

Obituary > Carl B. Drake Jr.

# Business leader was 'a parent for the Ordway'

Drake, 89, was CEO of St. Paul Cos. and a booster of the arts in St. Paul

By Tim Carey

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In the early 1980s, many people considered St. Paul the lesser of the Twin Cities. But Carl B. Drake Jr. had a far different view. He saw the two cities as equals and envisioned Minnesota's capital as a haven for the arts.

Drake, 89, a former chief executive of the company that is now St. Paul-based Travelers Cos., died Thursday at his home in Mendota Heights, leaving a legacy of giving and a strong arts community in St. Paul.

He was a catalyst in the creation of the Ordway Music Theater in the 1980s and served on its board from 1982 to 2006. He also was a board member at the Minnesota Orchestral Society and the United Way of

St. Paul.

"He was one of the pioneers of the Ordway project," said Patricia Mitchell, president and CEO of the Ordway. "He was on the steering committee and the board from the very beginning.

"I don't think many people would've given a nickel for the liveliness of St. Paul in the '70s," Mitchell said. "The Ordway really helped to revive the city. Carl was instrumental in St. Paul becoming the city it is today."

Drake, a St. Paul native, attended St. Paul Academy in the 1930s. He joined St. Paul Fire and Marine Insurance Co. as an underwriter after graduating from Yale University in 1941. He wasn't at the company long before he enlisted in the Navy, where he served as an officer in the South Pacific.

He returned to St. Paul after his military service and held many leadership positions at the insurer, then called the St. Paul Cos., before taking over as president and CEO in 1973. He retired from the company in 1984 and remained on the board until 1987.

"Carl began some of the international operations of the company, and he did a magnificent job in leading the company to become much more prosperous," said Doug Leatherdale, company chairman and CEO from 1990 to 2001.

Throughout his business dealings, Drake always remembered his civic responsibilities, especially as they related to his hometown.

"He was very much involved in the city's growth as the chair of St. Paul Cos.," Leatherdale

said, "but he also was regarded as one of the major business and civic leaders in the Twin Cities. And he always felt St. Paul could thrive and grow, and he saw the wider horizon of the Twin Cities."

As past chair of the F.R. Bigelow Foundation, Drake helped revive the St. Paul riverfront. He also helped create the Public Education Fund in 1993. His most significant contribution to the Twin Cities and St. Paul, however, is likely the Ordway, which opened in 1985.

"Losing Carl is like losing a parent for the Ordway," said Lorraine LeBlanc, director of development for the Ordway from 1991 to 2001. "This is such an emotional loss for all of us.

"When the theater was being established, there were people who felt it should be in Minneapolis," LeBlanc added.



Carl B. Drake Jr. helped revive St. Paul's riverfront.

"Carl is the one who fought for it being in St. Paul."

Drake sought creative ways to fund the center. He loved to play golf and found a way to use the game to solicit contributions.

"I remember a time he was golfing with (Carlson Cos. founder and chairman) Curt Carlson, who was trying to get funding for his pet project, the Carlson School of Management at the University of Minnesota," said Chris Sagstetter, the Ordway's vice president and chief financial officer. "Carl agreed to give money to Curt's project, but only if Curt agreed to donate to the Ordway."

"He really believed that if you were fortunate, you should share your good fortune with others — not only financially, but in terms of time spent, too," said Trevor Drake, his son.

Carl Drake is survived by his brother, Harry M. Drake; sons Trevor and Carl B. Drake III; daughter Eleanor Drake McLearn; stepchildren Douglas Day, Sylvia Day and Jeffrey Day; seven grandchildren; and five great-grandchildren.

A memorial service will be held at 2 p.m. today at House of Hope Presbyterian Church, 797 Summit Ave., St. Paul, with a reception following the service. Memorials to Drake are requested to Minnesota Public Radio and the Ordway Center for the Performing Arts. A special fund in Drake's name has also been established at the Ordway.

Nicole Garrison-Sprenger  
contributed to this report.

# Carl Drake, St. Paul Cos. CEO who helped start Ordway

• The St. Paul businessman was a civic and educational leader who led by example and loved his hometown.

By BEN COHEN  
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Carl Drake, a former CEO and chairman of the former St. Paul Companies, who helped found the Ordway Center in St. Paul, died of congestive heart failure at his Mendota Heights home on July 24. He was 89.

He was the great-grandson of Charles Bigelow, who led the company in the 19th century, when it was St. Paul Fire and Marine Insurance Co.

Drake was captain of the hockey and baseball teams at the St. Paul Academy and Summit School. During World War II, he served as a Navy officer. And from 1973 to 1984, he served as president and CEO of the insurance firm, now merged into Travelers Insurance.

Drake believed a business leader owed much to the community, and he walked that talk, said Doug Leatherdale, another former St. Paul Companies CEO.

"He loved the city," Leatherdale said. "He had strong feelings" about corporate citizens doing all they can for their community."

As a boss, he gave clear direction and didn't meddle, Leatherdale said.

While Drake led the company, it did very well, and he successfully fought off takeover attempts.

During his tenure, the firm gave a financial boost to the building of the Metrodome, buying \$250,000 of the bonds issued for its construction.

He led the United Way of St. Paul for many years, served as chairman of the boards of the Bigelow Foundation, the St. Paul Academy and Summit School and Macalester College.

"He thought that education was the key to making the world a better place," said his son Trevor of Wayne, Pa.

While playing leadership roles at St. Paul Academy, he also worked with students, teaching them about the im-



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Carl Drake used his retirement years to help students and promote the importance of civic responsibility and volunteering.

portance of volunteering.

He worked hard to make the Ordway become a reality, then served as chairman of its board from 1982-88, and stayed on the board until 2006.

"He did it out of his heart,"

said Chris Sagstetter, the Ordway's vice president and chief financial officer.

Sagstetter said he was an outstanding fundraiser and spoke sparingly but effectively. "He led by his actions. If something needed to be done,

he did it."

He graduated from St. Paul Academy in 1937 and Yale University in 1941, with a bachelor's degree in English.

He started as an underwriter for the insurance firm, leaving in 1941 to join the service.

He was a Navy officer aboard a destroyer in the Battle of Leyte Gulf in the South Pacific.

He became chairman of the board of the St. Paul Companies in 1977, retired in 1984, and remained on the board until 1988.

His first wife, Frances, died in 1975. His second wife, Charlotte, died in 2006.

In addition to Trevor, he is survived by his other son, Carl Drake of Wausau, Wis.; daughter, Eleanor Drake McLearn of Rochester, N.Y.; stepsons Douglas Day of Camden, Maine, and Jeffrey Day of Berkeley, Calif.; stepdaughter Sylvia Day of Hillsboro, Ore.; brother Harry Drake of St. Paul; seven grandchildren and five great-grandchildren.

Services will be at 2 p.m. Wednesday at the House of Hope Presbyterian Church, 797 Summit Av., St. Paul.