

# The man behind the Market

A look back with former executive director of the PDA, Ben Franz-Knight, as he leaves to start the next phase of his career.

**BY:** ERIN HOBSON  
**PHOTOGRAPHY:** LARA SWIMMER,  
WON MOC, LORETTA GRANDE

Preserving the past through shared connections — that’s how Ben Franz-Knight operates.

A sculpture major, comic book collector and bike tinkerer, Franz-Knight has always been able to make things work by understanding how they come together.

The former executive director of the Pike Place Market Preservation and Development Authority (PDA) grew up in Pullman, Wash., the son of a teacher and a WSU professor. After

high school, he traded in his crimson and gray roots for purple and gold.

“When I was a freshman I had season tickets to the Huskies and was one of the only ones rooting for the Cougars in the Apple Cup that year,” Franz-Knight said.

While at the University of Washington he ran the ASUW bike shop, which operates as a small business inside of a student government — an organizational structure he would become more familiar with throughout his career.

As a sculpture major, he spent most of his days manipulating shapes in the studio and at the bike shop. One night he met a fellow creative, a costume design major destined for Los Angeles. Now his wife, he followed her to California with his collection of bikes in tow and landed a temp job at the Santa Monica Pier as an administrative assistant.

It was there that a maintenance manager, Bill Bollinger, took him under his wing by encouraging him to ditch his rash guard and sandals and



Hanging in Ben Franz-Knight's office is a Gary Fisher-designed bike frame from the late '80s, a model that was only built for a few months. The company stopped making them because they were too hard to replicate. This is just one of many bikes hanging from his office ceiling, including one geared specifically to get him to and from City Hall and the Market, a common trip while the project was underway.



## Ben's Top Picks at the Market



**Oriental Mart:** A family-owned business started in the '70s by Mila Apostol, who has an MBA from the University of the Philippines and moved here with her husband, a Boeing engineer. Their daughters, Joy and Leila, now run it. He often goes there for lunch.



start wearing regular shoes because, "someday," Bollinger said, "he would run the place." After several years, the position of acting director opened up. "Bill called me up and said, 'If there's one piece of advice you listen to — and I know you haven't listened to a single piece of advice to date — apply for this job. It's yours,'" Franz-Knight said.

The Santa Monica Pier is much like the Pike Place Market; saved by a citizen's initiative in the 1970s, it comprises many small businesses and is a tremendous point of pride for the community. After eight years as



**Golden Age Collectables:** For her birthday, he bought his wife an original X-Men #2.

*"I'll certainly miss ... the people in the community. That's what makes the Market amazing, the diversity of voices — the passion that folks have for this place and the uniqueness of the place itself."*

— Ben Franz-Knight  
Former Executive Director  
Pike Place PDA



**Beecher's Cheese:** His son frequently asks dad to pick up some mac and cheese for dinner.

**OPPOSITE:** The iconic Market sign  
**THIS PAGE (FROM TOP):** Ben Franz-Knight with his beloved bike; the new addition makes it easier to traverse the Market's multiple levels; roll-up "garage" doors allow vendors to adjust their space to the weather

director of the Pier, Franz-Knight was ready for a new adventure, and the Market was looking for an executive director.

“The position was perfect in many ways,” Franz-Knight said. “It was an opportunity to scale up, significantly. It was an opportunity for me to take everything I learned in Santa Monica and apply it.”

On his first day at the Market, he attended a meeting to discuss seismic upgrades and piers needed to support the existing building. Following that first \$68 million renovation in 2010, Franz-Knight embarked on the recently completed \$77 million Pike Place MarketFront project with Sellen. These two projects would introduce him to his next big adventure.

Franz-Knight recently announced he would be leaving the Market to take a position with SOJ (Shiels, Oblatz, Johnsen), a Northwest firm that specializes in the management of



complex urban development projects for public and private clients, including the Pike Place PDA.

“Ken Johnsen is an amazing guy, and I have incredible respect for his skills, vision and leadership ability,” Franz-Knight said. “I’m looking forward to joining the firm.”

When he took the time to reflect about what he enjoyed most about his former role, it was the projects. He said he enjoyed every phase — from the concept development and construction aspects, to achieving the vision of the new MarketFront. In his role at SOJ, he said he will be taking on more complex civic projects, but he will miss the Market.

“I’ll certainly miss ... the people in the community,” Franz-Knight said. “That’s what makes the Market amazing, the diversity of voices — the passion that folks have for this place and the uniqueness of the place itself.” ■

**FROM TOP:** The MarketFront provides striking new sightlines of Seattle’s waterfront; the new expansion includes space for new vendors like Honest Biscuits