

Eulogy in Honor for Volker Eisele

Given January 6, 2015, by Jon-Mark Chappellet*

It's a great honor to have known Volker and consider him a close friend. No matter what I say at this point though I couldn't do his legacy justice, nor could I begin to express my sadness in his passing. My heart goes out especially to Liesel, Christiana, Alex, Catherine, Simone and Triston.

The man had a big life and a legendary personality that you felt from the moment you met him, unless you spoke German though you were likely to be corrected in the pronunciation of his name. For the linguistically impaired he would often accept as passable, changing the "V" to an "F" and just saying "Folker." Those with a true sense of adventure could take a step further, swallow the "r" and try to get it right. He might let you know how you did with a "ya" if you got close or a raised eye brow if you didn't.

I've put together some words that help me describe the person I knew.

He was Fearless, Gracious, Thoughtful, Generous, Tireless, Funny, Shrewd, Insightful, Inspirational.

He was an Activist, Organizer, Fundraiser, Political strategist, Historian, Visionary, Public intellectual, Mentor, Organic

farmer, Opera lover, Nature lover, Hiker, Mushroom forager, Grape grower, Fruit tree cultivator, Pate lover, Cheese hater, Business owner, Tour guide, CCD teacher, Choir singer, and this list could go on and on but most of all he was a Friend.

Getting together with Volker was delightful and fun but often made me feel like I should be doing more for my family, my community and more to preserve this land. It wasn't that he was trying to make me feel guilty, but he was just leading by example. I'm not sure that he ever actually told anyone what was truly on his plate but he was always thinking big and taking action.

Though his politics were decidedly partisan and his approach was often confrontational, he spent his life working with everyone and anyone that could understand the need to protect agricultural land and open space as an always threatened and irreplaceable resource. On his watch, and largely due to his efforts, we have retained nearly all of the County land designated for agriculture and open space since the founding of the Ag Preserve.

A true believer in democracy, Volker felt that the best way to ensure the continuation of the Ag Preserve was to entrust it to the citizens of the County. Thus, with the help of many who shared his vision, Measure J was born and later extended by

Measure P which takes it out to 2051. We talked about it being our descendants who would once again be called upon to consider this legacy.

Thanks largely to the work that he did, the sacredness of the Ag Preserve is a fact that almost everyone in this county now takes for granted. As a marker of this, note that no one running for political office from the left, right or center could be elected if they didn't unequivocally support this heritage. So, mission accomplished and we can all go about our business until 2051, right? Volker was never that naive. Our own successes in making beautiful wines in this seemingly preserved idyllic setting have created new challenges that he knew must be addressed. Traffic impacts, regional growth imperatives, local development schemes, winery definition issues, and environmental concerns of all types were all on his radar and agenda.

At 77 years of age, he was happy to have Alex and the rest of his family by his side to take over the reins of the business but he showed no signs of, nor interest in, slowing down when it came to political engagement. In fact I could never keep up with all of the things that he was involved with at any given moment. His light shown all over this valley and beyond and it's now up to us to keep it burning bright.

Our friend is and will be missed for a long, long time to come by all who knew him. Volker, we love and admire you and will always be inspired by your work and your heart.

*Save Rural Angwin Advisory Council