

# Karl G. King:

## Service Becomes a Second Career



By Candace Gwaltney

**T**en years into retirement, Karl G. King isn't spending his days golfing and lounging by a pool. Instead, the South Bend native can be found bettering the city he loves. King serves as a board member for eight entities ranging from the city's plan commission to the Madison Center, a not-for-profit behavioral health care service provider. He's the first to admit his plate is full, but with a variety of meaty activities.

"You always hear people talking about when they get involved in the public sector, they talk about giving back to the community, and that's never the way I felt about it," he shares. "I've always felt that this community's done more for me than I've done for it. I don't think I will ever get tired of doing things that make this community a better place."

King is dedicating much of his time to helping shape the future of South Bend.

**BizVoice®:** You have an impressive list of accomplishments both professionally and as a public servant. What do you consider your crowning achievement?

**Karl G. King:** "That's hard to say. I've had two career segments – 33 years at Crowe Chizek, which was a life in itself. The firm grew dramatically in the years I was there. When it started out all of us could go to lunch in the same car; now there are 2,500 people. ...

"Since I've been retired, of course, I went a completely different direction with getting involved with government and spending all of my time doing government-related things and not-for-profit organization-related things. It's hard to say what's most important, but I think that the postsecondary education prepares you to go get your first job. My life at Crowe Chizek prepared me to do the things I am doing now."

**BV:** Talk a little more about your 33-year career at Crowe.

**KK:** "My role at Crowe early on became to start the management consulting division of the firm." King spent 25 years with that division, growing it from one person to 180.

"I spent the remainder of my time at Crowe with another new division of the firm, which we call the software products group that developed software that we sold to banks all around the world. ... We developed a product that banks use to evaluate the creditworthiness of borrowers. We

ended up with about 3,000 banks using our software, including 48 of the 100 largest banks in the world.”

**BV:** You have served the South Bend community for more than 35 years. What is it about this city that has led you to dedicate so much of your time?

**KK:** “Well, I grew up here for one thing; and it is home. I know a lot of people, like my own kids, when they finished school any place but home is where they wanted to be. But I wanted to be at home. I love South Bend; I enjoyed growing up here. I’ve never regretted coming back here – except when it was 19-below last week.

“Simply, this community is a part of me. What goes on here is the most important thing to me. I really feel I have been blessed in having the opportunity to do things to try to make this community a better place. Being able to make even the smallest amount of progress in that direction to me is very fulfilling and rewarding.”

**BV:** Talk about some of the ways you are currently involved in the community.

**KK:** “Presently in the governmental area, I’m president of the area plan commission, and I am a member of the Century Center board of managers. Those are my two formal government-related involvements. As you know, I’m involved in a lot of not-for-profit organization activities.

“I’ve been on the area plan commission for about 10 years; I’m just starting my seventh year as president of it. It’s a really fascinating thing to do in government because what you are talking about is planning what the community is going to be like for the future. Making decisions today that will affect how my kids, their kids and future generations will live in this community.”

King has served on the Century Center (South Bend’s convention center) board of managers since 1988. “We consider the Century Center here to be one of the crown jewels of the community.”

Additionally, King serves on the board of directors for economic development organization Project Future and the St. Joe Valley Metronet – a 50-mile network of fiber-optic cable through the community.

**BV:** How else have you helped shape the South Bend community in recent years?

**KK:** “I was city council member for the 4th district (1998-2003); and the 4th district is the northeast corner of South Bend (adjacent to Notre Dame). ...

“When I became a council member you could only describe it (part of his district) as being in absolutely wretched condition. It was just awful. ... Fifty years ago it was a nice neighborhood. And when I became a council member, it was a wreck. The houses were a mess; the crime was high; people were demoralized and feeling awful about living there. One of my projects as a council member was to sponsor the development of the plan for revitalizing that neighborhood. ...

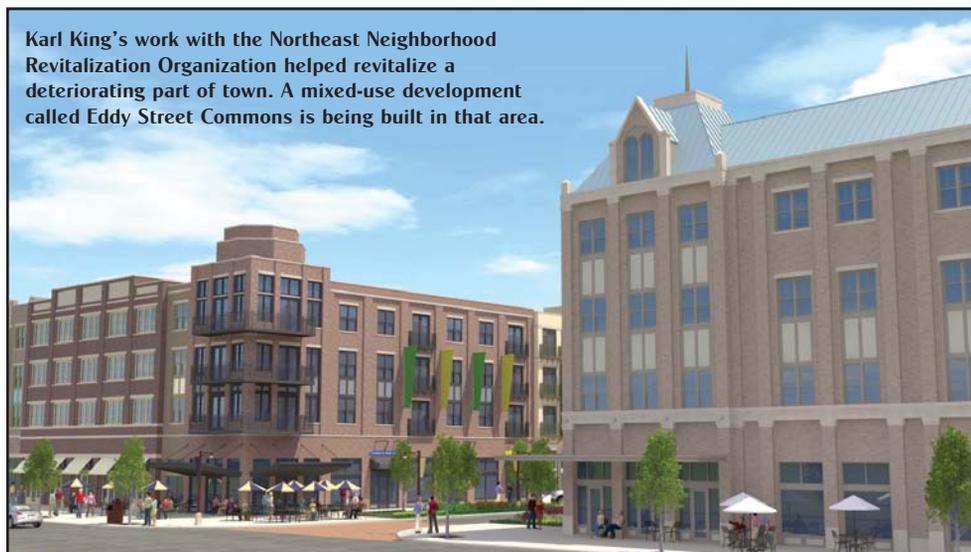
“We were able to gather up a core group of people who were neighbors there and get them to buy into the idea of working on revitalizing the place and were able to get some good advice from people at Notre Dame and from a corporation called the Northeast Neighborhood Revitalization Organization, which is financially sponsored by really the largest employers in South Bend. ...

“If you were to drive through the neighborhood today, you never would recognize it as being the neighborhood it was in 1997. People are moving into the neighborhood instead of moving out. Property values are going up instead of going down. And the whole mood in the neighborhood is dramatically different than it was.”

King, who still serves on the board of residents and business leaders, added: “I would have to say of anything I’ve ever done, this experience has been the most rewarding and really just the coolest in every possible way.”

**BV:** In December you were honored with the F. Jay Nimitz Exemplary Public Service Award for your service to South Bend, an honor your wife also received four years ago.

**KK:** “The Nimitz Award is sort of unique because of the guy that it was named for. If you want to say here is a citizen, here is a guy who understands citizenship – that was F. Jay Nimitz. And he really did. His idea was that you will be a good citizen and you will express your citizenship by personally embracing





**King has served on the Century Center's board of managers for more than 20 years. The convention center hosts an average of 650 events annually.**

service to the community. That's what he was all about. ...

"Being told you have followed the example of F. Jay Nimtz was important to me, and Margaret (his wife) felt the same way about it when she received it. We both knew him."

**BV:** What do you see as the next big challenge that needs to be addressed in South Bend?

**KK:** "Like all communities we have ongoing things, but you may be aware that Notre Dame was recently selected as the site for a nanoelectronics research project called MIND, which

presents really an opportunity for South Bend that we haven't had for 100 years. ...

"This MIND center is almost like in 2009 we are back having the same kind of opportunity presented to us that we had in 1909 (with the Studebaker automotive and Oliver plow companies) in that new technology is going to be invented here. ...

"This community has a tremendous opportunity that will emerge from that in any number of ways. Just the existence of research going on, the fact of the research going on here. If you latch on to that, you're supportive of it, you change the image of your community. Instead of being a rust belt that used to have a now-dead carmaker in it and a now-dead plow maker in it, what you are is a community where new, on-the-frontier research is going on."

**BV:** Anything else you want to add?

**KK:** "This is the age of globalization in terms of business; it's also a time which communities like ours really need to be thinking not about just what's inside their city limits, but about the region they're the center of. And that requires getting people to raise their sights a little and think bigger. And that's something we're working on right now."

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