

## Cassilly's memorial service is loving, down to earth

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St. Louis - To most of St. Louis, Bob Cassilly was the mastermind behind the wildly popular City Museum. His public persona was that of hell-raiser, nonconformist. A man passionate about creating what others could only imagine.

That image is a correct, but incomplete, one. A fuller picture was shared by his family and friends in a tribute to Cassilly on Saturday afternoon.

Cassilly was a small boy in Webster Groves when he first started creating. He built an elaborate three-story tree house and a tunnel into a nearby creek. His backyard became the place other boys were drawn to - a combination of mud, danger and excitement.

Looking back, said childhood friend Steve McAtee, that was the beginning of City Museum.

"One can only love this Titanic genius," McAtee said at a memorial service at Sheldon Concert Hall in midtown. Cassilly's life was "breathtaking and compelling."

The service was surprisingly subdued for a man who created one of the most vibrant, unique destinations in the region. There were no trapeze artists, fire eaters or belly dancers - entertainers who would be at home in City Museum. There would be no spectacle. Nothing to diminish or distract from Cassilly. Just stories - both funny and poignant.

"Bob had the ability not to understand 'no,' and aren't we thankful for that?" said longtime friend and business partner J. Watson Scott. Cassilly loved to explore, including climbing utility towers and ignoring no-trespassing signs.

Scott said Cassilly did so to see as far as possible "so he could find something to create that we'd all marvel at later."

Cassilly was known for his run-ins with City Hall. He preferred to create first and get approval from inspectors and other officials later. One of his better-known exploits was putting a school bus on top of City Museum. It appeared to be teetering on the edge.

"City Museum could easily have failed a thousand times in less creative and more timid hands," Mayor Francis Slay said. "But under Bob's quirky leadership and with his refusal to give up, many dedicated artists ... came together to create something that worked in a wonderful and inimitable way."

The Rev. Dave Rauch, pastor of Our Lady of Providence Catholic Church in Crestwood, said Cassilly helped change the image that St. Louis was not receptive to new ideas.

It's people such as Cassilly "who keep us from getting stale," Rauch said.

Cassilly's son, Max, brought a dose of levity to the memorial. He said his father would wonder what all the fuss was about.

"He definitely would not have thought this many people would take time out of their day and waste it on a funeral," Max Cassilly said.

City Museum was closed to the public Saturday so employees could attend the service. The crowd that filled the concert hall was a mixed bag. Some wore black; others came in T-shirts and jeans. One man wore overalls. An elderly couple strained to listen over fussy children.

Cassilly's mother was there, as well as his wife and two ex-wives. Steve Cassilly said everyone should follow his brother's lead and "direct our energies to what we want instead of going up against something we don't want." Doing so, "the things we don't want will fizzle and wither."

Videos were shown of Bob Cassilly that included family photos and images of him transforming a wheelbarrow full of concrete into a serpentine creature.

The crowd gasped at a video of Cassilly sitting on City Museum's praying mantis statue as it was lifted by a crane to the roof of the museum. He was smiling, loving the excitement and danger that came with the project.

The most haunting image was Cassilly perched in a bulldozer. It was a piece of machinery he spent countless hours on. He loved to churn the earth, shape it from forgotten land into something magical.

Cassilly, 61, was found dead Monday morning sitting in a bulldozer at Cementland, a project he had been working on for more than a decade. Authorities said it appeared the bulldozer had rolled over and that head injuries killed Cassilly.

"Bob Cassilly will not be forgotten as long as somewhere just off the Washington Avenue streetscape he helped make possible there is a worried parent looking for a delighted child climbing along the ceiling through a sculpture fashioned from pieces of our city's heart," Slay said.

• Caption: Photos by Laurie Skrivan • Iskrivan@post-dispatch.com Max Cassilly, son of Bob Cassilly, speaks Saturday at the memorial service celebrating the life of his father as an artist and founder of City Museum. "I bet my dad could beat up your dad," Max Cassilly said jokingly. Photos by Laurie Skrivan • Iskrivan@post-dispatch.com Melissa Giovanna "Gigi" Zompa Cassilly, Bob Cassilly's widow, is flanked by her children Dylan and Robert III at a memorial service celebrating the life of her husband, the artist and founder of City Museum, at Sheldon Concert Hall on Saturday. Cassilly died Monday working on a new project he called Cementland. Max Cassilly, son of Bob Cassilly, speaks Saturday at the memorial service celebrating the life of his father as an artist and founder of City Museum. "I bet my dad could beat up your dad," Max Cassilly said jokingly.

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