**Colin Hubbell's Detroit: A Tribute to a Developer, Champion and Friend**

By Clare Pfeiffer Ramsey, Aug 26,2008

Any day now Colin Hubbell and I were going to sit down and have that interview. We take life and time for granted, all of us, and Colin and I had passed some notes back and forth recently about a story I was going to write. I so badly wanted him to read this story: Colin Hubbell's Detroit.

Colin loved the city, and when Colin loved something or someone, there was no hiding it. He gave his love liberally, with much affection. Even a chance meeting with Colin guaranteed not just a flash of his great smile, but a good, solid warm hug. He had an endless supply.

Colin, a real estate developer with his company, [Hubbell Group](http://www.hubbellgroupdetroit.com/), and a grand champion of all things Detroit, died last week. He was 49, and he left behind a wife, Patricia (Trish as many know her) and four children -- Kelsey, Devin, Miles and Alana -- all of whom he was immensely proud.

Oh, how he is missed already.

I wanted to hear Colin tell me about the city -- his city. He was no Pollyanna. He knew the city's flaws -- for crying out loud, he was a developer so you know he had his share of frustrations, and then some, with bureaucracy, investors, contractors, supply and demand. Before that, he worked for the city, under both the Young and Archer administrations. He knew the good, the bad and the ugly.

Nonetheless, he loved Detroit, unabashedly. Why? Why did Colin love Detroit so much? What places did he find sacred, and what was his vision for Detroit's future, the future of those places? I wanted to ask him. I didn't want to write an obit. I wanted him to read this.
 **Too soon**

The end always comes too soon. But this was truly too soon. We all needed more time to learn from Colin, because he had so much to show us, to teach us. About being a Detroit businessman. About being a Detroiter. About Detroit.

As a developer, Colin was tireless, intrepid, visionary and successful. Almost a decade ago, he built the Canfield Lofts, putting 35 units in a historic 1921 structure once occupied by Buick Motor Co. In 2005, just as Model D was kicking off, [the governor joined him to cut the ribbon on townhomes](http://www.modeldmedia.com/developmentnews/rivertown.aspx) near the DIA in Midtown. The [Art Center Townhomes](http://hubbellgroupdetroit.com/) and the Ferry Street townhouses were built when people still thought you would have to be out of your gourd to invest in Detroit, let alone Detroit real estate, and let alone brand new, beautiful  townhouses.

It was never easy. [Lofts @ 55 West](http://www.55westcanfield.com/), his last major project, opened in December 2006 with about 30 units and 6,000 square feet of retail. Colin had a huge party to kick it off, and it was a veritable who's who of Detroit enthusiasts. But, in the past year and a half, we all know what's become of the real estate market: It's gone from soft, to softer, to mush. 55 West is truly is a gorgeous bunch of lofts, but it was a thorny project that stands as a testament to Colin's tenacity.

Cancer? Business challenges? You'd never know it to see his face. He'd tell you the plain truth if you asked him, but did Colin Hubbell give up? Nope.
 **Support**

What set him apart from the rest was the love for what he did, and Colin spread a lot of Detroit love.

"Colin was absolutely foundational to Model D getting off the ground," says our co-founder and co-publisher Brian Boyle. It's true. In every pixel of every character of every word of every story in every issue we publish, there is a flash of Colin Hubbell. He was the earliest of early adopters to this idea Brian and Paul Schutt had for an online magazine in Detroit.

I think Colin supported Model D because he saw there was a Detroit story that needed to be told, and Colin loved that someone was going to tell it. He loved sharing Detroit with people. He also liked to sell them places to live, but he'd settle for showing them why the city matters, and why people matter to the city.

Once, Colin took me, photographer Dave Krieger, and writer Bob Allen from Crain's Detroit Business to show Allen what's going on in the city. There wasn't an empty lot between Conner and Rosa Parks about which Colin didn't have something to say. I don't think that's hyperbole. (Many will nod in agreement. Colin was not one to hold back information. He was a great talker and a phenomenal storyteller.) Krieger knows Detroit extremely well, too, but there was no one in the car that day who didn't learn at least a little from Colin. He told us why this parcel was developed, or that one neglected, who was stalling one project, or why another project was so great, or why he just loved places like [Cost Plus Wine](http://www.modeldmedia.com/neighborhoods/shopping/costplus.aspx) in Eastern Market. Colin's Detroit wasn't perfect, but it didn’t need to be. He showed us that while so many people navel gaze and hypothesize about how Detroit needs to be fixed, not enough of us take the time to revel in what Detroit does right.

In the few years that I've known Colin, I have not been to a Detroit festival, concert, lecture, Model D speaker series, etc., where I didn't get one of those coveted, cherished Colin Hubbell hugs. He was everywhere. He was all over the city -- on his bike, at Trish's side or with the kids. Colin was at Festival of the Arts, Fourth Fridays in Campus Martius, and CityFest in New Center. If it had a band and a lemonade stand, he was there. And then he was lecturing at University of Detroit Mercy to lucky students who could tap into his expertise as a developer and planner; offering his energy, expertise and talents to the [WARM Training Center,](http://www.warmtraining.org/) [Detroit Synergy](http://www.detroitsynergy.org/) and the [University of Detroit Jesuit](http://www.uofdjesuit.org/) scholarship fund; taking his kids to [St. Clare of Montefalco](http://www.stclarem.org/) elementary school, U of D and [Regina](http://www.reginahs.com/) high schools, and bragging about their accomplishments; chatting with his neighbors in [East English Village](http://www.eastenglishvillage.org/); and maybe now and then biking into Grosse Pointe for a coffee. He was all over town, and so often with Trish -- what a pair to emulate.

At CityFest this year, I passed the two of them. We stopped and chatted. And then the Colin magnet turned on and more people stopped and chatted. Everywhere he went, people wanted to talk with Colin. There was always the smile. Always the ideas. Always Detroit.
 **Tributes**

Internet tributes have popped up to memorialize Colin. He was a mentor to many of the next generation of leaders in Detroit, and they are flooding Facebook with his praises. From one post to the next, there's an echo: Colin made me better. He inspired me. He brought my project more energy and vitality. Support. Support. Support.

On Thursday, his last day, we had more than 275 people show up for a Model D Speaker Series on the film industry. We turned people away at the door, eventually, because we couldn't squeeze any more in. Colin and Trish signed up to be there, but he'd fallen ill. He passed away that evening.

You know how people say they'll be there in spirit?  I don't think it's presumptuous to say Colin was in that auditorium at College for Creative Studies. It was filled with energy, passion and enthusiasm. In the atrium afterward, people talked of hopes and dreams for the city. They asked each other, what's next? Is this the next thing? How do we do it? There were metro Detroiters of every make, model, color and year. The ball kept rolling as many then crossed town to Atwater Brewing Company, where the inaugural [Detroit Pecha Kucha Night](http://www.pecha-kucha.org/cities/detroit/1) had another 200-plus people, drinks in hand, keeping the ideas churning, energy flowing, the ball rolling along. How he would have loved all of that vibrancy, diversity and enthusiasm.

When Colin started investing in Midtown in the '90s, he had the ball -- the "new Detroit," this "next Detroit" – pretty much to himself and just a few other plucky visionaries. Luckily, he knew that's no way to play.

So maybe you never knew the guy; or maybe you were lucky enough to call him a friend. Either way, there is one surefire way to honor him. Bike Belle Isle. Go to the [Jazz Fest](http://www.detroitjazzfest.com/) this weekend. Buy something funky at [Bureau of Urban Living](http://www.bureauliving.com/). Make friends with someone different from you. Find out what's in common. Bring your ideas together. Share. Be part of Detroit, in any way you can. Play here. Live here. Invest here. Do whatever it is you do best here. Be part of this crazy, flawed, but oh so vibrant urban fabric that he loved so much.

I always will wish I had had the chance to ask Colin what were his sacred Detroit places, but what I'm realizing is that his favorite place would have been yours. He would have loved the fact that you loved something about the city. He'd have reveled in it. He'd have hugged you for it, I promise you.

**Memorial:**

A fund has been set up in Colin's memory to support entrepreneurial efforts in the Midtown neighborhood. The [Colin Hubbell Fund](http://www.colinhubbell.org/) is accepting donations on an ongoing basis through the University Cultural Center Association. Checks should be mailed to the UCCA with "Colin Hubbell Fund" written on the memo line.