

## 'He would know the way'

"Kenny was a true leader. He would know the way. He would show the way. He would go the way," said Dr. Duane Flack, a veterinarian and general manager of the Monfort of Colorado feedlot division for many years.

Monfort introduced the concept of slaughtering cattle at local plants, including his own in northern Colorado, instead of shipping animals by railroad to cities such as Kansas City and Chicago.

He also devised the concept of "boxed beef," meaning butchered meat that is trucked to wholesalers and retailers in packages. Now an industry standard, boxed beef replaced the shipment of whole beef carcasses; it improved meat quality and food safety for consumers while changing the relationship between meat packers and sellers.

"It matters because of the improvements in the quality, consistency and shelf life of the product," said Kay Norton, a Monfort protégé who later became vice president for legal and governmental affairs for ConAgra Red Meats.

"Kenny recognized the changes that were going to be required to participate in the agricultural industry."

The Greeley business began when Warren Monfort, Ken's father, bought 18 head of cattle during the Great Depression in 1930.

The business grew under the younger Monfort's direction into the largest cattle-feeding operation in the world. He eventually ran three Colorado feedlots with a capacity of at least 100,000 head of cattle.

Greeley became a company town with the Monfort beef business at its core; the business employed several thousand people under Monfort's direction, making the company the largest employer in Weld County.

After building his cattle empire in Greeley, Monfort in 1987 sold his company to food giant ConAgra Inc. in a stock swap valued at nearly \$300 million, according to published reports.

Monfort stayed on as an executive and retired in 1989. His sons, Dick and Charlie Monfort, continued as company leaders and eventually left.

The brothers, who along with family members remain pillars of the Greeley community, are principal owners of the Colorado Rockies baseball club.

## A change of allegiance

Monfort was an anti-war Democrat when he served two terms in the Colorado House of Representatives in the 1960s.

In 1980, disenchanted with President Jimmy Carter and complaining about the generally poor state of the nation's economy and defense, Monfort and two other former Democrats announced they were switching their loyalties to the Republican Party. They called themselves "The Eat-Crow Club."

Monfort graduated from Greeley High School in 1946 and attended Colorado State University. He later served on the State Board of Agriculture, which governs CSU.

Monfort was a generous giver to CSU, donating millions to a scholarship fund in his name, an arts center, the library and athletic facilities. He spoke to CSU President Albert Yates after the school's football team was victorious at the Liberty Bowl in Memphis, Tenn., in late December.

"He lived and breathed green and gold," Yates said, referring to CSU's colors. "He was arguably the greatest benefactor and the best friend of the university."

Monfort also donated generously to the University of Northern Colorado in his hometown. In 1999, the Monfort Family Foundation gave \$10.5 million to the school's business programs; UNC renamed its business school the Kenneth W. Monfort College of Business.

He and his family also helped to establish the Union Colony Civic Center, the Monfort Family Birth Center at North Colorado Medical Center, the Monfort Children's Clinic and the Greeley Veterans' Park.

Monfort earned the Colorado Employer of the Year Award in 1970 and was inducted into the Colorado Business Hall of Fame. In 1991, he received the Citizen of the West award from the National Western Stock Show, among many other honors.

A memorial service will be held in Sarasota, Fla., on Sunday. Another service is set for 10 a.m. Wednesday at the Union Colony Civic Center in Greeley. Donations in Monfort's memory may be sent to the Boys and Girls Clubs of America.

*Mike Klis and Fred Brown of The Denver Post contributed to this report.*



Denver Post file photo

Young Ken Monfort with champion steer in 1941.

## Monfort led the way in beef industry

MONFORT from Page 1A

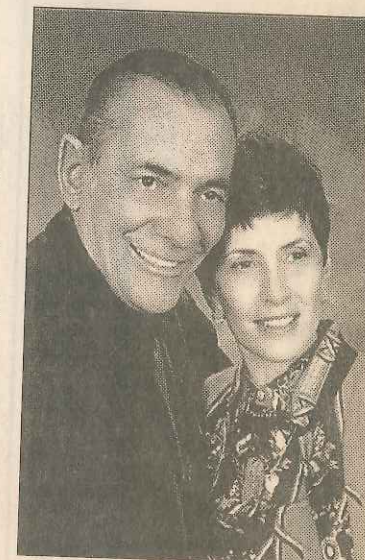
made a tenfold profit when he sold the Hereford for \$1,055.

Monfort began with one cattle feedlot and became a leading figure in the global beef business, particularly on the Pacific Rim.

In the late 1970s and early '80s, Monfort's multimillion-dollar business was on the brink of bankruptcy because of a depressed cattle market, a tornado that struck a backup plant in Nebraska and an industrywide hormone scare.

At the same time, the company had a serious conflict with unionized workers. Strikers closed Monfort's Greeley packing plant and came close to closing a key feedlot. The plant reopened about two years later without union representation, though workers later reorganized under a union banner.

The patriarch and his sons then managed to revitalize the company; Monfort had been transformed from a farm kid into an enduring beef baron.



Special to The Denver Post

Kenneth Monfort and his wife, Myra, in 1995.

# Beef baron Monfort dies at 71

By Coleman Cornelius

Denver Post Northern Colorado Bureau

Kenneth Monfort, the cattle baron who revolutionized the beef industry and also made his mark in Colorado as a politician and philanthropist, died Friday afternoon at a hospital in Florida after suffering for years with emphysema. He was 71.

Monfort and his wife, Myra, had moved to a coastal town near Sarasota, Fla., from their longtime home in Greeley when his health began declining about a decade ago. He died at a hospital there with his family at his side.

"It's been a tough day. He was a great dad," Dick Monfort, one of four children, said Friday. Monfort also is survived by 13 grandchildren.

Monfort, known as Kenny, was a visionary who changed the beef industry by combining several operations — beef feeding, slaughter, meatpacking, sales and distribution — into a Fortune 500 company that, along with several others, grew to dominate the business nationwide.

As a 12-year-old Greeley farm boy, Monfort showed the grand champion steer at the 1941 National Western Stock Show and



Kenneth Monfort in 1995.

Please see **MONFORT** on 18A