

SECTION B » TUESDAY, MARCH 16, 2010 » WWW.SLTRIB.COM/NEWS

# UTAH

## Bookseller dies

**OBITUARY** » Bruce Roberts, the co-founder of fabled bookstore Cosmic Aeroplane, died Saturday. The bookstore was Salt Lake City's "epicenter of cool," until 1991. » **B3**





BRUCE ROBERTS » 1948-2010

# Cosmic Aeroplane was a counterculture hub

Bookstore brought in hippies and professors alike.

By **BEN FULTON**

*The Salt Lake Tribune*

Bruce Roberts, a partner in Salt Lake City's fabled bookstore Cosmic Aeroplane, died of melanoma early Saturday at University hospital. He was 61.

Born in McGill, Nev., Roberts graduated from Skyline High School in 1966 before attending the University of Utah, where he studied journalism and edited the sports section of *The Daily Utah Chronicle* student newspaper.

An avid sports fan who loved the Cincinnati Reds baseball team and followed his high school football team throughout adulthood, Roberts formed a partnership with Ken Sanders during the mid-1970s. The two transformed Cosmic Aeroplane, at 258 E. 100 South, originally founded in 1967 as a head shop, into a book and record store that served as the city's countercultural hub.

"Bruce and the Cosmic Aeroplane are difficult to separate," said John Greene, station manager of KUER. Greene first met Roberts during his days at community radio station KRCL, then located above the Blue Mouse cinema, which was adjacent to Cosmic Aeroplane.

"Cosmic Aeroplane was the epicenter of cool for a lot of people," Greene said. "It was the kind of store where you'd find people with 5-inch-high spiked hair right next to literature professors."

A fan of almost anything offbeat, Roberts loaned records to KRCL disc jockeys and teamed with Greene as a concert promoter for punk and reggae bands who played the Utah State Fairgrounds Coliseum. On the bookstore side, Roberts found himself middleman to several forgeries of Mark Hofmann, the documents forger who killed two people with pipe bomb explosions.

Roberts was also a steadfast supporter of civil liberties issues who never missed a chance to promote banned books, Greene said.

Roberts was a chivalrous and irreverent businessman who kept work schedules flexible for employees working their way through school, recalled Jane Otto, a nonprofit consultant living in Los Angeles who worked five years at the book and record store.

He hosted "whiskey weekend" buffet tables, replete with bottles of Jack Daniel's, to power store employees through the final weekend of the holiday shopping season.

"It was a crazy quilt of a family," Otto said. "It was the most diverse place I'd ever worked. Maintaining all the diverse aspects of that store really spoke to Bruce at his core."

With the onslaught of chain book stores in the 1980s, plus a satellite store in St. George that spread business thin, the store announced its closing in 1991. From there, Roberts

launched a series of publishing concerns before landing a job as sales and marketing director for the University of Utah Press.

"His children, his book business and his dog Bill were the most important things in his life," said Becky Roberts, his younger sister, who works as a nurse practitioner in Panguitch.

Roberts is survived by his children Andrew, Hannah and Sam.

Family and friends will celebrate Roberts' life on April Fool's Day at a location to be announced.