

Kansas City Industrial Council Barney Karbank “Frosty” Award

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My father’s career in real estate began after a curious observation by my grandfather: the customers in my grandfather’s fishmarket who were in the real estate business drove new cars and were well dressed. He suggested that it might be a good business for Dad.

He started out in the business working for the James B. Welch Real Estate Company handling residential sales and apartment management and quickly determined that that part of the business wasn’t for him. In 1950 he decided to start his own company. He focused on industrial real estate because it was straightforward. Clients made decisions based upon rational factors: function and value.

Over the course of his 55 years in the real estate business, his brokerage transactions and development projects tell a broad and deep history of Kansas City’s industrial real estate and his client list reads like a Who’s Who of Kansas Citians, as well as of local and national companies. Dad had an encyclopedic knowledge of Kansas City’s industrial and commercial property. The files of his deals contain a treasure trove of detailed information on properties, many of which he handled the leases and sales multiple times for multiple clients.

There’s one story about him that I’d like to mention because it illustrates Dad’s tenacity and pursuit of a transaction and it’s also the story of his first development project, in 1952, a 6,500 square foot industrial building at 2615 Holmes that he built for the Borg Warner Corporation. Perhaps a few have you have heard it before but Dad always enjoyed telling it and I, for one, always enjoyed hearing it.

While attending a real estate conference in 1952 in Chicago, he was inspired by remarks from some real estate luminaries, including the young Trammel Crow. They said that the transformation of the United States economy after WWII, the population boom and the new Interstate road system, would give

rise to unprecedented economic boom. They added that real estate brokers who don't invest in or develop real estate would be missing out on extraordinary opportunities.

Dad was so excited by what he heard that he couldn't sleep that night. He picked up a copy of the Saturday Evening Post in his hotel room and happened to see an ad for the Borg Warner Company, a manufacturer of airplane parts. He was familiar with the company because during the war he worked at the North American Aviation plant in the Fairfax Industrial district, where he rose to be Assistant Chief Inspector of B25 Bomber production (Dad was unable to go into the military as he had polio as a child). He noticed the address of the Borg Warner headquarters was, coincidentally, next door to the hotel where he was staying. In the morning he went next door and asked to see the head of company's real estate department. He explained to the gentleman that he was from Kansas City, happened to see the ad in the magazine and wondered if Borg Warner might need a new building in Kansas City. The man asked Dad to follow him to a nearby office and asked him to repeat to his colleague what Dad had just told him. As soon as Dad finished, the men looked at one another and laughed, adding that they had decided just that morning to relocate their Kansas City branch to a new building. They suggested that Dad see the local branch manager when he returned.

Back in Kansas City two days later, Dad went to the Borg Warner office, introduced himself to the branch manager and began explaining to the manager why he was there. The man stopped him in mid-sentence and in a moment of recognition, pointed to him and said "I remember you. We attended the third grade together at the R..J. Delano School for Crippled Children."

That story exemplifies Dad's belief that following through on good ideas will have good results and serendipitous effects. That first development project was followed by many, many more, in every major industrial district in Kansas City.

Dad had an instinctive understanding of real estate and how to make a deal. He had an exceptionally deep reservoir of "*Common Sense*". He had an unusual ability to cut through extraneous issues and focus on essential matters, and could be relied upon to get things done in a sensible, logical and efficient manner. It is astonishing how productive he was for others. In fact,

he was the most productive person I've ever know. By choice, he never retired.

Those of us who worked with him feel enormously lucky and proud to have known him and learned from him. He was very fortunate to have Olen Monsees as his partner in the brokerage business for more than 35 years, Jim Wassberg as his Chief Financial Officer and Bernie Levine as his long-time lawyer and friend.

It is fitting that the KCIC is honoring him with the Frosty Award. He understood as well as anyone that industry and industrial real estate may not be particularly glamorous, but it is where an enormous amount of honest, hard-work gets done. On his behalf, I thank you.