

Howard L. McKee – Obituary in Chicago Tribune, December 9, 2007

Howard Lee McKee, of Chicago, IL, and Cascade Head, Oregon, died on Dec. 8 after a long battle with colon cancer.

He was born in Charleston, West Virginia, on Oct. 27, 1939, the youngest child of William Howard McKee and Millie Jane Cline.

Howard attended public schools in Charleston and Columbia University in New York City, earning a bachelors degree in economics, a Master of Arts in architecture and a Master of Arts in urban design.

Immediately after his university studies, Howard was hired by the architectural firm of Skidmore, Owings and Merrill (SOM). His first assignment was in Washington, DC, where he worked on the redesign of Pennsylvania Avenue.

At SOM, Howard focused on the broader questions of architecture, including whether a building met the different purposes and functions it would serve and how it would fit into the surrounding environment.

He worked on major design projects in Baltimore, Maryland, where his attention to land use and urban design contributed to the elimination of a freeway in the Inner Harbor area; in Saudi Arabia, where he was on the team that designed the city of Yanbu; and at the Esalen Institute in California where he redesigned the campus. In 1971, Howard transferred to the Portland, Oregon, office of SOM where he headed the Environmental Studies group.

He brought an outside perspective to Oregon and led a design team that would challenge conventional thinking. He was a major contributor to the Mt Hood Freeway design team that ultimately defeated the plan for the inner city freeway. The team worked closely with the Oregon and Portland governments to design a plan that preserved the natural and agricultural resources within the urban environment.

Tasked with finding solutions to the city's transportation needs, Howard and his team created the Portland light rail system and the Portland Transit Mall, innovations in urban transportation that are models for city planners around the country. As part of this effort, Howard helped to draft Oregon's famous land-use law, still in effect today.

According to Greg Baldwin, prominent Portland architect, Howard's work in Portland represented a key characteristic of the 1970s, "that of making tough decisions, and then designing and executing a series of policies and projects that made those decisions not only right, but essential to our well being as a community." Moving to Chicago in 1984, Howard joined the design team for the proposed 1992 World's Fair, planned as a celebration for the centennial of the 1893 Chicago World's Fair.

Although Illinois scrapped the plan for the fair in 1987, Howard and his team made a major contribution to the city by rerouting the Lake Shore Drive artery and designing open green space around the museum campuses, creating the beautiful waterfront drive around Lake Michigan.

In 1988, Howard left SOM to do independent design work, including projects in Russia where the post-perestroika government was making an effort to renovate historic buildings.

At the same time, he joined forces with Michael Keiser of Chicago, to create the great American links golf course, Bandon Dunes, Oregon.

Bandon Dunes is truly the legacy left by Howard McKee. As Keiser's partner from the concept stage and throughout the ongoing development, Howard was responsible for locating the land on the south coast of Oregon, an area of "breath-taking beauty," in his own words. He led the team that secured the necessary land permits and designed every structure in the vast resort.

For the past twenty years, Howard has been devoted to what he called the "soul work" of creating a resort that allowed a genuine experience for golfers, a resort settled into the environment, a pure challenge, uncluttered by manmade amenities.

When the first course opened in 1999, Howard explained, "The vision was malleable, but the principles don't change. It's honoring the land. It's building on the natural environment here that gets discovered if you spend time with it. The key is not to violate it."

Steve Goodwin, author of *Dream Golf*, described Howard in this way: "He is an unusual mixture of principles and passions: an intellectual who has a deep respect for nature and the supernatural, a man of science who puts a premium on the work of the imagination, a rationalist who never forgets the mysteries of the psyche. He was a high-minded thinker who loves to putter around on his property and to work with his hands, a philosopher who likes to sweat.

He was a serious man who laughs easily and uproariously.

He sometimes came across as a hard-nosed realist, at other times as a New Age dreamer and a bit of a woo-woo.

Those who worked with him weren't always able to pin him down philosophically, but they were in agreement on two of Howard's most conspicuous traits.

One, his intellectual curiosity was voracious, and whenever a subject interested him, he learned it inside out and upside down.

Two, he was brilliant; he could think and talk circles around most people, but he did so in a way that made them feel flattered to be in a conversation with him.”

Howard McKee is survived by his wife Dr. Kennon Pate McKee of Chicago, his son Colin McKee, his daughter Paula McKee Shabahang of Los Angeles, grandchildren Justin, Julian and Ava Shabahang of Los Angeles, brother Charles McKee and sister Wanda Brick of Charleston, West Virginia.

The family requests that memorial contributions be made to the Sitka Center for Art and Ecology, PO Box 65, Otis, Oregon 97368 or online at www.sitkacenter.org to support the Howard L. McKee Ecology Residency Program.