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Grape pioneer Robert (Bobby) Bianco dies unexpectedly

By

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March 16, 2021

Longtime grape grower and co-owner of Anthony Vineyards Robert (Bobby) Bianco died unexpectedly at 78 on March 6 after undergoing a routing medical procedure.

Mr. Bianco, along with his brother Dominic (Cookie) Bianco, was long associated with Sun World Inc.

and was credited with being the first commercial grower of the red Flame Seedless grape in the mid-1970s. The brothers Bianco vertically integrated in the 1990s when they established Anthony Vineyards as a shipping operation as well as grower entity. Over the years, Anthony Vineyards established extensive operations in both the San Joaquin Valley and Coachella Valley.

Though the two brothers worked closely together and were involved in all aspects of the operation, longtime Sales Manager John Hartley told *The Produce News* that Cookie Bianco was a bit more involved on the administrative side while Bobby Bianco focused more of his energies on the growing operations. They also split the duties along a geographic divide as Bobby lived in the Coachella Valley since 1965 and took care of the desert production, which includes dates, peppers and citrus, along with grapes. Hartley said Bobby Bianco was still very actively involved in the Coachella Valley farming operation on a day-to-day basis, along with his son, Anthony Bianco.

Anthony Vineyards has long been a proponent of organic farming with both Cookie and Bobby being active promoters of that sustainable method of farming. More than 50 percent of their acreage is devoted to organics.

Community involvement for Mr. Bianco and his late wife, Harlene, included contributions to the Boys and Girls Club, Big Brother Little Sisters of the Desert, Desert Arc, the formation of Palm Valley School and expanding and supporting many churches in the area. Mr. Bianco also had a love for golf, serving on the board for the Southwestern Growers Tournament and he played in the Bob Hope Desert Classic, when it went by that name years ago. Hartley said Mr. Bianco was in excellent shape continuing to play golf two to three times a week up to his death.

Mr. Bianco is survived by his son, Anthony Bianco, and daughter, Francesca Gist, and six grandchildren who all reside in the Coachella Valley. He also leaves behind other relatives including his partner and brother Cookie Bianco.

Bianco's life will be remembered Saturday, March 20 at 10 a.m. at Sacred Heart Church.

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