

# Roger Hainje

## The ultimate sacrifice for Sioux Falls

*Roger's integrity and intelligence opened closed doors. His quick sense of humor entertained and inspired. His persevering efforts created immeasurable prosperity for many. His efforts inspired the work that made Sioux Falls #1 in America. He was as refreshing and straight-forward as the great South Dakota he loved.*

So bears the inscription for Roger Hainje on the Memorial's granite plaque beneath the larger-than-life bronze sculpture of Korczak Ziolkowski's Fighting Stallions. Capturing fierceness, determination and fighting spirit the Memorial stands on the Capitol grounds in Pierre. The people of South Dakota constructed it as a lasting memory to six South Dakota leaders and the two state pilots who perished in an airplane crash on April 19, 1993. It was dedicated one year after the unspeakable tragedy that took the lives of Roger, Governor George Mickelson and six others, including the Development Foundation's Chairman and Vice Chairman, Dave Birkeland and Angus Anson. The group was on an economic development mission to address the threat of losing Sioux Falls' John Morrell plant, the city and state's largest agricultural processing employer.

At the time of his death, Roger was the president of the Sioux Falls Development Foundation and Forward Sioux Falls. His tenure lasted only six years. The metaphorical statue and succinct description immortalize Roger Hainje's work and approach to life. More than twenty years after the tragedy, Roger's legacy remains alive. Friends and family fondly reflect on his South Dakota Spirit, his ingenuity and his leadership of Forward Sioux Falls and the Sioux Falls Development Foundation.

Mary Medema remembers that Roger loved everything about South Dakota especially the great open spaces...from the Black Hills to the pheasant hunting fields near Winner and the lakes and golf courses in the east.



“He graduated from the University of South Dakota in 1971. He was brilliant, but not quite ready to give up his blue jeans for a suit,” his younger sister said. “He worked construction for a time and lived out in the country near Canistota. His strong South Dakota bond and rural roots were important to him, having grown up on the family farm near Dell Rapids. Roger always credited our parents for instilling pride in where we lived.”

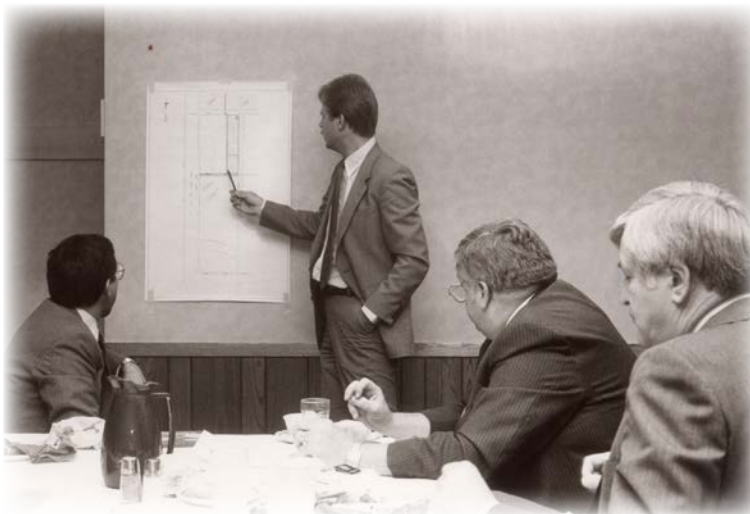
In the mid 70’s Roger went to work for the City of Sioux Falls in community development.

Rick Knobe had been elected mayor in 1974. “Without a doubt, the era was a time of big change. There was a nasty, nationwide political culture and a general lack of trust in leaders also characteristic of the mid-Seventies. And then there were the historical events with the end of the Vietnam War and the resignation of President Nixon.”

Knobe described his young staff as “thoughtful, intelligent, articulate thinking people who had a voice but weren’t loud.” “Like the others, Roger was intelligent, idealistic and earnest in spirit, but he was also collaborative, and he brought people along.”

Former city planning director Steve Metli worked with Roger. For Metli, it was the era of the Boomers that came at a time when “the city was hungry for new leadership.” Adding, “There was a real progressive vision with those of us in city government. There was no room for politics. Roger was one of those guys with good ideas and a lot to offer the city.”

Mary said. “A more diverse economy was beginning to take shape. The EROS Data Center proved that Sioux Falls could be a great location for science and new technologies, and community leaders recognized that we could do even more.”



*Roger presents industrial park information during a Board of Directors meeting. Pictured: Tony Bour, Roger, Dave Stenseth and Jack Rentschler.*

Setting bigger goals for industrial development inspired Roger, and he was excited to join the Sioux Falls Development Foundation in 1979 to focus his energy on those goals.

### **Moving ‘Forward’ -the up’s and down’s of the 80’s**

Sioux Falls celebrated the Citibank location in 1981 and the Sioux Empire Development Parks experienced many other successful locations. Yet in spite of good times in the early 80’s, the state’s economy had turned sluggish suffering a farming crisis, high interest rates and many foreclosures. By the mid 80’s, things seemed simply ‘stagnant.’

Nevertheless, whether in good times or bad the Sioux Falls Development Foundation had a motto of doing whatever it took and worked to bring people together to solve problems. The ongoing commitment to bring more jobs and prosperity to Sioux Falls and South Dakota drove the organization and its leaders. His vision along with a tireless energy led to Roger's being selected president of the Foundation in 1987 following Dave Stenseth's resignation due to health issues.

There was little time to settle in as the Foundation's second president. By 1987 the need for increased economic development activity was on everyone's mind. Former Argus Leader publisher Larry Fuller was one of the community leaders who worked closely with Roger at the time.

"Roger, Chamber president Evan Nolte and other community leaders wanted to do something that was bold and would spread the word about Sioux Falls nationally. I accompanied Roger and Evan to Denver where we met with an organization called Forward Metro Denver that marketed economic development on a regional basis. That is where the idea for the name Forward Sioux Falls came from and many of the same marketing tactics were applied here."

"The concept that a chamber and a development foundation could work together to promote economic development through a third, separate organization had never been tried before and Roger was a key player in helping to create Forward Sioux Falls and bring its first campaign to a successful conclusion," said Larry.

Everyone liked the idea of Forward Sioux Falls as a 'third cog' said Fuller especially with Roger leading the charge. The idea of an organization designed to raise money for the sole purpose of promoting the city caught fire. In 1987, a full-fledged fundraising campaign was launched. Lyle Schroeder, President of Sioux Valley Hospital, led the first Forward Sioux Falls \$1.4 million campaign.

Lyle was excited to be the first chair of a capital campaign. He felt the campaign would move people away from a growing negativity that had insidiously spread throughout the community.

Chamber president Evan Nolte agreed. "The 80's were tough," he said.

"The first big vote on a downtown convention center had been defeated by two percentage points. It was devastating to the business community. TACCO – Taxpayers Against Convention Center Obligations- was one of those negative groups that took shape in the community," Evan said. "It was necessary to regroup."

"In the late 80's I was part of a 'rump' committee made up of local people who came together to help move Sioux Falls away from a growing negativity that was festering in the city," Lyle said. "Our group had no status or organization, just a real belief that there was a definite 'mood of 'we shouldn't be doing this.' Election after election, bond issues were turned down. The committee was called the Citizens for Progress. We all expressed our concerns about moving away from this negative thinking. All agreed, however reluctantly that neither the Chamber nor the Development Foundation had money. That is when they twisted my arm for the capital campaign chairmanship. In 40 days \$1.9 million was raised – nearly a half a million more than our goal of \$.1.4 million."

It was at this point that Roger was named president of Forward Sioux Falls in addition to leading the Sioux Falls Development Foundation.

“Forward Sioux Falls was a real fundraising mechanism,” Lyle said. “With this campaign money there would be ways to ‘sell’ Sioux Falls. Roger, with his quiet leadership skills and his love for the city, put his heart and soul into its promotion.”

“Forward Sioux Falls would fuel the Sioux Falls economy,” Mary said. “The goals were job creation, business expansion, diversifying, strengthening the economy and improving the overall quality of life. Roger took the lead because these goals were all based on good economic development.”

## **Industrial parks expand and diversify**

Always important to the Sioux Falls Development Foundation’s history has been industrial park development to prepare for new and expanding business and industrial opportunities.

““Landing Hutchinson Technology in Sioux Falls in 1988 was a big deal,” said Mary. “That came shortly after the launch of Forward Sioux Falls and expanded advanced manufacturing and high technology to the Sioux Falls’ industry and workforce resume.” Graco followed in 1993 along with more call centers, food processing and corporate offices. The hope and commitment for economic diversity and greater prosperity was coming true.

## **Ways of coming together**

After years of occupying various less accessible and attractive offices downtown, the Commerce Center groundbreaking was celebrated. Don Dunham’s new facility would jointly house the Chamber, Development Foundation, Convention & Visitor’s Bureau and Forward Sioux Falls. The organizations would finally have a permanent downtown location. With renewed focus on industrial development, the needs for future infrastructure required big, long-term planning. The Commerce Center was unifying so all related agencies could work together with the City more efficiently for this long-term planning.

Outside of Sioux Falls, there were also regional concerns to address. What about other communities in Minnehaha County? How did they feel about Sioux Falls’ development and economic growth? Could they in some way share in it? Working with County Commissioner Tom Dempster, Roger helped create the Minnehaha County Economic Development Association (MCEDA) in 1991, and the Development Foundation housed its new director.



*Forward Sioux Falls representatives Mark Griffin, John Mulligan and Roger Hainje accept an award from Kilian.*

Tom Dempster, Minnehaha County Commissioner from 1989 to 1998, said this informal mayors' group got communities collaborating instead of spinning their wheels. Still, there was push back.

"There was opposition on the Commission too, thinking the towns were competitors. One mayor was especially opposed," said Dempster. "Roger became the guy who could bring people together. Just talking and listening can make the difference."

Beyond all of this activity, there was something else about Roger that served as a catalyst to bring people together – his gift of humor.

"Humor made Roger, Roger," said Russ Greenfield, Sioux Falls Development Foundation chief counsel for 34 years. "It was a home-grown style and loaded with lots of wit that made him who he was. It was also an effective tool he used when talking to others."

## **We're #1!**

For the Sioux Falls Development Foundation, Forward Sioux Falls and the city, Roger was certainly considered to be the right man for the job when it came to promoting Sioux Falls. Never did this notion seem more spot on when in 1992 Money Magazine named Sioux Falls the 'Best Place to Live in America.'

"The national media, including Good Morning America, converged on the city," Mary said. "They all wanted pictures of the #1 city in America. Roger got special permission to go to the top of the Zip Feed Mill – Sioux Falls' tallest structure. It was not a safe place. Roger, accompanied by AP and local reporters, scaled to the top of the Zip Feed Mill. To get the 'right' shot photographers leaned out over a ledge while Roger literally hung on to them by their belts. Once again, it was all about doing whatever it takes."

## **Tragedy and loss**

Sioux Falls' national recognition opened doors for the city. Unfortunately, Roger would only have a short time to celebrate and enjoy it.

On that fateful day in April. Roger, Governor Mickelson, and six others were killed in a plane crash 15 miles southwest of Dubuque, Iowa as the group returned from a trip to Cincinnati to promote economic development and do what they could to save the Sioux Falls John Morrell plant.

"No one could have imagined the tragedy for the city and state at the loss of those eight men who were not only key leaders, but each individually at the height of his career and service to their respective companies and organizations. If you were old enough, you likely remember where you were when you heard the news," Mary said. "As difficult a time as it was, Sioux Falls state and corporate leaders did what they had to do - they found ways to



*Roger and Vice President Dan Scott. Dan was named interim president after the tragedy and served as the Foundation's president for 13 years.*

move forward and continue to create a legacy of which Roger and the others who perished would be proud. That is what they would have wanted and what they had been working for all along.”

*(Along with the statue in Pierre, the Roger A. Hainje Briefing Center in the Commerce Center, Sioux Empire Development Park IV and Hainje Avenue are dedicated in lasting memory of Roger’s exuberance, South Dakota Spirit, elegant speaking style, humor and leadership.)*

By Virginia Olson

