

Barney Karbank dies at 80

Leading developer left his mark on KC real estate

By DAN MARGOLIES
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Barney Karbank, one of Kansas City's premier industrial and commercial developers, died Sunday after a long illness. He was 80.

Karbank, chairman of **B.A. Karbank & Co.**, developed more than 100 properties in the area, mostly warehouses and production plants he rented to other companies.

"It's a real changing of the guard," said Olen Monsees, president of B.A. Karbank. "He was just such a legend in this business. The world will go on, but we'll miss him."

The son of a fish-market operator, Karbank walked with a cane all his life following a childhood bout with polio. He started out as an unpaid clerk for **James B. Welsh Realty** in 1946 before joining **Charles F. Curry Co.** the following year. Deciding that pushing brooms, running errands and selling houses wasn't for him, he began B.A. Karbank & Co. as a real estate brokerage firm in 1950 at the age of 26.

He constructed his first building, at 2615 Holmes St., for **Borg-Warner Corp.** after paying a cold call on



File photo

Barney Karbank founded B.A. Karbank & Co. in 1950 at the age of 26. He developed more than 100 properties in the Kansas City area.

Borg-Warner. More than five decades later, his company controls more than 5 million square feet of industrial and commercial space in the metropolitan area, as well as buildings in other cities.

Settling for a build-and-hold strategy, Karbank described his business in a 2000 interview with *The Star* as lending people bricks and mortar instead of money.

Karbank rarely sold the projects he developed, focusing instead on ownership. Among his major projects in Kansas City and elsewhere were buildings for dozens of companies, including **General Electric Co.**, **Sunkist Growers Inc.**, the **U.S. Postal Service**, **Southwestern Bell**, **Chevron Chemical Co.**, **Westinghouse Electric Co.**, **Whirlpool Corp.** and **General Motors Corp.**

"He took great pride in never defaulting on a loan, never giving property back to a lender, never putting a project in bankruptcy, never asking for a loan workout and never refinancing a property," said his son, Steven Karbank, president of **Karbank Development Co.**, the operation's development arm.

Barney Karbank left his mark on almost every major industrial park in the area. He also assembled a major portion of the land for the **Truman Sports Complex** and undertook land assemblages for other clients, including sites for the area's first cellular phone system.

A Kansas City native, he attended Paseo High School and Kansas City Junior College. Outspoken in his views, he resigned in 1969 from the **City Plan Commission** after criticizing it for doing "practically no planning as such." For years, he inveighed against Missouri's redevelopment laws, which he said gave private developers too much power

to subvert public purposes.

"The survival of the city is in direct proportion to its ability to rebuild itself," he told *The Star* in a 1969 interview. "Everyone is for new development and new buildings and growth. But in what way should it come?"

Barney Karbank served on the boards of numerous business and professional organizations, including **First Federal Bank**, **Mercantile Bank** and **La Petite Academy Inc.** He was treasurer for the **Committee for County Progress** in the 1960s and a member of both the **City Plan Commission** and the **Jackson County Board of Zoning Adjustment.**

He was a director of many civic and charitable organizations, including the **Jewish Federation of Greater Kansas City**, the **Jewish Community Foundation**, **Congregation Beth Shalom** and **Menorah Medical Center.**

Barney Karbank is survived by his wife of 55 years, Rose Karbank; their four children, Marcia Karbank, Diane Davidner, Neil Karbank and Steven Karbank, and their spouses; his brother Joe Karbank; 15 grandchildren; and four great-grandchildren.

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