



## Barry Allen Benepe

May 21, 1928 - April 23, 2025

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Barry Allen Benepe died peacefully at his home in Saugerties, NY on April 23, 2025. Many members of his family had come to see him for his last hours on an earth that he loved so much for its bounty of beautiful fruits and vegetables, architecture, cycling and art. Barry was 29 days shy of his 97th birthday on May 21. Though his heart was giving out, he was able to return to his beloved Saugerties where he and his wife Judith have spent their summers for 41 years while winters were enjoyed in the deep culture and bustle of New York City. Fortunately, he was able to get up from his bed to see the explosive blooms of the spring, the daffodils, narcissus, crocuses, forsythia, magnolia, pear, and apple blossoms that surround his and Judith's property on Van Vlierden Road. He also enjoyed the help of many people from the community in his last weeks, the four "D's", Divina, Diane, Denver, and Daneka, and one "T" for Tita, numerous visits from family and friends who came to shower their love and affection for him, and the tireless help of Zzoe who has been a rock for the family for years.

Barry was trained as an architect and graduated from Williams College, the Cooper Union and MIT but he will be remembered for pioneering in his dogged and quietly passionate way, the creation of Greenmarkets in New York City. As a young man, he spent his summers at his family's 200-acre farm

Melody Manor, in Princess Anne, MD., where they raised animals, and grew produce. He chose not to join Leacock and Co., the family importing business of linens and other home goods, to be a planner and architect, for which his father Robert Benepe never quite forgave him. Living in New York City he soon yearned for the simple pleasures of farm life, and managed through pure stubbornness to bring the country to the city in the co-creation of Greenmarket with Bob Lewis. The idea was simple, bring local produce to the nearest city so you could savor the taste of freshly picked apples, pears, raspberries, strawberries, asparagus, lettuce, tomatoes, green and yellow squash, potatoes, and so much more –from local farmers. He also wanted to help preserve small farmers and their land, who were rapidly being bankrupted by large agrobusiness.

The first Greenmarket on East 59th Street near the Ed Koch Bridge was well attended by the public, and Barry's five children Adrian, Jennifer, Andrew, Callum and Simon all helped in the new market (for free of course). But local supermarkets saw the fresh fruits and vegetables brought in directly by the farmer, as a threat and placing a different kind of "plant" on the local community boards, fomented the dismantling of the 59th St. market. This made Barry even more determined.

With grants from the J.M. Kaplan Fund and help from Marian Sulzberger Heiskell, a founder of Council on the Environment of NYC, (now GrowNYC), Barry and Bob reopened at Union Square which at the time was a dying public space, with surrounding retailers going bankrupt, and drug dealers occupying the park 24/7. He had great supporters, including Lys McLaughlin of GrowNYC, and many others who saw his vision, and soon over the years, the Union Square Greenmarket became the most successful and largest market in New York City. It also was the focal point for the amazing retail revival of the surrounding area. The market management was non-profit which meant that the profits went to the farmers, not to Greenmarket, and Barry existed on a

modest salary. This fit his luddite notion of plain and simple living, while giving back to the world the most important things –such as the exquisite taste of a fresh tomato that has been allowed to ripen on the vine instead of being stuffed un-ripened into a train car to travel for 24 hours from places like Florida, California and Mexico. It also put a strain on supporting his children which he had through two marriages, the first to Jagna Wojcicka, an urban anthropologist and the second to Morag Clyne, an artist. His children all went on to do their own extraordinary work, while embracing his love for movement, art, and public service.

Barry was also an untiring advocate for human-pedaled bicycles, and managed with the help of many friends and advocates, to lay down their bikes in front of traffic and get the roads in Central Park closed to cars on Sundays. Biking to work one day in the West Village, he was struck by a truck and had his own brush with death landing in Saint Vincent's hospital with a concussion, and a head gash and 100 stiches that went across his forehead. His eyebrows were never the same after that. And, he never biked to work again, but he was surrounded by advocates when Central Park was finally closed once and for all, to all cars, on all days.

After a third unspoken “marriage of a kind” with the sculptor Mary Frank, who now lives with her husband Leo Treitler in Woodstock, NY, Barry met Judith Spektor, also a passionate NYC public servant who headed the agency serving the homeless in the Koch Administration. They have had a wonderful life together, co-opening with others the Saugerties Farmers Market in Saugerties after Barry retired, growing their magnificent garden, and adding artistic touches to their 100-year-old plus farmhouse (though in true Luddite fashion still existing with only one bathroom). They also traveled frequently to Paris, France, staying in a friend's apartment on Ile Saint Louis many years in a row, for a month at a time so they could listen to music floating up from the

street, eat stinky French cheese, hobnob with friends and family, and truly enjoy the pace and beauty of France the way it should be.

Barry is survived by his wife Judith, all of his aforementioned talented and mischievous children, grandchildren Alex, Erik, Ian, Miles, and Tyler, great grandchild, James, and former wife Morag Benepe. A family funeral will be held on Saturday, April 26. Memorials to be held in Saugerties, NY and New York City will be announced shortly.

You can also read the obituary about Barry in the New York Times here, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/04/23/nyregion/barry-benepe-dead.html>