

History Note: A passion for puppets was a part of Moses' life

by [Access Press Staff](#) // September 10th, 2015

A lifetime love of puppetry and theater, and a commitment to disability rights, defined Ken Moses' life. The Stillwater area resident died of congestive heart failure August 17.



In Minnesota, Moses is remembered for his work on disability and GLBT rights as well as his theater and arts accessibility work with VSA Minnesota, the Minnesota Association of Community Theaters and other groups.

But what many of his Minnesota friends may not know is Moses' longtime work with puppets. Moses, a native of New York, became interested in theater and puppetry at age four, when he received puppets as a gift. He earned a theater technology degree from Carnegie Institute of Technology (now Carnegie Mellon University) in 1965, with puppetry as part of his portfolio. He worked with and later succeeded the late Larry Berthelson as director of the famed Pickwick Puppet Theatre. Moses wanted puppetry to be thought of as an art form for all ages, not just for children. He was the first two-term president of the Puppetry Guild of Greater New York.

His career in professional theater included work on and off Broadway, at the Smithsonian Institute, in London's West End and in regional and community theaters. Moses was the 1975 recipient of the United International de la Marionnette or UNIMA Citation of Excellence award for collaboration with Berthelson on Stravinsky's "Pulcinella." Moses also produced and directed Mozart's "Magic Flute" at Lincoln Center, and produced an original adaptation of Cervantes' "Don Quixote" with a score by Manuel de Falla.

His work appears in books, newspaper and magazine articles and photos. In 1983 he told the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette that puppetry could be presented as fine art, not simply as children's entertainment. He performed with puppeteers from around the world. Moses Pickwick's work was featured in print and broadcast media ads, and in performances with musicians ranging from orchestras to the rock band Mott the Hoople.

Moses was also a longtime teacher, starting out as an instructor at Syracuse University's Drama Department in 1966-67 before heading to New York for a career in professional theater work. He

taught many classes and workshops, and frequently taught at theater festivals. In his later years he gave presentations on theater access for people with disabilities, as well as transportation systems. Moses hosted more than 150 international visitors, inspiring him to take a round-the-world trip in 1987-1990.

He was a self-trained audio describer, working at state and national theater festivals, and smaller theaters throughout the region. Moses volunteered several years for Art St. Croix, a group of east metro artists with disabilities, and set up several art exhibits and performance events – all of which incorporated ASL interpreting, audio description, captioning and large print.

The last theater production he directed and designed was “Sly Fox,” in November 2011 for the Bridge Theatre in Stillwater. He developed plans for an unbuilt theater in downtown Stillwater.

He gave talks to groups including Critical Thinkers Clubs in the Twin Cities. One talk he gave on the poor condition of highway infrastructure was just hours before the I-35W Bridge collapse.

“How to Train a Cat: The Evolution of the Human Animal” was a favorite talk Moses gave. It was an informal, idiosyncratic personal journey through his experiences with animal cultures and society. Part of the talk focused on autism and evolution. Moses’ self-written obituary wryly noted that he died of “complications from autism.” His autism wasn’t detected until 2007, and he wrote about being a “lifelong misfit.” He was closest to good friends and his cats George (deceased) and Ozzie. Moses worked as a personal care attendant, and worked for several years for the Metropolitan Center for Independent Living (MCIL) overseeing the PCA program there. Years before Moses wrote the rules for the New Jersey Personal Assistance Services Program.

He worked tirelessly on civil right issues, serving on the Stillwater Human Rights Commission for several years. Moses was the first-ever Stillwater Human Rights Award in 2006. He focused on many issues including accessibility in the community. He loved offering tours, especially for people with disabilities, and often used tours as an excuse to find out how accessible theatres, art galleries, parks, museums, libraries, grocery stores and other places really were. Moses distributed email news and helped organize programs for Out in the Valley, a GLBT organization.

A cabaret service is pending with Bradshaw Funeral Homes.

Access Press is interested in reader submissions for the monthly History Note column, to complement the articles written by Luther Granquist and other contributors. Submissions must center on events, people and places in the history of Minnesota’s disability community. We are interested in history that focuses on all types of disability topics, so long as the history has a tie to Minnesota. We are especially interested in stories from Greater Minnesota. Please submit ideas prior to submitting full stories, as we may have covered the topic before. Contact us at access@accesspress.org or 651-644-2133 if you have questions. The History Note is a monthly column sponsored by the Minnesota Governor’s Council on Developmental Disabilities.