



2021 Weld Coxe Marketing Achievement Award Recipient

Thomas E. Smith, Jr., AICP, FSMPS, CPSM

By Christine Chirichella

The 2021 Weld Coxe Marketing Achievement Award (MAA) recipient, Thomas E. Smith, Jr., AICP, FSMPS, CPSM, was honored as part of Build Business 2021: RISE, the SMPS annual conference. Throughout his 45-year career, Smith has been a serving leader and role model within SMPS and the A/E/C industries.

The MAA is the highest individual honor within SMPS, saluting professionals whose achievements and lasting contributions to the professional services marketing field are exemplary. Smith is the 30th recipient of the award, named in memory of marketing pioneer, SMPS co-founder, and past honoree Weld Coxe. Last year's recipient, Carolyn Ferguson, FSMPS, CPSM, presented the award virtually during The Evening of Excellence on August 5, 2021.

In total, more than 20 individuals provided recommendations for Smith's nomination, including seven past MAA recipients and 14 past Society presidents. Although in illustrious company, he remains humble, acknowledging, "It's a huge honor to be included in this group of really talented people who have been acknowledged by the Society as providing value over the course of their SMPS careers."

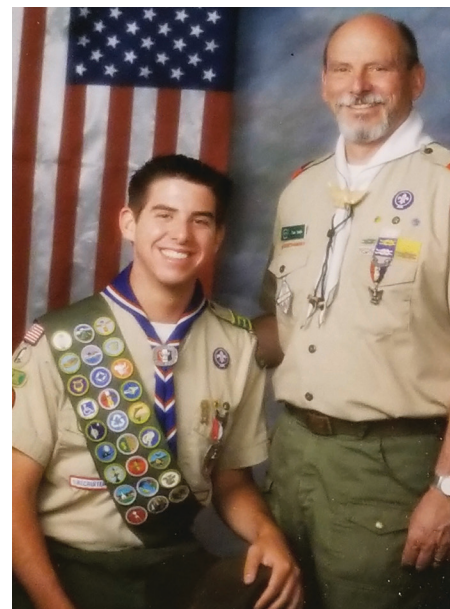
Smith built his career on hard work, communications, empathetic leadership, and service to others. He's never been afraid to take calculated risks, which ultimately paid off with two successful, long-term planning firms he established with colleagues. He believes, "If you're not taking risks, you're not giving yourself the opportunity to grow." But he also acknowledges many small coincidences that guided him on his career journey and led him to believe he was on the right path.

Service From a Young Age

Smith was raised with strong examples of service and leadership. His father, a World War II veteran, was a firefighter and fire engineer with the City of Pasadena for 25 years. His mother stayed at home and managed the house and family.

Smith's fondest childhood memories surrounded the outdoors, in particular during family camping vacations. Somewhere around age eight, he joined the Cub Scouts, and thereafter moved to Boy Scouts, which aligned with his love of the outdoors. The Scouting program offered challenges to lead teams and move up, culminating in the highest rank of Eagle Scout. Smith reached this pinnacle by age 13, compared to the usual 17 or 18 years, showing his maturity and goal-setting nature at an early age.

Smith lived by the Boy Scout motto "Be Prepared" and slogan, "Do a Good Turn Daily." He notes, "The



Smith leading son Tony's troop as he made Eagle Scout. Courtesy Smith family.

scouting experience formed a lot of my orientation toward service. ... It instilled a variety of traits and skill sets that stuck with me and became part of how I moved through life." He also began to recognize the power of a team and develop a leadership style that relied on empathy and one-on-one communication, noting, "It's something that's always been easy for me."



Smith graduating from U.S. Air Force basic training. Courtesy Smith family.

After graduating high school, Smith entered the University of California, Los Angeles, around the time the U.S. Army began drafting young men to serve in the Vietnam War. Typically, college deferments prevented students from being drafted. However, the deferment could be revoked if students didn't keep their GPAs up, something

Smith realized might happen. He decided to proactively enlist in the U.S. Air Force, putting college temporarily on hold.

Smith served a four-year enlistment, working in munitions to assemble explosive ordnance used in support of rescue efforts for downed pilots. After spending about a year and a half at an air base in Thailand supporting the war effort, he remembers, "I started appreciating the value of serving your country and doing something that was bigger than yourself."

Service in A/E/C

After returning home, Smith resumed college, just after the first Earth Day. He recalls, "There weren't many environmental studies programs yet, because colleges hadn't responded to Earth Day to create separate programs." But he found one in Social Ecology at University of California, Irvine.

In the first of many life coincidences, Smith's academic adviser, who had a Ph.D. in planning and public policy, became a big influence in his education and career path. The adviser also helped him hone his writing and editing skills, which became crucial down the road. He always demonstrated a strong work ethic and dedication to quality, saying, "Always do the absolute best that you can in anything that you're being assigned."

During school breaks, Smith worked as an environmental analyst at a consulting firm in Orange County, where he was responsible for preparing sections of environmental impact analysis documents, as well as scopes of work in response to RFPs. It was here that he first cut his teeth in the A/E/C industries.

His adviser encouraged him to attend graduate school right after undergraduate. Smith decided on UCLA's two-year master's program in environmental planning in the School of Architecture and Urban Planning.

Thanks to his rigorous master's coursework, he was hired as an environmental planner with a regional agency, the Southern California Association of Governments. He helped prepare a water quality management plan, which took three years. This experience reinforced that he made the right career choice and led to his next job at a planning company. "That was my transition from public sector to private sector," he recalls.

His next big leap was from employee to firm partner. After three years with the planning company, Smith's boss left to start his own firm. His former boss invited him to become a founding partner with him on a new venture, MBA Consulting in 1982. So, Smith, along with four others, joined the new firm. He loved being an entrepreneur, realizing, "I'm not going to work for anybody else again. I like deciding what we're going to do and then pursuing it."

After 14 years, Smith and a few others left the firm to start BonTerra Consulting. Over the next 17 years, BonTerra opened a second office and was recognized as a key consulting organization in Southern California. In January 2014, the company was formally acquired and merged into Psomas as its new Environmental Planning Division, at which time Smith retired from the firm.

During his 30+ years as an entrepreneur, Smith's two A/E/C environmental planning firms employed more than 150 professionals and served more than 500 clients. After retirement, he continued as a sought-after consultant working on research studies for various clients.

Service to SMPS

Smith got his real start in marketing and business development at MBA. With his outgoing nature and strong communications skills, Smith was volunteered to handle these efforts. Without formal training, he realized he had to find a way to acquire the skills needed to bring in new work and clients.

Smith asked his connections for help and discovered SMPS Los Angeles. At his first meeting, he realized the people he met were doing exactly what he'd been tasked to do. He recalls, "I couldn't believe how lucky I was to have found SMPS. ... All the energy that is always present at SMPS events was something I'd never seen in my other professional organizations." He left the meeting fired up and joined right away.

Learn more and watch Smith's acceptance video at smps.org/members/recognition/marketing-achievement-award.

As a new member in 1984, Smith regularly attended meetings and met the chapter leaders, who soon asked him to be on the board. He also started attending the SMPS annual conferences, where he met Angela Kimball, FSMPS, whom he considers one of his SMPS mentors. She was chair of the Society's Publications Committee, responsible for *Marketer*, whose articles Smith often used in his firm.

Kimball invited Smith to be part of the committee and help write articles or recruit contributors. After about a year, Kimball moved to the SMPS board of directors, and Smith filled the vacancy as chair. The committee worked with Society staff to transform *Marketer* from a newsletter to more of a journal, as well as to develop revenue-generating *Marketing Information Reports (MIRs)*, which were standalone publications that expanded on popular topics members had been clamoring for.

Smith also contributed to two classic SMPS publications created from the *MIR* collection: the *SMPS Handbook for Marketing Professional Services* and *SMPS Marketing Handbook for the Design and Construction Professional*. These publications ultimately evolved into the SMPS Domains of Practice and MARKENDIUM, currently the basis for the CPSM program. One of the reports, *Career Ladder Guide for Professional Services Marketers*, became the precursor to *Blueprints*. Smith notes, "As I think back on it, as volunteers we accomplished a whole lot in a relatively short period of time."

All of this was just the beginning for Smith, who later served as a member of the Certification Committee and Fellows Selection Jury Committee. He became Fellows delegate to the SMPS board of directors in 2006 for two years, followed by president-elect in 2008.

As Society president from 2009–10, he lent his strong business acumen to deal with the impact of the Great Recession that had been raging since the market crash of October 2008. Many members were out of work. Smith led a task force of past Society presidents to survey their interest and gather their input on creating more value for members and prospects.

In his five years on the Society board, Smith advocated for the creation of a new online member community, MySMPS, and for providing annual funding to the SMPS Foundation to produce primary research. His support led to the first Fellows Survey project to identify trends in the marketplace, resulting in *A/E/C Visionaries Foresee the Future*. The foundation also released eight white papers during this period.



Embrace challenges and opportunities, whether coincidental or not. You might just find, as I did, that they will lead you to some interesting and rewarding experiences.

— Thomas E. Smith, Jr., FSMPS, CPSM



After coming off the board in 2011, Smith joined the Fellows Advisory Committee, formed by then-Fellows Delegate Carla Thompson, FSMPS, CPSM, where he served for three years. He participated in the SMPS CEO Selection Committee in 2015, which hired current CEO Michael V. Geary, CAE.

Closer to home, Smith assisted with the formation of the first SMPS Pacific Regional Conference in 1992. He's served for many years as Chapter Champion to SMPS Los Angeles, SMPS Orange County, and SMPS Inland Empire, helping launch two of the newest chapters. In 2018, Smith was honored with the Lifetime Achievement Award by SMPS Los Angeles for his countless contributions over 30+ years of membership. Today, he continues to advise the chapters in navigating through the pandemic.

Service Through Leadership, Mentoring, and Education

In A/E/C, it's often thought that technical professionals lack communications skills. But Smith is clearly an exception who has excelled at communicating with clients, employees, individuals, professional organizations, and local community.

Smith was a seller-doer before the concept became prevalent. While at MBA, he taught technical project managers how to use client meetings to obtain additional assignments and identify future projects. He's conducted many presentations over the course of his career, to clients, peer organizations, and SMPS.

With his clients, his thorough explanations helped them understand the planning process and regulatory requirements, while managing expectations. He explains, "It really boiled down

Smith with 2020 MAA winner, Carolyn Ferguson, FSMPS, CPSM, at Build Business 2010, when they served on the SMPS board of directors together. Photos on page 25 and 27 courtesy Frank Monkiewicz Photography, frankmonkiewicz.com.



Smith with wife Lorraine and children Julia, Tony, and Anna. Courtesy Smith family.



For me, Tom represents all that is good in business and our industry ... Without flash, Tom has worked steadily through the years to make sure SMPS, in particular, continues to be relevant. Tom's exemplary experience proves that service can be a powerful life brand."

— Nancy J. Usrey, FSMPS, CPSM, SMPS President 2017-18, SMPS Foundation President 2004-05

to wanting to be as effective as I could be in communicating what we were doing and trying to make sure we were providing exemplary service."

On the flip side, he had to ensure his staff had the skills to solve problems and move the project forward expediently. Smith believes strongly in mentoring and leading by example. A lifelong learner, he always helped employees improve performance and pursue their expertise, saying, "If you're not staying curious and learning, you're really not taking advantage of opportunities that can make your whole journey a lot more fulfilling."

As an educator, Smith acknowledges, "To be truly effective as a leader working with others, you need to help them achieve their goals as they work with you to achieve broader goals. Doing that ultimately helps you achieve your own." He credits his wife Lorraine, who had a career in HR, for helping him develop and see the value of an empathetic leadership style.

He shares, "Part of my maturation as a leader was to recognize that you have to be sensitive to where others are coming from, and what challenges they're facing, beyond what's going on in the office." This insight made him an effective coach who directly mentored more than 10 SMPS members, with two serving as chapter presidents and one as Society president.

Throughout his career, he's participated in and spoken at many other industry organizations including the American Planning Association, Association of Environmental Professionals, American Society of Civil Engineers, and American Public Works Association.

Within his community, Smith channeled his commitment to education and leadership back into Cub Scouts and Boy Scouts in his adult life, while raising his son Tony. Thanks to his leadership, 12 young men, including his son, achieved the rank of Eagle Scout.

Honoring a Life of Service

While Smith's list of accomplishments is long, he shares, "I'm most proud of the longevity

of the business organizations I helped found, and my ability to serve as both a technical and marketing and business development leader in these firms for more than three decades."

Smith also feels a deep sense of pride in being able to move SMPS forward into a more viable organization for the members. He adds, "I'm also proud of the publications I helped produce that provided value and resources that could grow their career, beyond just attending meetings and networking."

During his acceptance speech at Build Business, Smith credited his scouting and military background for opening his eyes to the value of service, stating, "My destiny seems to have been framed through service to others, and SMPS provided many opportunities."

He acknowledges his life of service allowed him to take risks that others might have missed, quoting the great hockey player Wayne Gretzky: "You miss 100% of the shots you don't take."

Smith took it a step further, issuing a challenge to all SMPS members: "Embrace challenges and opportunities, whether coincidental or not. You might just find, as I did, that they will lead you to some interesting and rewarding experiences."

And like all great leaders, he thanked those who helped get him here, including his nominations team, reviewing team, and the many special friends who helped along the way. He sent heartfelt thanks to Lorraine, his life partner of 49 years, and to his children Julia, Anna, and Tony for supporting his time away from his family.

In thinking about his legacy and years of service to SMPS, Smith reflects, "I felt like I could provide some value to this organization that I love, and that I've been a member of a long time. I was committed to following that through. I hope that's a legacy that others can resonate with and that might inspire them to do the same." ■