

# 'YOU'LL SHOOT YOUR EYE OUT, KID!'

The Kansas City Rep aims for Broadway with 'A Christmas Story, the Musical!'

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## THE MAG INTERVIEW

Bob Trapp on Princess Di,  
Reagan and his favorite flower

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# A BOUQUET OF MEMORIES

**Bob Trapp is founder and owner of Trapp & Co., which celebrates its 40th anniversary this year. Trapp has done flower arrangements for dignitaries including Ronald Reagan and Princess Diana. This conversation took place in Trapp's vermilion red office in his store at 4110 Main St.**

**You started your company in 1969. Does it seem like 100 years ago or like yesterday?**  
Like yesterday.

**What do you remember about the first location, which was on Westport Road?**

There was a young woman who used to come in every Friday. Friday was \$1 flower day. And recently I was on a radio show and that woman called in. I thought that was so cool.

**Part of your reputation locally rests on famous people you've done flowers for outside of Kansas City. Are those your favorite memories?**

Of course I remember all of that, and those were highlights of my career. But it's funny the things you remember.

One Saturday morning when we first opened, a young couple came in, and you could just tell they were in love — it was bubbling around them. They wanted one rose. They went in the cooler and they looked and they looked and they looked. Finally they came out with the rose they wanted. They were on their way to the rose garden in Loose Park to be married. I have never, ever gotten over that moment. That was as important as any wedding I've ever done.

Another occasion, much more recent, was a man who had been a driver for us more than 25 years ago. He came in because his brother died. His brother had been a big Harley-Davidson motorcycle guy, and the man wanted a floral tribute that had to do with Harley motorcycles. So we made something using orange and black flowers and with flames.

**Let's talk about the celebrities. Princess Diana — what is the one thing you remember about her?**

I had been invited to London by Ambassador Price. Charles Price, who was from here, was the U.S. ambassador to the Court of St. James (United Kingdom).

I had heard that Princess Diana always looks down when you first meet her, and she did. Then her eyes came up my body and then she zeroed right into my eyes, and it was so intense, I felt like she had drained me. And then she said — and the British are marvelous at this — "Oh you're Mr. Trapp. You're the flower man from Kansas City. I've heard so much about you."

You know, they're trained, they've got bios on everyone in the room, but there were 200 people in the room. It's amazing.

**What did the flowers look like?**

Everything was pink. And she was in pink that evening. With her coloring — she had a gorgeous natural blush in her cheeks — she was magical.

**And how did Prince Charles strike you?**

Very nice, perfect manners, but there was some barrier there that you didn't feel with Princess Diana at all.

**In Princess Diana and Ronald Reagan you met two of the most charismatic people of the second half of the 20th century. What was Reagan like?**

The first time the Reagans were in London to meet the queen, they were staying at Winfield House (the U.S. ambassador's residence). When an aide told them they were running about 10 minutes early, Reagan said, "I am so impressed with the motorcycle brigade that is taking us everywhere. I want to meet those gentlemen."

So they took him to the back of the house and had the men come in in twos, and he spoke with each one of them. The Brits went wild when that made it in the papers, but that's just who he was.

**What kind of a presence was he in a room?**

I've met other presidents, and it was a different feeling with Reagan. He gave off a sense of, I'm Bob Reagan, I'm a good guy. Not, I am the president. His eyes always twinkled. And I think that would be hard to do with every president's have on their shoulders.

**What do you remember about his physical appearance?**

Perfection. And that was Mrs. Reagan. She had a great eye. I doubt Reagan ever walked out of his quarters without his hair and suit being perfect. You never saw him with his tie crooked, the knot was always perfect, and the dimple below the knot was always there. And his handshake — you felt it come up your arm. He stood erect, he had great posture, and he never seemed like an older man to me.

**What did the flowers look like for that event?**

Mrs. Reagan loved coral, so everything was in corals with a little white and a little yellow mixed in. Her interior designer was Ted Graber of Beverly Hills, and he and I had been friends a long time, so I had a good insight into what she liked. She didn't like exotic things, she liked English mounds.

**In terms of exotic versus classic, where is the trend going today in floral design?**

A friend left me a message last night because he had been watching some flower design show on cable.

Oh, dear.

He was beside himself because he said it was perfectly dreadful. I think we are in the era of tortured arranging. The flowers are upside down, they are submerged in water, and a lot of that is for effect only.

**What is the trend now for funeral flowers?**

A lot of people don't want a traditional fan. They want a loose gathering of flowers, as if you've gone out to the garden and cut these flowers and put them in a vase. That is my favorite style of arranging.

**What are your favorite flowers?**

Carnations, by far. Even though they are so out and people don't like them. I love their shape, and the stems have that curly gray foliage. But I only like them one way: about two dozen of them in a good crystal or silver vase.

**What is your favorite flower for fragrance?**

Gardenias.

**What color family do you like best in flowers?**  
Reds and pinks. I think red is the most misused-steroid color in the world.

**How so?**

People don't understand that everything goes with red. A lot of women think they can't carry a red handbag because it doesn't go with anything, but I can't think of a woman who can't take a red handbag with. But you can't convince people of that. And pink is the most flattering color for most people's coloring.

**Do you think about retiring?**

(Laughs.) Yes. I built a house five years ago in Eudora on 13 acres. The house is beautiful and the property is breathtaking. For three years, I lived there from Thursday through Monday. But I didn't like the idea I had to go there on Thursday even if I would rather be at an event we were doing here on Friday or Saturday. I realized I didn't really want to be retired.

**You are an only child with no children. What will happen to your company after you are gone?**

Four of my longtime employees found out last year that they are inheriting the company. I said, you're not my family and without them I couldn't have done this.

Somebody said to me, they might not get along and might sell the company. I said, you're not getting the point. They gave their careers to this company and they deserve it. If they sell it, that's part of their "thank you."

*Interview conducted, condensed and edited by Cindy Hoedel, cchoedel@kcstar.com.*

