

FORMER PRESIDENT OF SERTOMA

Ocean Isle's Smith Believes In Giving Something Back

BY DOUG RUTTER

As a past president of the civic group Sertoma International, Charles Smith has traveled all over the United States, Canada and Mexico.

Out of all the places he could have selected to run his own insurance business, Smith settled on Ocean Isle Beach. "When you're born with the water, you're never happy away from it," says Smith, a native of Conway, S.C.

Smith has been happy since moving to Ocean Isle three years ago and plans to start making an impact in the community. That's something he's accustomed to after 27 years as a leader of Sertoma International.

When Smith joined the Spartanburg (S.C.) Sertoma Club June 22, 1966, he had no plans of one day rising to the organization's highest leadership role. He joined for the fellowship.

"For reasons you cannot explain you get involved above the club level," Smith said of his climb to the top. "I was lucky enough to be at the right place at the right time."

From the time he joined Sertoma, it was 25 years before Smith was elected international president for the 1990-91 term.

Along the way, he held countless offices at the club, district, state and international levels. Smith completed his one-year term as chairman of the board last September.

"A lot of people have thanked me for my work, but I have been the lucky one," he says of his experience. "I've gotten an awful lot out of this. I've done a lot, but I've gotten back much more than I put into it."

Perhaps the greatest thing Smith has gained from Sertoma are friends. "Most people can count their friends on one hand. I feel like the luckiest man alive. I can't count my friends on one hand."

Smith's term as international president kept him hopping. Between board meetings and various functions across the continent, he was on the road every other weekend for a year.

He visited Florida, where one club sponsored the world's largest pork barbecue dinner, and Pennsylvania, where another hosted the world's largest barbecue chicken cookout.

"The diet went to pot," Smith, a slender 56-year-old, said with a smile. "But it was very rewarding to go out and see the things the different clubs were doing."

All Sertoma clubs are committed to "Service To Mankind," but Smith says each one approaches the mission from a different angle. Clubs are encouraged to help meet the needs in their communities.

Members decide the type of fund-raisers that work in their area and how the money should be used. A club in Colorado, for instance, held a "buffalo chip" throwing contest to raise money.

All Sertoma clubs try to reach



CHARLES SMITH (right) of Ocean Isle Beach met President George Bush in 1991 while serving as international president of Sertoma. PHOTO CONTRIBUTED

out to children through summer camps, scouting, youth sports or some other means. "The future of the world is in those kids," Smith said.

One his most was rewarding experiences as a Sertoman was the club's response in 1989 after Hurricane Hugo leveled Charleston, the city where Smith grew up.

The organization had held a conference in Charleston earlier that year, and when word got out about the devastation, Sertoma was among the many groups that responded with supplies.

"It was just rewarding to see people rally around whatever the need was," Smith said. "We can say what we want about the United States, but we are the most giving, caring country there is."

As international president, Smith said his biggest job was cheerleading for the individual clubs, visiting as many as possible when they celebrated special anniversaries.

Without a doubt, the highlight of his presidency was meeting President George Bush on March 12, 1991. Smith visited Bush with a Winston-Salem woman who received an award from Sertoma for her volunteer work with the homeless.

"I don't care who you are or what you do," Smith said. "If you get inside that Oval Office you're in awe. I was a Bush person, still am. But I would have been equally honored if Clinton was in there."

Smith's term as international president expired nearly two years

ago, but he is still very involved in the organization. "Leadership has no time limit. Once you go through that people still look at you as a leader."

Smith still claims Spartanburg as his home club, but recently helped get a new club started in Myrtle Beach. "I do not believe in burnout. I think it's an obligation. My involvement in Sertoma has given me experiences that others have not had."

Smith's goal now is to establish a

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club in the South Brunswick Islands. "We're fortunate enough to be living and working here. Any time you're lucky to get something you have to give back."

Sertoma International is open to any man or woman age 18 or older who is willing to volunteer. "We do not feel like it is our right to reject anyone who wants to participate," Smith said.

As a result, Sertoma boasts clubs specifically for single people, couples, senior citizens, sky divers, and motorcycle owners.

Although he has been involved with Sertoma for 27 years, Smith is a big believer in all civic organiza-

tions. He likes the Lions, Optimist, Rotary and Kiwanis clubs because they all work for the good of the community.

With 1,200 clubs and just over 30,000 members, Sertoma is smaller than some civic organizations. Smith says that allows motivated and capable members to move into leadership roles as fast as they want.

Smith joined Sertoma after moving to Spartanburg in 1964. An insurance agent by trade, Smith has

from Williamson, and hasn't regretted his move to the Brunswick County coast.

"I like it here," he says enthusiastically. "I think this is a much better place to live than Myrtle Beach or someplace like that. I like the family aspect of it."

The Brick Landing Plantation resident enjoys all kinds of sports in his free time. He jogs and plays tennis to stay in shape. "I believe physical fitness is very important. I think if you feel young you will act young."

Smith also loves shag dancing, because of the exercise and the great beach music. He's part of a local group of dancers forming the Society of Brunswick Shaggers.

Because of his work in Sertoma, Smith hasn't had much opportunity to get involved in local civic projects. He recently started working with the South Brunswick Islands Chamber of Commerce now that he has more time on his hands.

Smith, who is single, has two children and expects his first grandchild this year. His daughter, Courtney, is a physical therapist in Kansas City. Son Stephen is a recent graduate of The Citadel.

Getting back to his life at Ocean Isle, Smith says he love the fact that there is just one traffic light between his home and office. Home is just a five-minute drive from work.

In Spartanburg, Smith said he could spend five minutes waiting for just one traffic signal to change. "I think this is as good a place to live as you can get."

Smith purchased the company