadio: “Mark’s face tells you everything you need to know about him. In the 18th century, when a man would

come into a great fortune, they would say he had been placed at ease. Mark’s is the face of a man who had been placed at ease, not by a great inheritance, but by a great life.

“When I first became interested in historical flasks, I kept hearing about Mark Vuono and his collection. So, one day I called him, introduced myself, and asked if I could visit him and see his collection. Of course, he immediately invited me to his home. I arrived a few days later about ten in the morning and was greeted by that smiling gentle face.

“His wife was out of the country, so it was just the two of us. Except for a break for a wonderful lunch, we spent the entire day talking about historical flasks. Mostly he talked and I listened.

“You spend a day like that with a man, you learn a lot about him. I learned that Mark’s knowledge of the field was inexhaustible. I learned that he derived great joy in sharing that knowledge with others. But I also learned that he was a good man, content with his life, who enjoyed other people and had a deep sense of honor. He was a gentleman.

“I considered him both a friend and a mentor who I will really miss. He enriched my life.”

“Measure a man by his character, not by his possessions, but by the strength of his words, and how he faces the world. Mark, as my friend, above all things was a statesman. A spokesman for our hobby, an icon to all.”
