Fred Karl ’49 has tried retirement a few times. He doesn’t care for it. Now at the age of 79, the namesake of the Hillsborough County Center has returned to public service as Tampa’s city attorney.

A child of the Great Depression, Karl attributes his vitality and energy to a strong work ethic. “From age nine, I was delivering papers and waking up at 4 a.m., loving it,” said Karl. “Retirement wasn’t satisfying to me. I like to be useful, carry my load, and do some meaningful work.”

Throughout Karl’s long career he has made countless contributions to Florida residents. He has led several of Florida’s major public institutions, serving as a Florida Supreme Court justice, state representative, state senator, state public counsel, county administrator, county attorney, city attorney, gubernatorial candidate and hospital CEO.

Though his public achievements have been extensive, Karl believes that his military service had the most profound impact on his life. “I had traumatic experiences that left indelible marks on my emotions. It was the most significant impression that I have had during my lifetime. I survived it very well,” said Karl, who at age 18 was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant. Serving as a tank platoon leader, he led 25 men and five Sherman combat tanks during World War II, earning the Silver Star, Bronze Star and Purple Heart medals.

After the war, the same work ethic that Karl learned as a child led him to attend Stetson to quickly complete his legal degree. “I was 22 years old and anxious to get college behind me. I wanted to reach my goal of being an attorney, and I was in a hurry to work.” He lived in officers’ quarters at the naval-station-turned-law-school, and in three years completed the required undergraduate coursework and law degree.

Karl has established a legacy of public accountability that will influence Florida politics for generations. He was counsel to the House Select Committee on Judicial Impeachment, chair of the Florida Supreme Court’s Committee on Attorney Discipline and Special Master on executive suspensions for the Florida Senate. As a state senator in the 1960s, he coordinated the senate trials of 52 officials who had been suspended by the governor. During the process he established the rules for suspension and removal of Florida public officials from office.

“I had to establish a precedent for dealing with cases, what the definition of misbehavior should be and the drafting of statutes that guaranteed due process,” explained Karl. One ousted official tested Karl’s rules by appealing his case to the U.S. Supreme Court, which upheld the process. Karl later authored articles detailing the procedures in the *Florida Bar Journal* and the *University of Florida Law Review* that still serve as the historic reference for suspension
and impeachment hearings.

Over the past two decades, Karl has left an equally significant imprint on the Tampa Bay area in his roles as a Hillsborough County administrator, county attorney, president and CEO of Tampa General Hospital, contract attorney and now Tampa city attorney.

His leadership was first recognized through the naming of the Frederick B. Karl Legal Center. Days after the legal center was demolished in October 2000, the 28-story tower across the street was designated the Frederick B. Karl County Center. This honor was particularly fitting for Karl, who played a key role in securing the building’s purchase for Hillsborough County. “As county administrator in 1991, I had negotiated the price for $30 million, when it was appraised at $90 million,” he reflected. “It was a fantastic business deal.”

Now in his golden years, Karl enjoys working as Tampa city attorney under newly elected Mayor Pam Iorio, an old family friend who he has mentored from the start of her political career. “It’s a fun job. She is an outstanding political figure and a bright star for the future,” said Karl.

He has also maintained a continual bond with Stetson over the years as an overseer, guest lecturer, alumni award winner, commencement speaker and honorary degree recipient. “My Stetson education has been the underlying asset I have had in my career,” said Karl. “It’s helped me practice law, support my family and provided me with prestige and status in the world.”