



The desire to serve:

Alumni consider public service a privilege

After graduating in 1990, John Carassas volunteered to serve on the City of Clearwater Zoning board. “Ever since then, I’ve enjoyed serving the public in various capacities from being chairman of that board to Assistant City Attorney to serving in the Florida House of Representatives.”

This Florida legislator joins a long list of Stetson alumni that have chosen to use their law degree in combination with public service. “There is a tremendous amount of personal satisfaction in giving back to the community,” said Carassas.

The satisfaction that comes with taking on a complex issue and working with people to achieve a good result is what drives James C. “Jim” Smith ’67 to continue serving in a public capacity after years of service. Smith has held many positions in Florida government including: secretary of state, assistant to the governor and chief of staff, attorney general and Board of Regents for the State University System, to name a few.

After serving as Florida Secretary of State until January of this year, Gov. Jeb Bush appointed Smith to the Florida State University Board of Regents. “I was fortunate at an early age to have the opportunity to serve in state government, and I have always considered it a great honor to serve the public.”

The Calling to Serve

Stetson alumni offer various inspirations for their desire to serve. Jaye Ann Terry ’87 cites a biblical passage as her guidepost for public service: *To whom much has been given, much will be expected* (Luke 12:48). “Those words hold special meaning for me because I am the first generation of my family to graduate from college. I grew up understanding the importance of being involved in the community and helping people better themselves.”

Terry worked in media law for Holland & Knight in Tampa and clerked for U.S. Circuit Judge Paul H. Roney before joining Congressman Jim Davis’ staff. As a field representative, one of her primary responsibilities is

helping constituents resolve issues with federal agencies such as the Social Security Administration, the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services and the Department of Veteran Affairs.

Parenthood also has affected the way Terry prioritizes public service. “I am raising two children in this community, and I want to have an impact on making it a wealthy environment — in every sense of the word — for them and other children.”

A family tradition of public service steered Karl Koch ’93 towards his path in life. “I come from a family that values public service,” he said. “My grandfather was a judge, my father served on the city council and my brother is active in the Florida Bar.” Koch currently serves as chief of staff for Congressman Davis. He began his career in college as an intern for former U.S. Rep. Buddy McKay and later worked for the late Gov. Lawton Chiles.

Koch feels fortunate to have the ability to continue the tradition of service. “It makes me appreciate the world we live in, and I get a lot of enjoyment from being involved in a system that works towards solutions,” he said. “It’s easy to criticize your government, but it’s better to be a part of the solution. I have a daughter at home, and it’s important to me what kind of a world she grows up in.” Koch added that “public service” can mean a lot of different things. “In the end it means being involved in your community and making things better.”

After starting her legal career at the Florida Public Service Commission in 1991, Lila A. Jaber ’90 was first appointed PSC Chairman by Gov. Jeb Bush in February 2000 and reappointed for another term ending in January 2005. Her father initially influenced her entrance into public service. Once at the PSC, she knew that she had made the right career decision. “As I began to work with the PSC staff and saw their dedication and hard work in protecting Florida consumers, I realized the level of impact PSC decisions have on every Floridian. I was eager to seek the commission seat and work more aggressively on these consumer issues,” Jaber said.



A Sense of Honor, Duty and Commitment

Jerry Paul '94 divides his time between his duties as a State Representative, a general civil trial attorney in Port Charlotte, and his personal commitments. "I focus on the issues of today and strive to balance my commitments to my family, to public service and to the legal community as an officer of the court. And I always keep in mind that public service is a noble cause." Rep. Paul compared the duty of protecting the public's rights on legislative matters with that of individual rights in a courtroom.

St. Petersburg City Councilman Richard D. Kriseman '87 says the ability to have a positive impact on the community is worth the time he spends balancing a sole personal injury law practice with serving on the council. "Not only do I have a deeper understanding of how government works from the local level up, but I have enjoyed the opportunity to meet the citizens who work, live and play in this community," he said. "Right now I am working with a school board to start a pilot program where service learning is mandatory for all students. I think this would greatly benefit the city as well as encourage students to become productive citizens and give back to their community."

Leading the way at the PSC, Jaber's goal as commissioner has been to make the PSC more accessible to Florida citizens. "The issues that we address at the PSC involve telecommunications, electric and water matters that impact the lives of every Floridian. They impact our state economic development and recovery," she said. "The PSC has afforded me an opportunity to bring these critical issues to the forefront so that every consumer can participate or impact the outcome of these decisions."

The Challenges

As with any profession, public service is not without its own set of challenges. In addition to striking a balance between city council, work and family, Kriseman considers the pressure of representing a large body of people to be a challenge. "You have to do what you think is best for the city as a whole even though you may offend some people. It's virtually impossible to please every individual."

The consummate public servant, Smith contends that the most difficult part of being an elected or appointed official "is to maintain a quality of family life and meet the time demands of public service." Jaye Ann Terry echoes that sentiment, "There is a lot of work to be done in ensuring that at the end of the day, people have been served and their needs have been met." As a public official, Jerry Paul feels a tremendous sense of responsibility to his constituents "It takes real discipline to maintain impartiality just as a judge has to do in the courtroom," he said. "That's what I take pride in — maintaining that neutrality."

For these and other Stetson law alumni, the desire to serve the public has led to high profile careers and has placed in their hands tremendous responsibility. A common thread weaves through their bipartisan careers—a fervent commitment for public service. And despite the long hours and challenges of balancing careers and family life, these alumni remain resolute in their commitment to use their Stetson education for a life of service to others.