

Members and Firms

Building Codes Champion Bob J. Fowler, FAIA, Dies *AIA, building industry loses a true friend*

by Stephanie Stubbs and Douglas E. Gordon

Bob J. Fowler, FAIA, PE, CBO, was killed in Montana August 1 when the Harley Davidson he was riding was hit by a truck. He was 67.

Fowler, chief building official for the city of Pasadena, Calif., was a Renaissance man of the building industry—architect, engineer, and building official. Fowler earned a BArch from Texas Technological University in Lubbock. Prior to becoming building official for the city of Pasadena in 1995, he served as chief building director in Newport Beach, Calif., for 13 years then as building director in Abilene, Tex., for 16 years.

The *Pasadena Star-News* reports that Fowler “was well respected by his colleagues at City Hall.” He got the job as Pasadena’s building official in 1996 and did his job with “dignity and style,” said City Manager Cynthia Kurtz. “I don’t even know the right words to say what a loss it is to the city of Pasadena,” she told the *Star-News*. “He absolutely was the best building official I have ever worked with.”

Many members of the AIA also would testify to Fowler’s true professionalism, clarity of thought, and good humor. Often at the cutting edge of the profession, he was one to embrace the nuances of the American with Disabilities Act (ADA) and one of its first translators for his fellow architects. In this light, he helped the AIA develop and produce “Opening All Doors,” a series of national conferences about the ADA that aired on PBS.

It was in the building-codes arena that Fowler contributed most to the AIA. He was a member of the national Building Codes and Standards Committee in its many incarnations since 1980 and served as its chair in 1989. He was instrumental in the development of the AIA’s 1991 “One Code” resolution, which ultimately led to the development of the International Building Code, launched in 2000. Outside of the AIA, Fowler was the first architect to serve as Chairman of the Board of Directors of the International Conference of Building Officials (1993-1994). He served on ICBO’s board for more than a decade.

Fowler was generous with his time and patient enough to be a great teacher. He was a certified instructor in his native Texas and taught classes for design students, fire officials, and build-

ing officials—he was facile with all their languages. We personally worked with him on the AIA codes committee. We interviewed him for various publications often, because he could make a convoluted code concept crystal clear and seemed genuinely happy to do so. For that, we will always remember him with a smile and a touch of gratitude.

“Life really isn’t fair. Of all the people the world needed now to keep pushing ahead—Bob was it,” wrote AIA Codes and Standards Committee Chair Steven Winkel, AIA, in breaking the news of Fowler’s death to the committee. “He embraced life more fully than anyone I have ever known. It is trite but also true to say ‘we will not see his like again.’ The single code is made an orphan, its father is gone. He was a mentor, a visionary, a consummate professional, and a true friend.”

Also a Renaissance man in his private life, Fowler was active in his church, rode and rebuilt motorcycles, collected antique guns, and ran a ranch, in Merkel, Tex. Fowler is survived by his wife, Doris; brother, Bill; daughter, Tamra; and two grandchildren. His funeral was held Monday, August 6, in Merkel, Tex.



FOWLER

AIA Presidential Citation

Presented to Robert J. Fowler, FAIA, PE, by Michael J. Stanton, FAIA, on September 13, 1999:

An impartial listener and advocate, he brought to the complex process of developing a comprehensive set of integrated building codes both an appreciation for and a profound understanding of a broad range of views. His stature among building officials and members of the design team was such, that wherever he stood, others were quick to see that he had discovered a common ground.

Remembrances may be sent to the Starbuck Funeral Home, 201 Edwards St., Merkel, TX 79536. ☐