

Senator Kenneth Plante
2013 WPHS Alumni Circle of Distinction

At a regular session in March of 2013, the Florida Senate voted that the Senate President's Conference room of The Capitol would henceforth be named The Ken Plante Conference Room. This was but one of many tributes honoring this famous 1958 graduate from Winter Park High School. Recently, he was inducted into the Florida Blue Key in honor of his service to the state of Florida. His amazing career was also celebrated with the award of the Lifetime Achievement award by Leadership Florida.

Although he is from Winter Park, and later resided in Oviedo, the name Ken Plante is possibly more familiar in Tallahassee and in the halls of the Florida Legislature. Just about everyone associated with Florida government knows of Republican Senator Ken Plante and his marvelous achievements. He is widely regarded by Florida legislators as one of the very best lawmakers, ever. A Democrat senator said Ken Plante "was one of the outstanding senators of his time and of this whole generation."

Upon his election to the Florida Senate in 1957, Ken headed off to Tallahassee to serve brilliantly for 12 years, until 1978. Even the close of his career as a politician was an inspiration to many. He did not seek re-election after financial disclosure laws for legislators were upheld by the courts. He saw them as an invasion of privacy. Many were inspired by Ken's dignity in standing resolute on his principles, which is often rare among politicians. Ken became something of a champion for honesty and integrity. When news reporters looked for a man of honor who might talk about what's really going on in political campaigns or the Legislature, they frequently turn to Plante.

After his distinguished career in the Florida Senate, Plante entered the lobbying business rising to become one of the most sought after advisers for either party for much of the last half century. He helped conceive and found the respected Florida Association of Professional Lobbyists raising the bar of conduct for that profession. He has also been a requested lecturer governmental policy at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University.

Former Governor Jeb Bush, when elected in 1998, persuaded Plante to leave his lucrative lobbying practice to become Bush's personal lobbyist and Director of Legislative Affairs. Many credit Plante with Bush's success with lawmakers. Whenever Ken disagreed with Governor Bush, he never hesitated to tell him. Today, the two have become close friends and correspond regularly. When Ken faced medical challenges, Governor Bus was at his side.

To many of the people who earn their living in and around Florida's capital, the good-natured Plante has been a role model, teacher and mentor for both Republicans and Democrats. One Senator recalled how Plante told her as a freshman that being a legislator is a hard job "but always keep your word." His upright character and reputation made Ken Plante a rather rare personality in politics, widely admired for both his characteristic integrity as well as his powerful influence.

Many believe that a number of circumstantial factors, like age and timing, denied Ken Plante, one of Florida's greatest lawmakers, from being Governor of Florida. Those same supporters believe that Ken could have been one of our greatest governors as well.

Ken Plante has lived in Tallahassee since shortly after he left the Senate in 1978. He and his wife, Sandy, have seven children, 14 grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren.