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Baisch and Skinner celebrate 70th anniversary

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THE HISTORY OF FLORAL ROW

While the flower wholesale market has always had roots in St. Louis history, it wasn't always associated with its LaSalle Street address on floral row that it's known for today. Beginning in 1890, Wholesale houses for the sale of flowers were located primarily on the streets of Olive and Pine in downtown. This was the case due to the proximity of nearby greenhouses and easily accessible street cars.



Between 1890 and 1926, there were nearly 25 different start-up wholesale florists on record. Important in the promotion of St. Louis as a nationally recognized Flower City was the opening of the retail firm of Grimm and Gorly in 1905. With their coined phrase "We give

the earth with every plant,” they gave out free flowers, tagged with their name and slogan to every convention in town letting everyone know they were from St. Louis, “The Flower Town.” The wholesale flower market gained greatly from their exposure of flowers and availability to the public.

Then, in late 1926 the land around and including the Pine Street wholesale businesses was cleared and redeveloped, forcing the St. Louis Wholesale Flower Market to find a new location. In 1927, construction began on a single building that was divided into 11 sections, each divided by a tile wall that ran from the basement to the second floor. To this day, floral row still calls this location home.

BEGINNING OF BAISCH AND SKINNER

After years of working for Herman Orth Company, Art Baisch and Roy Skinner collected funds to form Baisch and Skinner Wholesale Florists on 2721 LaSalle Street in July 1952. Baisch came from a family of florists. His father, Albert, owned a greenhouse in West County until he sold it during the depression.

When Baisch and Skinner opened, the company rented 3,700 square feet of space, half of what was then the Clayton Rose Company. Baisch worked hard to turn his fledgling company, that mainly consigned flowers, into the place of stature that it holds today in the St. Louis Wholesale Flower Market. In 1962, they opened the Baisch and Skinner Annex on LaSalle Street in what was once a dairy barn to handle supplies. In 2007, Baisch and Skinner acquired Stuppy Wholesale, adding locations in Kansas City, Springfield, Topeka and Wichita. Additional locations in Quincy, Illinois, and Cape Girardeau, Missouri, rounded out the seven locations of Baisch and Skinner today.

HONORING AN OLD FRIEND

The company name, Baisch and Skinner, has always remained the same since the very beginning. Currently, brothers Bob and John Baisch carry on their father’s legacy and are very much involved with the daily operations. But tragically Art Baisch’s partner, Roy Skinner, died from a brain aneurism only a year and a half after it began in 1952. Some companies may have rebranded or changed the name after such an incident still in its infancy stages, but Art felt differently. A lot of hard work, time, and energy went into their effort to save enough to start their venture together. For Art, this was a true life-long partnership, both business and personal. Ultimately, he decided to keep the Baisch and Skinner name in memory of Roy.

LINDA KAY LEARNING CENTER – A TOUCHING TRIBUTE

Baisch and Skinner opened their Linda Kay Learning Center to facilitate design shows enhancing customer’s knowledge of the floral industry and serve as a training and meeting center for employees. The learning center was named in honor of one of Art and Ruby Baisch’s daughters, Linda Kay Baisch Ferleman, who passed in 1994.

Linda was a “pioneer” of sorts in a male dominated wholesale industry in the 70s and 80s. She believed in educating our customers on the new design and product trends. She was a corporate buyer and well respected throughout the industry by suppliers, vendors, and customers alike.

We remember her fondly every time we walk through the doors of the Linda Lay Learning Center.

LAST ONE STANDING: BAISCH AND SKINNER TODAY

Of the original 11-or-so wholesale florists that once lined the streets of the 2700 block of LaSalle, Baisch and Skinner is one of the few left standing. That's not to say they haven't had their share of hardships. Emerging technologies in the digital age and the rise of ecommerce led to their new webstore making ordering easier and accessible 24/7. Perhaps one of the greatest challenges has been surviving a pandemic.

"We offered curbside pick-up, like everyone else, but flowers are very delicate in nature. You have to see and smell the flowers. Pick up and feel for quality. Not being able to do that was a real struggle. The trust between a customer and their salesperson really came into play. In the end, the relationships with our customers strengthened because of this," reflects John Baisch, President.

While no one knows for sure what the future holds, with such deep roots in the St. Louis Wholesale Flower Market, for Basich and Skinner it sure is looking bright.

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