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Beef king Ken Monfort dies in Florida

Friends remember famed business leader, former state legislator for his caring nature

By Julie Poppen

News Staff Writer

Colorado cattle baron and former legislator Ken Monfort, credited with revolutionizing the na-



Monfort

tion's beef industry, died Friday in Sarasota, Fla. He was 72.

Monfort, whose father, Warren, launched the family's Greeley meatpacking empire, was remembered Friday by friends as a straight-talking man who was not only a visionary busi-

ness leader but also a person who cared deeply about his family and community.

Monfort, known for his love of cheeseburgers and buttered french fries, supported programs at both the University of Northern Colorado in Greeley and Colorado State University in Fort Collins. He served on the State Board of Agriculture, which oversees CSU, when CSU President Albert Yates was hired in 1990.

"We've just lost one of our true heroes, one of the native sons in the state of Colorado," Yates said. "When I think about Colorado State University, hands down, Kenny Monfort has been truly the best benefactor, the best friend ... of all time."

The UNC business school bears Monfort's name after the Monfort Family Foundation donated \$10.5 million to the school in 1999. The donation was the largest in UNC's

history. CSU sponsors the Monfort Scholars Program thanks to a \$2.5 million gift from the Monforts.

Monfort and his wife, Myra, who served as vice president of the family beef business from 1980 to 1995, moved to Sarasota several years ago because of Monfort's emphysema. Recently he developed bronchitis, which led to

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Monfort beef dynasty began in 1919 with 18 head of cattle

MONFORT from 4A

pneumonia.

"He couldn't come back to Colorado, which was really tough on him," said state Rep. Bill Webster, R-Greeley. "His wife said he wasn't walking the beach or swimming enough, but he could sure play cards."

Webster, who also has worked in the feedlot business, had nothing but glowing remarks about Monfort, who was three years

ahead of him in school. Webster said Monfort was always proud that he had attended a one-room schoolhouse as a child.

"The important thing about Kenny was his humility," Webster said. "He never flashed what he had created, the cattle empire he created, the multitude of awards he got."

Monfort served in the state House as a Democrat (he later switched and became an active Republican) and ran for a seat in

the U.S. Senate in 1968 on an anti-Vietnam War platform. His colleagues often ribbed him for his disheveled appearance and penchant for always wearing white socks with his loafers.

"When he went to a party, it was tough for him to wear a coat and tie," said Bill Allnutt, co-owner of Allnutt Funeral Service in Greeley, who grew up with Monfort.

The Monfort family developed a beef dynasty in Colorado that began with 80 acres and 18 head of

cattle in 1919.

Patriarch Warren Monfort was a farmer with a vision who pioneered a cattle-feeding operation using surplus crops from his farm. He began the small operation during the depths of the Depression and by the end of World War II, Monfort was feeding thousands of cattle on his feedlot north of Greeley and was the top seller in the Chicago cattle market from 1939 to 1942.

He passed that entrepreneurial

spirit on to his son Ken, who dropped out of Colorado A&M — now CSU — in 1950 to join his father in an operation that had grown to 8,000 head of cattle and \$1 million in annual sales.

Ken Monfort expanded the family business into beef packing with the construction of the Greeley packing plant in 1960.

He is recognized as a pioneer in moving packing plants from urban

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