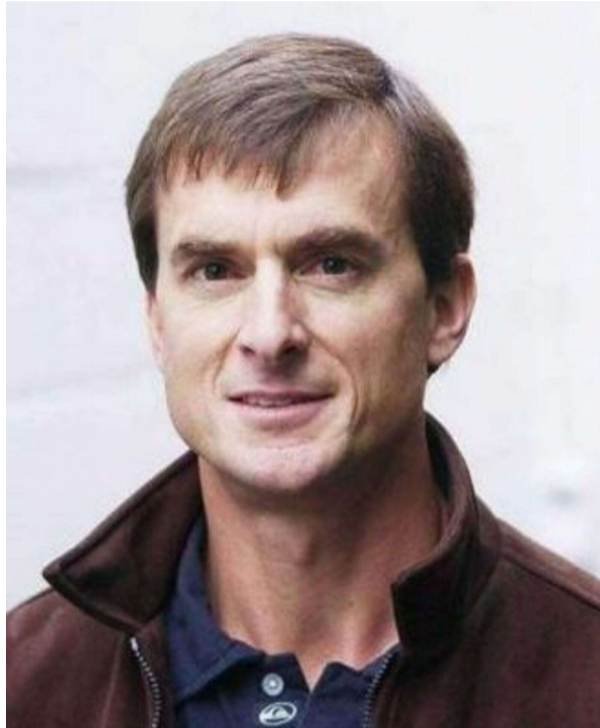


Roger Marolt: A lifetime of opportunity appreciated

Opinion [FOLLOW OPINION](#) | February 24, 2022

Roger Marolt
Roger This



Roger Marolt

There is a difference between mourning a death and mourning the loss of a life. In the first case, we are wrought with fearful sorrow, the forced consideration of our own mortality balanced along the hairbreadth of a life's span, forming an obtuse angle under our weight, steeper ahead at the end of the tightrope than it was at the beginning looking out. In the second case, we are sad for great joy we recently knew in the flesh and must now keep safe someplace else we are not certain of, fearful of the false notion that it might slip away now that we can no longer touch its source. In its new lightness, we mistakenly believe it is fragile, although in our hearts we know it will endure.

And so it is with the passing of Jack Brendlinger. His life was a gift to everyone who knew him and many who didn't. This is not an obituary. Recent stories in both papers about his life did right by him. His and Marsha's Aspen Hall of Fame video fills in the blanks. I want to share how Jack and his big band of friends influenced what Aspen once was and why, in their diminishing presence, it is slipping into what it is.

What Jack's life is proof of, among many things more important that are evident in knowing those close to him, is that Aspen was a better place once. It was better, not because the snow was deeper, drier and more predictable in pre-global warming times, but because people like him had an opportunity to come here and create good lives for themselves and their neighbors, which in an authentic small town is everyone.

Jack and Marsha built a home, raised a family, created businesses, nurtured their creative talents, founded programs for kids, organized groups for charity, made lots of lifelong friends, and knew how to have really good times.

Aspen ground was fertile for this in the 1970s. It was the perfect climate for the seeds of worthwhile living to gestate and produce an abundance of good fruits to nourish town. Some people who came then are still here now, but in the mourning of Jack's death, we see that velvety rich fabric of community rolling up.

We are rapidly reaching the point where virtually everyone who will live and work here will be living in subsidized housing. Today, local houses, condos and even yurts are almost assuredly too expensive for the entire next generation of working Aspenites to afford. When lawyers and real estate brokers are priced out, we have reached a U-turning point in communal character, feel and opportunity for the profit of owning a healthy, happy soul.

This shrinkage of opportunity to anchor a home will lead to shorter residencies. Not only will there be fewer working people living in town, there will be even fewer investing the rest of their lives. Contrary to the notion that retired Aspenites ought to give up their housing when they retire, this is the period of their lives when they have the time to become even more immersed in the community and bless us with organic mountain magic.

Today's business in Aspen is building monumental structures instead of vibrant livelihoods, loyalty and opportunities for locals to thrive. Designs are formulaic instead of intuitive. I don't want to pick on Mark Hunt, but he willingly wears the caked makeup clown face for much that has gone wrong. He is the antithesis of a guy like Jack. It feels like he has bought half the town as a strawman for people who want to remain hidden in the shadows. These investors are conscientiously avoiding being known by the locals. It's sadder than it is arrogant, more pitiful than condescending. Tell me how you build community out of this?

Money is the necessary medium of exchange. But, it abuses its position. It talks loudly. It tells lies. It stays aloft making false promises. Cold and hard are apt descriptions. It has become more important than what people like Jack did for Aspen.

If I have politicized his passing, I am sorry. It's just that Jack Brendlinger was iconic of how people came to get involved, to turn neighbors into friends, to ensure for kids the comfort of a solid community around them. He was a giver of himself. He filled our hearts to overflowing with love, joy, and a yearning for immersion. It is why they are heavy today. Rest in peace, Jack, you left nothing in the tank.

Roger Marolt knows Aspen needs to remember old timers and define extraordinary contribution to community by looking at how they lived. roger@maroltllp.com

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