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In business, Al Kober was a master retailer in the meat industry.

But what so many who came to know the father of nine would find out, it was Kober's mastery of life that often left the greatest impression.

A devout Christian whose energy and quick wit were matched only by his loyalty and kindness to others, Kober garnered a laundry list of accomplishments and honors during his lifetime, and won over an even greater number of friends.

Kober passed away in April at the age of 72 after a brief illness.

"He's an icon," said Liz Wunderlich of the U.S. Meat Export Federation. "He was not only somebody who was able to educate, but he wouldn't step down from his core beliefs. He believed in meat as part of a healthy diet, and he believed in quality. He lived those core beliefs - he talked them daily, along with his strong religious beliefs. He was just a great guy."

Kober, an Oley, Pa., native who served as director of retail for the *Certified Angus Beef*® brand from 2002-2010, spent 58 years working in the retail industry, including 50 with Pennsylvania-based Clemens Supermarkets. After beginning his working career at age 7 in "information distribution," which he would later clarify was the technical term for a paperboy, Kober spent time in the "landscaping and estate beautification" field, the term he jokingly referred to for mowing lawns.

When he was 14, Kober's neighbor got him a job bagging groceries with the company that would employ him in various roles for the next half century.

"He was the consummate meat professional," said Mark Kurkiewicz, vice president of meat programs at TOPCO. "He knew more about meat than just about anybody I've met in this business, and I've been in it for almost 30 years. We spent a lot of time talking about fresh meat, Certified Angus Beef and, certainly, faith. ... I consider him a mentor."

After moving to the Clemens meat department, Kober worked his way up to assistant meat manager in 1964, deli manager in 1969 and meat supervisor in 1973. While serving as Clemens' meat director, he launched a close-trim program for all meat cuts, years before the practice became the norm.

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It wouldn't be the last time Kober would change the meat industry.

“Al sat on the (The American Meat Institute/Food Marketing Institute) committee for as long as I'd known they had a committee,” Wunderlich said. “And he was the one who said, ‘when we sell protein in stores, we're also selling poultry. If we're going to have meetings that are meaningful, we need to include the poultry groups’. He told me one time that one of the very strong packers refused to speak to him after that because he was so mad, but Al knew it was the right thing to do and he wasn't backing down. Now, we have Tyson owning beef. Look how integrated we are now as an industry.”

Over the years, Kober picked up a well-deserved reputation as a retail wizard whose expertise was often called upon for speaking engagements in the industry.

In fact, Bryan Salvage from *Meat & Poultry* magazine remembers one of many instances when Kober stole the show.

“He was in a panel discussion during an (American Meat Institute) convention, Worldwide Food Expo or some other major event many years ago in Chicago,” Salvage wrote in an e-mail. “An animal activist in the crowd stood up during the Q&A and pretty much proclaimed that God was a vegetarian and that the Bible states people should not eat meat. Al politely corrected her by referring to various parts of the Bible contradicting her claims, and her jaw dropped. She sat down and stayed quiet for the rest of the Q&A.”

A day never passed that Kober didn't praise the Lord for being alive, often sprinting to his destination for no other reason than “because I could.”

“One day I looked out my window and saw him sprinting across the parking lot, and I was almost in a panic because I thought something was wrong,” said Brent Eichar, senior vice president of operations for Certified Angus Beef LLC. “I finally tracked him down and asked him why he was running to his car. He said ‘Because I could.’ For the next eight years, he'd run to his car, to lunch, to the door. We finally realized that's just Al. He wasn't in a hurry. He just did it because he could.”

Through everything, Kober remained thankful for his wife of 54 years, Judith, their nine children (five by birth, four by adoption), and 19 grandchildren.

“... I have been able to see that my life has had a designer,” Kober wrote in 2007. “There were times when I did not follow as closely to that design as I should have, but, being the gracious Heavenly Father that God is, He has always been there for me. ...All that I have, my wonderful wife, my nine kids, my 19 grandchildren, all my many friends in this industry, and his guarantee that I will spend all of eternity with Him when this adventure is finally over. What more could anyone want? What more is there? Only Heaven will tell.”

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