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4M Fruit Distributor founder Mark DeFrancesco dies

By

Tim Linden

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Mark DeFrancesco, founder and president of 4M Fruit Distributors in Chelsea, MA, died on Friday, Feb. 17, of undetermined causes at the age of 71.

Mr. DeFrancesco was born on March 25, 1951 and grew up in Salem, MA, graduating from Salem High School in 1969. He then went on to attend Bryant & Stratton Commercial School majoring in marketing. He was acquainted with the produce industry at a young age, working at John DeFrancesco & Sons, the family fruit and produce wholesale distributor, founded in 1918. As a young man, he managed a family-owned retail store before moving to the family's wholesale business.

He worked in the New England Produce Center for a couple of different companies in the 1980s and 90s and operated a transportation company with his brother. In 1996, Mark and Maria DeFrancesco established 4M Fruit Distributors as a wholesale produce business in the New England Produce Center in Chelsea, MA, specializing in grapes.

In 2000, Mr. DeFrancesco partnered with Louis (Simmy) Simonelli to expand the product line to include stone fruit and citrus. Jamie DiVola, who joined 4M in 1997, one year after it opened, told The Produce News that the company continued to expand its domestic and imported fruit offerings over the years, and today it carries an extensive line of products including grapes, stone fruit, citrus, berries, melons, apples and many specialty fruit products as well. "But grapes are still number one," he said.

DiVola said that while Mr. DeFrancesco had been taking it a bit easier in recent years, he was still materially involved in all aspects of the operation and was working full-time at his death. Mr. DeFrancesco's wife, Maria, as well as their two sons, Michael and Matthew, continue to work at 4M Fruit Distributors, with Maria now taking over the lead role.

Mr. DeFrancesco's grandchildren and great-grandchild were the light of his life and always brought a smile to his face, according to his family. In his free time, he also enjoyed traveling with his wife. He could also be found enjoying a game of blackjack at Atlantic City and nearby casinos. He had a love for live music and was an avid concertgoer.

Besides his wife, and sons and daughters-in-law, Michael and Teresa, and Matthew and Micheli, Mr. DeFrancesco is survived by brothers Brian and John DeFrancesco, four grandchildren, one great-grandchild, and numerous other relatives, including nieces and nephews as well as great nieces and nephews.

In place of flowers, Mr. DeFrancesco's family noted that he was an avid supporter of N.F. Northeast (Neurofibromatosis) in Burlington, MA, and encourages donations there or to St. Jude's Hospital in Memphis, TN.

Caption: Mark DeFrancesco (second from right) with his wife, Maria, and Jeff Vocatura and Kevin Barry of Big Y Foods.

[Tim Linden](#)

About Tim Linden | 

Tim Linden grew up in a produce family as both his father and grandfather spent their business careers on the wholesale terminal markets in San Francisco and Los Angeles.

Tim graduated from San Diego State University in 1974 with a degree in journalism. Shortly thereafter he began his career at The Packer where he stayed for eight years, leaving in 1983 to join Western Growers as editor of its monthly magazine. In 1986, Tim launched Champ Publishing as an agricultural publishing specialty company.

Today he is a contract publisher for several trade associations and writes extensively on all aspects of the produce business. He began writing for The Produce News in 1997, and currently wears the title of Editor at Large.

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