

Godfrey Kobets, who took out a \$15,000 personal loan 25 years ago to start a school for high school dropouts - now known as the DeLaSalle Education Center - died Saturday.

He was 80.

Kobets, known as "Koby" to friends and students, was in St. Louis visiting his granddaughter when he suffered a heart attack.

"This was a great man," said Jim Dougherty, who took over as executive director of the alternative high school after Kobets retired in 1983. "He was really an exceptional, saintly, visionary man." Kobets was born in Kansas City, Kan., to parents who immigrated from Germany. He graduated from Rockhurst College in 1939 and received his teaching certificate from Central Missouri State University in Warrensburg in 1940.

He was principal at Greenwood High School in Jackson County in 1940 and 1941 before joining the teaching and coaching staff of Rockhurst High School, where he worked for five years. In 1946 he was hired to teach at De La Salle High School, a private Catholic boys school.

While working at the school, he moonlighted at the Jackson County jail, working with troubled juveniles. He taught and coached athletics at De La Salle until May 1971, when it closed.

Because of his experience with troubled youths and his deeply religious beliefs, it came as no great surprise to his friends that he wanted to reopen the school to help juveniles.

The nonsecular school opened with 12 teen-agers in June 1971 and now has 550 students at seven area sites. But that doesn't mean it was easy.

"He had very little financial backing to start with," Dougherty said. "He had to borrow money and use his own house as collateral." Norman O. Sanders, chairman of the board of DeLaSalle, said the school succeeded because Kobets never gave up.

"He was very sincere and hard-working," Sanders said. "He was a good organizer and could get people to assist him in any endeavor.

He never quit. "Kobets recently attended the kickoff of DeLaSalle's 25th anniversary celebration (Story on Page B-5).

Dougherty said Kobets' life could have taken a different path because Kobets was an extremely talented athlete in his younger days.

He was a Little All-American college football player, made the Olympic semifinals in wrestling and was drafted by the Cincinnati Reds baseball team.

"He played in the minor leagues for a while," Dougherty said.

"He said he made himself a promise that if he didn't make the team, he would dedicate himself to helping kids." After retiring from DeLaSalle in 1983, Kobets started the **Benilde Hall** Program in 1984 to help alcoholics and drug addicts, with religion being a key ingredient to their recovery.

CITATION (AGLC STYLE)

CHRISTINE VENDEL, Staff Writer, 'DeLaSalle founder Kobets dies at 80 Alternative school is legacy of the coach, teacher and mentor.', *The Kansas City Star* (online), 21 Jul 1996 B1 <<https://infoweb-newsbank.com.mcpl.idm.oclc.org/apps/news/document-view?p=AWNB&docref=news/0EAF4354788CCA50>>