

Kent Rickenbaugh
Denver, CO

Date of Death: 3/25/2002

"A Denver philanthropic family known for its passionate commitment to children, the environment and downtown perished in Sunday afternoon's plane crash near Centennial Airport along with their pilot, a doctor who devoted himself to rural health care.

Kent L. Rickenbaugh, 64, the longtime operator of family-owned Rickenbaugh Cadillac/Volvo at 777 Broadway, his wife and son, along with pilot, Steven R. Mostow, a doctor at the University of Colorado Health Sciences Center, were identified Monday by the Douglas County Sheriff's Office. 'The very name Rickenbaugh has such a sterling quality of character,' said Joe Blake, president of the Denver Metro Chamber of Commerce and a friend of Kent Rickenbaugh's since college. 'This is a staggering personal loss and a great loss for the business community.'

Rickenbaugh's wife, Caroline, 62, was chairwoman of the Children's Hospital Foundation. Their son, Bart, 35, was a real estate attorney in Bozeman, Mont., who graduated from the University of Denver law school in 1994. He leaves a wife and two children, 5 and 3.

'The Rickenbaughs had spent the weekend at a quarterly get-together in Aspen with two grown daughters who live in Aspen and Carbon-dale,' said Dell Van Gilder, a longtime family friend. The family also owns a cattle ranch in Gunnison and may have tended to ranch business as well over the weekend.

Their usual pilot, Englewood businessman Bill Lundell, owner of the twin-engine Cessna 340, was unavailable to fly them. So Mostow offered to fly the family as he had on several occasions, Van Gilder said. While investigators sifted through the wreckage Monday trying to determine what caused the plane to crash, friends remembered

the Rickenbaughs' generosity and community spirit - a spirit born in part from the death in 1963 of their infant daughter Selby, who suffered from a heart defect and was cared for at Children's Hospital.

In return, her mother devoted herself to the hospital, helping raise millions of dollars. 'She had a passion for this organization that grew out of her personal experience, and she had a belief that Children's offers the best option for people with sick children and in desperate need,' said Steve Winesett, Children's foundation president. 'We'd have an event, and Caroline would get up and speak and you could feel the passion she has for this institution in her voice.'

She and Kent endowed a chair in cardiology of at least \$1.5 million in Selby's name 2 1/2 years ago. She co-chaired the hospital's biggest campaign from 1995 to 1997, a \$15 million fundraiser to build a new wing, and was about to embark on an even bigger fundraiser for the hospital. 'She was passionate about life in general,' Winesett said. 'When my son was born in 2000, she came to the office every day and left a different gift for him. At Christmas, she'd bring a dozen elaborately decorated gingerbread houses for everyone at the office.'

She was instrumental in persuading the Children's Hospital board to move the hospital to CU's new health sciences center campus in Aurora, said CU president Betsy Hoffman. 'She had tremendous energy and was so full of life and excitement. I'm stunned,' Hoffman said. 'She was a tremendous fundraiser. She kept everyone going and kept everyone's eye on the prize.'

The former Caroline Berger studied acting and had roles in several New York plays before marrying Kent Rickenbaugh 40 years ago. He had begun working at the Cadillac dealership owned by his father in 1960, when he was a 22-year-old Dartmouth College graduate. He worked in every department before being named assistant to his father, Ralph, who founded the Denver Better Business Bureau in 1951.

Kent Rickenbaugh was committed to protecting a vibrant downtown Denver as well as the natural outdoor beauty of Colorado. He kept the Cadillac dealership founded by his parents in the same central Denver neighborhood through good times and bad. Most car dealers left the neighborhood - now known as Golden Triangle - for the suburbs after World War II. 'He always thought it was important not to leave central downtown,' said Mickey Zeppelin, president of the Golden Triangle Neighborhood Association and a developer. 'He always argued it was good business to not abandon a downtown.' He was rewarded with several years of national Cadillac franchise sales and service awards.

'His fingerprints are all over this town,' said Bill Mosher, president of Mile High Development, partners with Rickenbaugh in plans for a 15-story residential loft next to Rickenbaugh's Volvo and Cadillac dealership. 'I first knew him because I was a customer. I was so impressed with his down-to-earth approach and his commitment to keeping a customer happy, I knew I had to work with him.'

While Rickenbaugh cared for downtown, he could also escape it, heading to his 1,100-acre ranch with 150 head of cattle outside Gunnison. 'There, he set the world of business aside and would even help post fence,' said ranch manager Mark Campbell. 'You would never know he was this real important man,' Campbell said. 'My two sons thought of him as a grandfather.'

He recently began approaching ranch owners to work with the Colorado Land Fund to conserve their property and maintain it as open space, said Pat Grant, president of the National Western Stock Show. 'He was a true Westerner,' Grant said. 'He had a respect for land and its traditions. And he let his actions speak for him.'

That Western spirit was passed on to his son. Bart Rickenbaugh, a four-year rugby player at Dartmouth, also was a former saddle bronc rider with the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association. He loved to play hockey, hunt, ski, run and play racquetball. He moved two years ago from Denver to Bozeman. 'We all feel like we've just been punched in the stomach,' said Bozeman attorney Russ McElyea,

who hired Rickenbaugh. 'He mixed well with us because he worked hard and had fun. You rarely find anyone with his talent that is so interested in other people and so humble about his own capabilities.' 'He was good at everything he did,' McElyea said. 'He was fun to play with because he was so competitive and always challenged you, but he also was gracious, humble and a good sportsman. He had an extraordinary sense of humor and was a great guy to have a beer with. We're all poorer for his absence.'

Bart Rickenbaugh is survived by his wife, Lisa; and children Sam, 5, and Lila, 3. Also surviving the Rickenbaughs are daughters Anne Rickenbaugh, 36, of Aspen and Katherine Rich, 31, of Carbondale.

Memorial service for Kent, Caroline and Bart Rickenbaugh will be at 11 a.m. Thursday at St. John's Episcopal Cathedral, 1313 Clarkson St., Denver. The family asks that contributions be made to Children's Hospital, 1056 E. 19th Ave., Denver, CO 80218.

Service for Dr. Steven R. Mostow is at 3 p.m. Thursday at the Dennison Auditorium on the campus of the University of Colorado Health Sciences Center, 4200 E. Ninth Ave., Denver. The family has asked that memorial contributions in his name be made to Planned Parenthood of the Rocky Mountains, 950 Broadway, Denver, CO 80203- 2706; or the National Foundation for Infectious Diseases, 4733 Bethesda Ave., Suite 750, Bethesda, MD 20814-5228."

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