

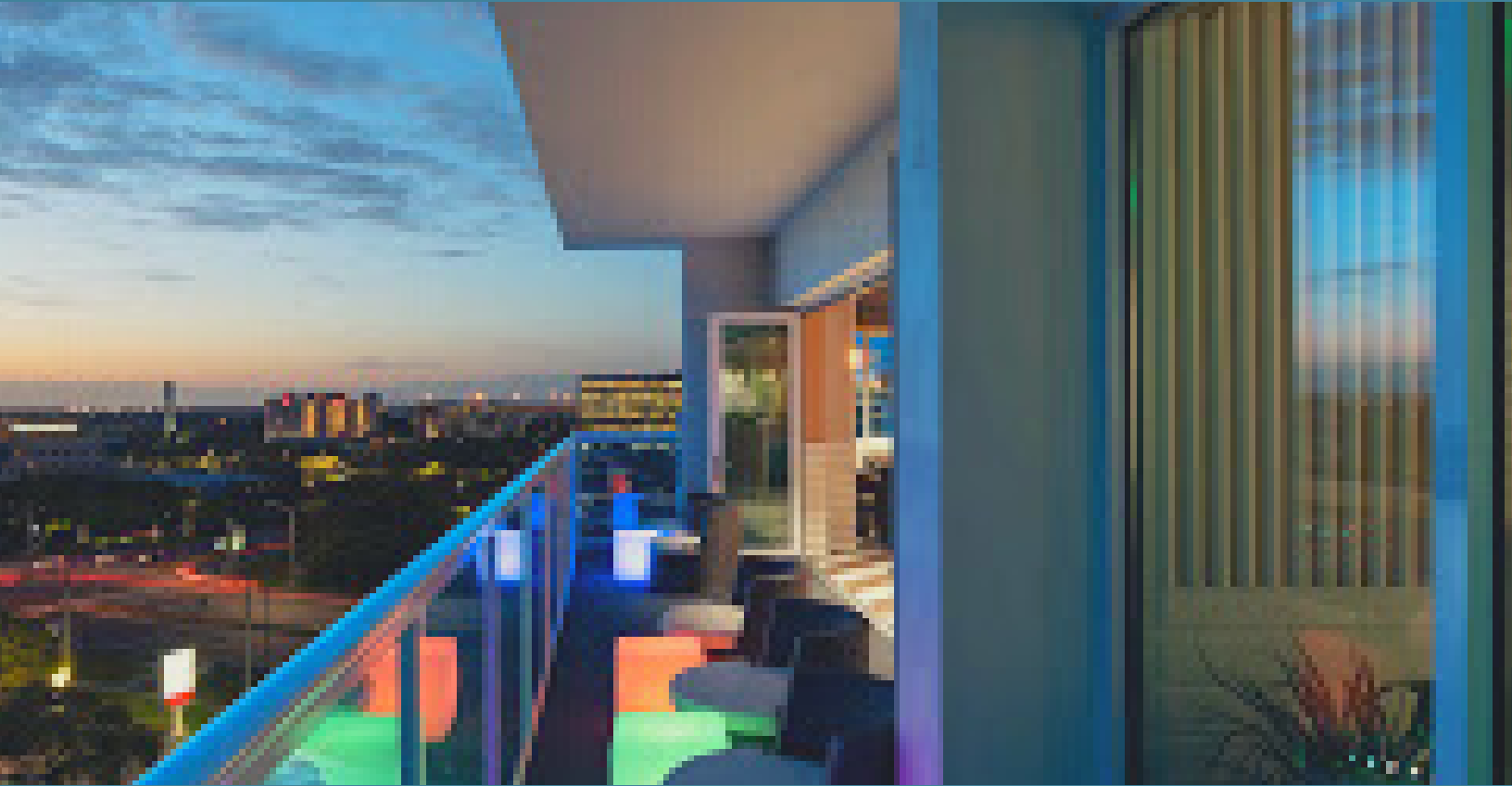
EXPLORE

THE KAROL HOTEL

FEATURED DESTINATION

By Ray Collins





The Karol Hotel

It was 1987—I was a young radio news anchor for WFLA “The Talk of Tampa Bay,” and I was invited to play in a media tennis tournament at Feathersound between Clearwater and St. Petersburg.

It was to be my first and last time at Feathersound—until last week—34 years later!

It was nostalgic to return. I even took a picture by the tennis courts—even though most of the people now playing there weren’t even born in 1987. In fact, most of their parents probably hadn’t met!

And one other thing that didn’t exist back then, or even a couple years ago, was The Karol Hotel.

What a beautiful addition to Feathersound! A \$30 million dollar 9-story hotel on Ulmerton Road. It features 123 rooms, a separate restaurant and bar in the lobby—as well as a rooftop bar—and 7,000+ square feet of event space, a ballroom, pool and fitness center.

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You’ll never guess how it got its name: Bullard Group CEO Fred Bullard named this crown jewel of Feathersound after his wife, Karol Kelly Bullard. There’s even a shrine to her in the lobby! (He certainly knows how to make the rest of us husbands look lazy.)

It wasn’t hard to spot the hotel. It stands out like a beacon by the side of the road. A beautiful white building with charming colorful awnings on most of the rooms. The deep blue sky made the facility sparkle in the afternoon Florida sun.

We had a ‘Classic King’ room with a marble bathroom^{0 2} and expansive shower. Our view looked out toward the Tampa downtown skyline across Tampa Bay.

After we unpacked, it was time to explore the area. We went for a nice walk around the perimeter of Feathersound. A beautiful subdivision full of friendly neighbors, parks, ponds and even a basketball court. We worked up an appetite for dinner, and had the luxury of leaving all car keys, wallets and worries behind—and went down to the K*Club Bar & Bistro in the lobby.

Erin had the Cedar Plank Salmon with sweet bourbon pepper glaze and root vegetable potato hash (\$26). I had the 7oz cut of filet with chimichurri pesto, arugula salad, smoked tomato vinaigrette romesco and rosemary fries (\$34). We also asked the waitress to pare our choices with a nice pinot noire which made for a wonderful dining experience. My filet was as good as anything I've had at the high-end steak houses.

After dinner we went up to the rooftop, armed with two free drink passes given to all hotel guests. We were happy to find an active nightlife scene in Vantage Rooftop Bar. Great ambiance—while looking back east toward Tampa Bay and the downtown skyline of Tampa. Beautiful.

Apparently, Vantage is establishing itself as the place to go in Pinellas County. How did I know? We met a member of the U.S. Coast Guard who was spending the weekend in Clearwater. He said word has spread that Vantage is the new hot spot in the area.

Besides handcrafted cocktails, they also have tapas, shared plates and the ability to order from the menu at the K*Club down below.

Erin was in a good mood because one of the hard-working people running food up and downstairs stopped to tell her that he liked her dress. (It's nice when people aren't afraid to reach out and show a little personality.)

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We stayed up a little too late watching the various streaming services in the rooms. HBO, Netflix, etc. Luckily, we were able to sleep late in our comfortable King-sized bed.

Packed up and headed out, refreshed, from a great stay at this beautiful new hotel in Feathersound. I won't wait another 34 years to come back!

Ray Collins is a former TV news anchor turned Realtor. He has written over a hundred reviews for Family Beautiful over the past ten years.

