

Colorado Executive dead at 72

By Jeffrey Leib

Denver Post Business Writer

Roland I. "Sonny" Mapelli, a Colorado meat company executive, a longtime National Western Stock Show director and a former Democratic Party politician, died yesterday at his home in Greeley after a long battle with cancer.

He was 72.

"Everyone loved Sonny," said Ken Monfort. "He was the best storyteller in the world, and I was an excellent straight man to him. I'd hear the same story three times and it would always get better."



Sonny' Mapelli

Mapelli had a rich and varied career in Denver and Colorado business and politics. For a time, he owned a restaurant at Colfax Avenue and Broadway near the state Capitol. He served on the Denver City Council in the mid-1950s and ran for mayor in 1959, an election he lost.

He was also a colleague of Gov. Roy Romer.

"Sonny was a personal friend and political colleague, and I am very saddened by his death," the governor said yesterday. "He was a very noble and intelligent person."

After taking over Mapelli Brothers meat company, a Denver firm started by his father and uncles in 1906, Mapelli merged the co

Please see **MAPELLI** on

cancer ends

MAPELLI from Page 1A

pany with Monfort of Colorado Inc. in 1969.

The Denver native had met Ken Monfort in the mid-1960s when both men served in the Colorado Legislature — Mapelli in the Senate and Monfort in the House.

The political partnership developed into a business combination lasting more than 30 years.

Mapelli's most recent title was senior vice president and assistant to the president of ConAgra Red Meat Cos., the parent of Monfort Inc., which ConAgra bought in 1987.

The president of ConAgra Red Meats is Dick Monfort, Ken's son.

In 1961, Mapelli was appointed to a seat in the Colorado House of Representatives and in 1962 won election to the state Senate along with fellow Democrat Romer.

Mapelli served one four-year term in the Senate and then turned to concentrate on the family meat business. The company would buy beef carcasses from Monfort's Greeley slaughter plant and bring them to Mapelli Brothers' Blake Street plant in Denver for fabrication into food-service portions.

Mapelli jokingly said later that Ken Monfort had an entrepreneurial eye and saw the value that Mapelli Brothers was adding to the Monfort beef by cutting it into portions.

"I said right then, 'That damn Ken Monfort, we either have to join him or he's going to compete with us,'" Mapelli said.

Today, Mapelli Distribution Co., a Monfort Inc. division, has more than 2,000 employees in 45 branches around the country and sells more than \$1 billion of meat a year.

Ken Monfort acknowledged that he and Mapelli came from different backgrounds.

"Sonny was a North Denver motorcycle-riding city guy, and I was what some might call a cowboy," Monfort recalled. Yet the Harley rider and the horse rider had lunch together nearly every day for more than 20 years, unless one or the other was out of town.

In 1980, Mapelli and Monfort started a group they called the Switcheroos along with other political figures around the state to reflect their switch in affiliation from the Democratic to Republican parties. They also dubbed it the "Eat Crow Club."

Despite the party switch, Romer remained friends with Mapelli. "I told him I always believed in latter-day redemption," the governor said.

"Sonny was a very religious person," said Ken Monfort. "If there is a heaven, he will get there. The chances are somewhat less that I'll make it up there to join him."

Mapelli served in the U.S. Air Force in Europe during World War II. He is survived by his wife Nornie, whom he married in 1942, two daughters, Terri and Jerri, five grandchildren and a brother, Eugene.

A vigil service will be at 7 p.m. Sunday at St. Mary's Catholic Church in Greeley. A mass of Christian burial will be said Monday at 10 a.m. at the church.

Entombment will be Monday at 3:30 p.m. at Tower of Memories, Crown Hill Mausoleum, Denver.

Memorial contributions may be made to either the Hospice of Northern Colorado or the American Cancer Society.