

URBAN MILWAUKEE



The Herb Kohl Way

"Living a life full of good deeds and service.' Hundreds gathered to honor US Senator and Bucks owner.

By Evan Casey, Wisconsin Public Radio - Jan 13th, 2024 11:51 am

When construction was nearly complete at Fiserv Forum, the Milwaukee Bucks offered to build a statue of Herb Kohl outside of the arena. He declined.

Instead, the team named a small stretch of road directly outside of the arena "Herb Kohl Way." Friday, hundreds walked down that road on their way to the arena to pay their respects to the former U.S. senator and former Milwaukee Bucks owner during a public memorial service.

"The Herb Kohl way was always about staying humble and down to earth," his nephew Dan Kohl said during the event. "The Herb Kohl way was about being generous and kind. The Herb Kohl way was about living a life full of good deeds and service. The Herb Kohl way was about being the ultimate champion for the city of Milwaukee and for the state of Wisconsin." That was how many friends and family who honored Kohl at the event remembered him — a simple man who loved his city and state and did what he could to make them better.

Over 200 people gathered at Fiserv Forum to pay their respects to the late senator, who died in December following a brief illness. He was 88.

Kohl was a monumental figure in state politics and business and one of the most successful Wisconsin Democrats in modern history. He won four statewide races for U.S. Senate, three of them in landslides.

“I really am so moved by the life that Herb Kohl led,” said David Axelrod, one of Kohl’s friends and former special advisor to former president **Barack Obama**.

“The measure of a good life is what kind of impact you make on others, what kind of impact you make on your community,” he said. “He made lives better. He made the city of Milwaukee better. He made the state of Wisconsin better. He made this a better country, particularly on issues that were related to vulnerable people, like children and seniors.”

Kohl was also a businessman and owner of the Milwaukee Bucks for nearly three decades, ensuring the team stayed in the city. His legacy looms large across the state, but Friday, it was often the simple moments that those who knew him best chose to reflect on.



Bud Selig and Herb Kohl were lifelong friends after they met at the age of 6 while growing up on Milwaukee’s west side. They were roommates while attending the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and they kept in touch as the years went on.

Selig, a former Major League Baseball commissioner, said they would have lunch every Thursday at 11:45 a.m. at the **Pfister Hotel** in Milwaukee.

“So, every Thursday, at 11:45 a.m., I’ll be thinking of Herb, and our lunches at the Pfister,” Selig said. “I’m going to miss those lunches, and I’m going to treasure them, as I will always treasure all the times we had together over the past eight decades.”

Chuck Pruitt, who served as chair of Kohl's senate campaigns, said Kohl didn't enjoy being the center of attention.

"In everything he did, in business, in sports, in public service, in philanthropy, in friendship, in family, he insisted it not be about Herb Kohl," Pruitt said. "It always had to be 100 percent about the customer, the fan, the constituent, the person in need. It was always about you."

Kohl's death sparked reactions across the nation as well, including from President **Joe Biden** and former Presidents Barack Obama and **Bill Clinton**.

"Herb Kohl was one of the finest people I've served with – a kind and principled man of integrity and character, one of Wisconsin's greatest-ever advocates, and a dear friend," Biden said in a statement.

"I was fortunate to serve with Herb Kohl in the Senate, and will always remember his quiet decency and dedication to the people of Wisconsin. We also shared a love of basketball, and the Bucks might not be in Milwaukee today without Herb's vision and generosity," Obama said in a social media post about Kohl's death.

Kohl was a Milwaukee native and grew up in the Sherman Park neighborhood. His father emigrated from Poland and his mother came to America from Russia, according to a statement from the Herb Kohl Foundation.

He graduated from the University of Wisconsin in 1970 and became president of his family-owned Kohl's Corporation, which would eventually expand to 50 supermarkets and several department stores.

In 1985, Kohl bought the Milwaukee Bucks. At that time, he promised to keep the team in Milwaukee, and he fulfilled that promise.

"The opportunity I was given to purchase and to keep the team here in Milwaukee is one of the most unique and fortunate experiences I've ever enjoyed," Kohl said about that opportunity.

Kohl later sold the team in 2014, donating \$100 million to help build Fiserv Forum in Downtown Milwaukee.

In 1988, he decided to run for United States Senate, portraying himself as being "nobody's Senator but yours."

A bipartisan resolution after his passing in Kohl's honor from Wisconsin U.S. Sens. **Tammy Baldwin** and **Ron Johnson** said Kohl championed several issues during his time as senator. That included fighting for dairy farmers, working to protect kids from gun violence, helping seniors get quality health care and supporting education at every level.

"Senator Kohl served in this body for 24 years, but served the people of Wisconsin and our country throughout his entire life," Baldwin said. "In the Senate, he didn't care how long the fight would take, how long the odds were, or who he was up against – if it would help the people of Wisconsin, it was a worthy fight for him."

Kohl also started the Herb Kohl Educational Foundation in 1990, which has provided more than \$34 million in grants and scholarships to students and schools across the state.

Listen to the WPR report

'The Herb Kohl way:' Former US senator honored during memorial service was originally published by Wisconsin Public Radio.