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Abstract

Lendal H. Kotschevar is a pioneer in the food service industry. His life spans that of the 20th century and his influence in the hospitality discipline molded its growth and its directions.

Legend in his time: Lendal H. Kotschevar

by Mort Sarabakhsh, Edna
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Lendal H. Kotschevar is a pioneer in the food service industry. His life spans that of the 20th century and his influence on the hospitality discipline molded its growth and its directions.

A giant in his chosen field, a preeminent expert in food service education, the author of landmark texts in hospitality management, a consultant to a Pope and to the United Nations, a highly sought-after speaker for major industry events, an outstanding teacher, a tireless worker on behalf of education—all the attributes one would hope for in a professor, mentor, or friend—all of these words have been used to describe a pioneer in the hospitality industry: Lendal H. Kotschevar. What transpired over the years that prompted these words from others in describing this man?

Early years set pace

Lendal H. Kotschevar is the descendant of early settlers in



Lendal H. Kotschevar

North Dakota. His great grandparents, Michael and Annie Chezik, built one of the first cabins on the west side of the Red River of the North in 1869. His grandparents, Jacob and Annie Kotschevar, came to Dunseith, N. D. in 1882 to establish a trading store, seven years before North Dakota became a state. Lendal, who was born on

June 12, 1908, was something of a pioneer himself, being the first baby born in the fledgling town of Noonan, N.D. He spent his childhood in the state and in 1923 graduated from a small, two-room school near Thorne.

In 1927, Kotschevar entered the University of Washington, majoring in English and journalism. To help put himself through school he worked as a cook for his grandfather, Louis Baker, a French chef of some prominence in the Pacific Northwest. He graduated with a bachelor of arts degree in 1933. However, those were Depression years, so there was no work available for a young, fledgling journalist.

In 1934, at the urging of his grandfather, he entered the School of Home Economics at his alma mater. "I liked it very much," he said. "I was one man in a school of 375 women. So, it was very unusual and I enjoyed the notoriety."

It was during this time that he met and married his wife, Margaret Scoles (1909-1975). He studied institution management and business and also took a position as chef of the Sandpoint Golf Club. In 1935, he became manager of food services in the new student union building, a position that gave him a better opportunity to attend classes.

Shortly thereafter, he was recruited by the dean to solve a problem. In the aftermath of the Depression, a number of the fraternities and sororities at the university were in financial trouble, and the dean was being hounded by

angry merchants who wanted to know why their bills were not being paid. The dean offered to set Kotschevar up in a business managing the financial affairs of the fraternities and sororities. He wanted Kotschevar to put the houses on a budget, take over their food services, and put them on a standard accounting system; he guaranteed Kotschevar a base of over 20 houses to start the program. Kotschevar accepted the challenge.

The dean then wrote the alumni boards of the troubled houses and told them that they would have to subscribe to the new service or be closed. They all subscribed, albeit grudgingly. In a few years Kotschevar graduated with a second bachelor's degree, a B.S. in home economics, institutional management. He also succeeded in straightening out the financial affairs of the fraternity and sorority houses and increased the membership of his association to over 50. The new members entered because of the savings being made through a unified purchasing and management program.

Military program started

In 1942 as a lieutenant (jg) in the U.S. Navy supply corps, Kotschevar was assigned to duty as assistant to the commissary officer at the Naval Training Center in San Diego, California. In 1944, he was advanced in grade and made director of the training center's commissary schools, the chief commissary stewards' school, the

cooks' and bakers' school, and the commissary stewards' school. He changed the curriculum and work experience programs for these three schools. It proved a very successful change, and in 1945 his cooks' and bakers' school was selected as the one that would start the training of African-Americans for right-arm rates. Up to this time, members of this race could not qualify for these rates. These right-arm rates were only for those of the white race; one wearing a rate on the left arm was considered inferior in rank. However, under the aggressive leadership of Eleanor Roosevelt and others, the armed forces were forced to change their policy and allow other races to qualify for these rates.

There was some concern on the part of the navy about starting such a program at the San Diego Training Center because so many recruits from the South were being sent there. However, Kotschevar once more tackled a difficult problem and successfully solved it. The school and educational program were highly popular, and Kotschevar and his staff were firmly in control. In a short time, enrollment was 100 percent African-American. During his tenure, his schools graduated nearly 5,000 personnel, sending them out to support the war effort.

Navy work accelerated

In 1947, Kotschevar left active duty and returned to Seattle to take a position with Horwath and Horwath, an accounting firm

specializing in hotel and restaurant services. He re-entered the University of Washington and in 1948 received his M.S. degree in institution management. His thesis dealt with a simple method for calculating nutritional intakes he had developed while in the Navy. Since Navy data were used, he had to get their permission; this was granted with the proviso that a copy of the thesis be sent to the Navy. The Navy was impressed by the quality of the thesis and its results; Kotschevar's estimates of the nutritional intakes of enlisted personnel came close to an unpublished study made by a group of eminent nutritionists for the Navy. Based on the thesis and Kotschevar's former record in the Navy, the Navy invited him to become civilian director of the Naval Commissary Research and Development Facility at the naval yards in Bayonne, New Jersey. He accepted.

With characteristic vigor and direction, he started the new facility's programs on the pathway to finding ways to improve food service in the Navy. During his tenure, his division made a number of contributions that accomplished the facility's goals, the most notable being planning the galley of the first atomic submarine, the *Nautilus*. A new type of ration load was also developed that would allow such submarines to stay out for much longer periods than formerly possible. He himself made one cruise in the submarine that lasted nearly 90 days, besting this new ration load. In 1953, a banquet was

given in New London, Connecticut, honoring him for his leadership in making these important contributions in future submarine actions.

University career begins

In spite of his heavy responsibilities for his Navy position and his very active professional life, Kotschevar also found time to attend Columbia University. He earned a doctor of philosophy degree in institution management in 1954. He resigned from the Navy facility because he had found that he liked teaching so much that he wished to follow that career pathway in the future. In 1964, he retired from the Naval Reserves with the rank of Commander.

Kotschevar and his wife preferred to live in the West, so his first teaching position was as professor at the University of Montana where he also was made director of housing and food services and helped design dormitories and a central seating system that received national attention. In 1956 he became chair of the Department of Home Economics. It is possible that he was the first male home economics head. There he developed a set of industrial engineering principles in food service work, a result of having been a student of Lillian Gilbreth, the famous industrial engineer at Columbia University. His articles received considerable attention, and as a result, he was invited to become a lecturer in the Executive Development Program of the National Restaurant Association.

He also became a popular speaker at food service conventions, seminars, and meetings, emphasizing the need to modernize food production and service methods, and a strong advocate of the use of some of the new foods reaching the market that reduced preparation time for service. While his ideas were advanced for the time, events have shown that he was looking forward into the future.

In 1958, Kotschevar went to Michigan State University to become professor and head of the department of restaurant management in the School of Hotel, Restaurant, and Institutional Management, and professor in the graduate school of the College of Business. About this time, his first book, *Food Service Planning*, was published, co-authored by Margaret Terrell of the University of Washington. Shortly thereafter, he wrote *Quantity Food Production* and *Quantity Food Purchasing*, the first books ever written specifically for the new hospitality management discipline and destined to become landmarks for the subject matter. Other books followed, and soon Kotschevar was seen not only as a leading figure in food service management but as a writer of texts for this new field. To date, Kotschevar has written 17 books, some with co-authors, and most of them the first written on their subject.

As Kotschevar's reputation and books became known internationally, he soon became active in foreign travel, lecturing, and

teaching. In 1962 he was invited to become a consultant to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, with duties involving the reporting of feeding conditions of mass groups in developing countries. He visited over 100 countries, trying to convince governments and factory owners to make improvements. He helped establish schools to teach food service management and to develop feeding programs to better the lot of the poor.

Hunger becomes focus

"Feeding the hungry is a terrific job," Kotschevar said. "Industrialists, you know, in many countries, don't feel the need to feed people or give them much to live on." One industrialist, who owned five or six spinning mills in Pakistan, told Kotschevar that if he couldn't make his investment back in three years, he wouldn't invest. As a result, workers were given little food, which was of poor quality, and very little pay. In one factory he found women working 10-hour shifts on their feet in front of spinning machines. The workers, many of them pregnant, some in the third trimester, were getting only 100 calories a day. They were not given a meal; the calories came from sugar for their tea provided by the company.

Kotschevar says he tried to show employers that, by treating their workers better, they would be healthier and that would increase productivity. "I tried to show them through their pocketbooks. That

was the only way you could get them to move."

Working with foreign governments was challenging. "You have to be political and sagacious, and work with the powers," he said. "It's not an easy job. I used to wonder if it was all worthwhile, but it was all so interesting, and I got to see the world."

His work soon brought him to the attention of the Curia of the Roman Catholic Church, which was trying to find an authority who could advise Pope Paul VI on how the church could improve the nutritional lot of many people in developing countries. He was summoned to Gondolfo Palace for a 45-minute conference with the Pope. Kotschevar was asked to provide advice on how the church could provide better assistance to the indigent in parts of the world where he was traveling. The request was honored.

"We still have a hunger problem in the world," Kotschevar said. I'm a dietitian, and even in this country I see under-nutrition among children, older people, and the poor. We need to do more to try to educate them. One of the troubles is that there are too many fad diets out, and people don't have real information. We need to get better information to them."

Professional role grows

To have more free time to pursue professional interests and writing, Kotschevar left Michigan State and took several visiting professorships, both here and

abroad. He served as visiting professor at the University of Hawaii, Florida International University, University of Nevada at Las Vegas, University of Haifa (Israel), and Glion Culinary Academy (Switzerland), as well as giving short courses and seminars in food service management in this country and in a number of foreign countries. In 1994, at the age of 86, he retired from Florida International University and was awarded the rank of professor emeritus.

Kotschevar was active as a consultant to a number of large food companies such as General Foods, Pillsbury, and General Mills, where he shared his knowledge of the food service industry and its product needs. His experience in research enabled him to work closely with the research staffs from these companies on various problems. He also served on the boards of a number of professional organizations including the American Dietetics Association, the Council for Hotel, Restaurant and Institutional Education, and Food Service Executives.

Lendal Kotschevar is the recipient of many awards and honors including the Howard B. Meek award in recognition of contributions to the hospitality discipline. In 1984, he was made a Diplomat by the Educational Foundation of the National Restaurant Association, an award given to outstanding leaders in the food service industry. Each year, one called "the best of the best" is selected from this distinguished

group of leaders to be the Ambassador of Hospitality. In 1992, Kotschevar was chosen for this award. In the fall of 1993, Pennsylvania State University honored him by choosing him to occupy the Walter Conti chair. North Dakota State University recently honored him as a native son who had brought honor to himself and his state for his accomplishments. During commencement exercises in May 1998, NDSU conferred its highest honor, a Doctor of Laws, *Honoris Causa*, on Kotschevar.

Retirement far away

When asked once when he was going to slow down and retire, Kotschevar answered, "Never!" While he has retired from teaching, he still writes nearly every day. He spends his winters in Madison, Wisconsin, near his daughter, who is also a dietitian, his son-in-law, and grandson. He loves to cook, entertains regularly, and enjoys spending time in his summer retreat high in the mountains of Montana.

Kotschevar says the secret to a long and happy life is attitude. "It's having a very positive outlook on life, working hard, eating well, and drinking good bourbon," he said. "I've had a lot of joy in my life. I worked awfully, awfully hard, and devoted a lot of time to my career. But at the same time, I played. I had a wonderful wife, who also enjoyed living and who had a winning, soft charm that drew people instantly to her."

Admired and respected by both

the food service industry and its discipline, he is looked upon as an individual who is still doing much to point the way that the food service industry is moving. Still active in his tenth decade, Lendal Kotschevar did more than any other to shape and nurture the fledgling hospitality discipline which today is taught in nearly 200 schools.

References

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