



## AGENT ORANGE AND UNCLE PHIL

*Phil Knight's right-hand man is mysterious but powerful*

PHOTO COURTESY OF NIKE.COM

**N**ike co-founder Phil Knight often gets the credit, or the blame, for being the guiding force behind construction projects at the University of Oregon such as Matthew Knight Arena, The Jaqua Center for Student Athletes (aka the Jock Box), or, more recently, the plan to demolish Hayward Field's historic East Grandstand in order to make way for a new stadium.

But Knight isn't necessarily the man who pushes the projects through to the end. He has a fixer for that.

Throughout the years, Knight has had the same "right-hand man" (or "confidant," "adviser" or "troubleshooter," names given by various media reports) by his side: Howard Sidney Slusher, who has had a hand in managing all of those projects and more — and has been getting paid millions of dollars from Nike for his work.

The projects Slusher has worked on have been full of controversy and criticized for lacking transparency as well as for their large price tags.

For a man who is so integral to decision-making with

Knight and Nike, not much is known about him these days — but as the discussion over Hayward field grows even more heated, Slusher's name is coming up in news stories. *EW* reached out to Nike multiple times for more information on Slusher and an interview but received no response. *EW* also reached out to a phone number thought to be associated with Slusher and received no response.

As for the Eugene residents *EW* contacted who know Slusher, none of them would speak about him on the record.

A former Los Angeles attorney, Slusher became known by the nickname "Agent Orange" through his unyielding tactics of defending athletes in order to negotiate better pay from sports-franchise holders, and his red hair, according to a 1985 *People Magazine* article.

Now in his 80s, Slusher grew up in Brooklyn, according to that article, and has a Ph.D. in physical education from Ohio State University and a law degree from the University of Southern California.

Most recently, Slusher has had a hand in the plans for

a new Hayward Field, according to the University of Oregon's senior director of public affairs, Tobin Klinger.

"Howard Slusher is an important part of the Hayward Field construction team, which also includes SRG Architects, Hoffman Construction and project manager Jim Petsche," Klinger says. "He and the entire team bring great experience and an amazing track record of building world class facilities, including iconic and amazing buildings for both Nike and at the UO."

He adds. "We are grateful for Howard's work on our campus and fortunate to have him as part of the team on another UO project."

There is no public information available on how much Slusher is getting paid for the Hayward Field project, but Nike has paid him millions over the years.

Slusher is a key part of Nike World Headquarters renovations. He received \$2,024,592 from Nike in the 2017 fiscal year from managing the "planning, design and construction of new buildings, and improvements to, Nike's World Headquarters" in Beaverton, according to Nike's proxy statement from its annual meeting of shareholders.

He was also paid an extra \$71,970 for life insurance premiums last year, according to that report.

Slusher was selected to work on this most recent Nike World Headquarters expansion "due to his deep history and experience with the Company, as he managed several significant construction projects for the Company, including the original World Headquarters construction and later expansions," the statement says.

In 2014-2016, Slusher was paid more than \$7.5 million, plus health and life insurance premiums, for the same thing — management of design and construction of buildings, or improvements, at Nike's World Headquarters, according to Nike.

Slusher has known the Knight family at least since 1992, when he and another person were granted joint power of attorney for both Phil and Penelope Knight for the purchase of a Manhattan apartment unit, according to court documents from the New York City Department of Finance.

In the 2008 fiscal year, Slusher paid \$2,790,650 to buy Nike stock for about \$27 a share, the price its stock was going for in 2000, according to another Nike proxy statement.

From then on, according to Nike, Slusher's life and health insurance premiums have been paid for by the company.

According to reporting by *Willamette Week* in 2010, Slusher has a house in Lake Oswego built by Hoffman Construction, the same company that built Matthew Knight Arena and is a part of the Hayward Field project.

Slusher's family also has professional ties to Nike. His son John Slusher is currently the executive vice president of global sports marketing, according to the company. But the senior Slusher is not listed as a Nike executive.

Not only is it difficult to see exactly who Slusher is in the Nike organization these days — or in the Knight-funded UO construction projects that Slusher has helped oversee and advise Knight on — there have also been transparency issues.

Most recently the lack of public input during the planning of the Hayward Field construction project and East Grandstand teardown has left community members in the dark.

The Jaqua Center for Student Athletes, opened in 2010, was controversial due to its exclusivity — it's mostly used by student athletes for tutoring and advising services while other students and the public are not allowed in most parts of the building. The Jaqua also had transparency issues surrounding its construction price. The Knight-funded project cost \$41.7 million dollars, but that was not revealed until documents were released to *The Oregonian*.

Concern from the community arose around Matthew Knight Arena as well. The more than \$200 million build-