

Michael L. Strang
1929 -2014

Michael Lathrop Strang died at home on his ranch outside Carbondale, Colorado on January 12, 2014. Born in Bucks County, Pennsylvania on June 17, 1929, his family moved to Colorado in 1932, to a ranch they purchased in the mountains above Golden. Times were tough, so the family made ends meet by bringing eastern kids out west for “summer camp” at the ranch. Mike developed his passion for horses early in life caring for the string of ranch horses that were used to work the cattle and outfit the campers. The family used a team of draft horses to cut and rake the hay they put up and to skid Ponderosa pine logs off the mountain to their sawmill. Mike’s father also raised Thoroughbred racehorses.

Mike and his brother, Bart, were home-schooled by their father until they went to Princeton University. Mike took time off from his studies at Princeton (’56) to serve as a lieutenant in the Army from 1950 to 1953. It was while training future officers at the army’s Officer Candidate School at Fort Benning, GA that he met Ben Hardaway and developed his passion for hounds and fox hunting.

After a brief stint in New York as an investment banker, he returned to Colorado to ranch. In 1960, he married Kit and moved to the Roaring Fork Valley on the Western Slope of the Rockies to pursue his dream of cattle ranching along with his brother and another partner. The Big 4 Ranch also hosted a summer camp for kids to help pay the bills. Both English and Western riding were part of the curriculum.

In 1965, Mike and Kit purchased their ranch on Missouri Heights near Carbondale. They raised registered Hereford cattle and later crossed them with specialty Lowline cattle to produce stock that would fatten on grass. They also raised Thoroughbred and Warmblood sport horses for hunters, 3-day eventing, and show jumping.

In 1967, inspired by George Beeman, legendary Master of the Arapahoe Hunt, Mike co-founded the Roaring Fork Hounds with the Honorable John Wendt. Mike served as joint-MFH until 2006. Many in the fox hunting community thought a pack of hounds near Aspen was crazy, but Wendt and Strang proved the skeptics wrong. The hounds’ usual quarry was not a fox, but the wilier coyote, which provided great sport, under Mike’s leadership, for nearly four decades. Roaring Fork Hounds can lay claim to being “*the highest hunt in the world.*” Shortly after starting the hunt, Mike and Kit organized and hosted the Roaring Fork Hounds Pony Club, which still thrives and meets regularly at the Strang Ranch.

Over the decades, the Strangs have hosted numerous Pony Club rallies, horse trials, Hunter Jumper shows, clinics and other equestrian activities on their ranch, and Mike was a regular presence, making sure participants, competitors, and spectators alike were comfortable, safe, and, most important, having fun. He was always proud to watch his “home-bred horses being ridden by home-bred daughters.” Mike was a big supporter of equestrian sports nationally. He was president of the board of the *American Horse Trials Association*, a non-profit corporation established to assist Three Day Event Riders and Organizers in raising tax-deductible financial support for national and international competitions. He also volunteered at the Atlanta

Olympics, as well as regularly at the Radnor Three Day Event in Pennsylvania, and the Rolex Event at Lexington, Kentucky.

Mike served in the Colorado State Legislature from 1970 to 1974, and was noted for introducing legislation to allow the state to regulate and tax the sale and consumption of marijuana, an idea whose time had not yet come. More important, however, he worked with members of both political parties to develop sensible land-use regulations to address the effects of the population growth occurring in the state. The legislation he introduced gave local governments more tools to manage the sprawl that was beginning to threaten the land and water resources essential for agriculture to thrive.

In 1984, Strang was elected to the U. S. Congress, representing Western Colorado. He served one term and then returned to Colorado to ranch.

Strang is survived by his wife of 53 years, Kit, two daughters, Bridget and Laurie (Cunningham), and a son, Scott. His son Lathrop predeceased him.