

Roger Olson Eulogy

Roger's reputation preceded him. As we contemplated our coffee house project, my Uncle Ron, owner of Vegter Masonry, told me I could trust Roger Olson, whom I'd never heard of. Uncle Ron remarked that a large company in the Lake Geneva area had sucked many contractors into a major project, pulled the plug, and burned them all, one of whom was Roger. Uncle Ron told me that, though it took years, Roger paid back every contractor that he dealt with directly. Many business owners have the other kind of story told about them.

My first impression of Roger is etched in my memory. Early on a warm, sunny summer evening in July, 2002, Roger parked his truck beside mine, just west of a garage that he would soon demolish. After we shook left hands, I unrolled my architect's plans. He scanned them and announced, "I don't like them." My exact thoughts: "Oh no! What kind of corners is this guy going to cut?" Roger continued, "We are going to build this right." Something in his voice and demeanor whispered to me, "You are safe with this man."

I still am, and was then, just a little guy: 50 years old, no experience, no job, 5 children, and risking everything we had saved and all we owned on our dream. Roger looked out for me, when I didn't have enough experience to look out for myself.

"Your architect wants shorter basement walls. With this fill and elevation, you'll be better off with 14'. And only 6" walls? 8" is superior. Floating stoops? Do we want them floating away from the foundation after the first winter? No, we'll pour them attached to the foundation." When the architect came to inspect the project for rebar, she said to him, "You've got twice the rebar I called for." Roger smiled and remarked knowingly, "We don't want the foundation cracking and crumbling in a few years, do we?"

And my favorite. "What? No bumper on your drive-thru? Cars will destroy your building." I sure didn't know any better; the licensed professional didn't either. But the veteran knew. Day after day Kathy bakes at the back table just inside the drive thru. Every time a customer runs over the curb, backs up, and takes shot #2, which happens pretty much 1 to 2 times every day, we fondly recall Roger.

Roger was the "good-proud" of his work. He liked to stop by for hot apple cider and reference aspects of his work. His favorite: pointing out countless

tire marks and layers of rubber on his bumper curb. In all likelihood, one of our customers is running over the bumper even as we speak, and Roger is somewhere up there grinning down and remarking, "Steve, aren't you glad we poured my bumper curb?" "Yes, Roger, this is our 3,065 day of business. At 1 hit a day, our building would need your demolition crew by now."

And the architect had not drawn enough radius for the drive thru. Roger said, "Steve, your drive-thru will be critical to your business. I will not stop filling and packing until I can drive my big pickup right up to your window." And he was good to his word.

And what a memory. Several years after our construction, the city storm sewer under my parking lot failed. Unable to router it, the city opted to redirect the sewer. They knew a manhole existed out near my pine trees and wanted to connect through it. But city workers had filled several inches over the manhole cover, and no maps existed. So Roger came. Walking to the spot, he stood in the grass and announced, "I believe it's right here." And 5 years since he'd seen it, he was standing precisely over the center of the manhole cover.

Roger, stopped back often to Mocha Moment for his hot cider. He liked the cider, but I think more than cider, he savored the opportunity of an aging man to relish his success. He was proud of our full house as if it were his own. He remarked from time to time, "I thought you were a little nuts, building this. But I'm so happy for you." And you know what's cool, "He really was genuinely happy for me."

As with most small businesses, capital is short. The excavation was unusual and demanding. A careless or unscrupulous contractor could have financially destroyed me, my family, and our dream. Roger was sent providentially to insure that we succeeded. I could never sufficiently thank him.

Roger, you were an uncommon man, part of an old breed of a bygone era: your word and a handshake. Pride in superb work before money. America increasingly starves for your type. Rest in peace. Your truism reverberates not only throughout our Mocha Moment foundations, building and grounds, but over much of south-central Wisconsin: "A job well done."