

TRANSCRIPT: EDWARD G. SMITH INTERVIEW

Edward G. Smith · Fmr. Director, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension

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An interview with Dr. Edward G. Smith, Former Director of the Texas A&M Agrilife Extension. Smith is a 1973 graduate from Texas A&M and an inducted member of the Tyrus R. Timm Honor Registry.

This video was posted January 17, 2014 on the Tyrus R. Timm Registry YouTube Channel.

Could you please introduce yourself and tell us a little about your career?

My name is Edward Smith, and I was the Extension Director for the last six or eight years with the A&M system.

Why did you choose to study Agricultural Economics at Texas A&M?

Good question, but it's one that's easy for me to answer. I had a vocational Ag teacher that was an Aggie, and when I was deciding whether to go to army or go to, to college, he suggested that I go to A&M being that that's where he graduated from. And he also said you don't have the wealth to probably be in production agriculture, but you've got the business sense. And he's the one, although he was in Ag education, he suggested that I go and study Ag Economics. So, he's, he basically sent me here to, to study Ag Economics and it was a wise choice.

Could you describe your early career?

Well, all my professional career was with the, the Extension Program. When I graduated in, in '74 with a master's degree, I went to work as a county extension agent, assistant county agent in Gaines County out in West Texas and did the County agent work for about five years in Gaines and Terry County. And then at that point, decided that I might want to get into extension administration. And so, the Extension Service sent me back to school. I convinced them that Ag Economics was a, was a good degree for extension administration. And so, they sent me back to school, and I moved back here in 1980, got the PhD, and then worked as an extension economist for 20 years in the extension program before moving over to administration in 2001.

What experiences influenced you in your life the most?

Well, there's obviously a lot, but I mentioned my Ag teacher that had a big impact because my dad thought that every young man should go straight into the military and then make his own way in, in life, and, and the AG teacher convinced him that, that I had the capability to earn my way through school and, and to do that. And so, that was a, that obviously, that was a big decision since it was right in the middle of Vietnam at the time. And so, then actually Ty Timm, the man that this award is named after, he had worked an extension, and he was a very outgoing department head who visited with the students, and he had mentioned extension to me. And when they interviewed on campus, they offered me a job, and I've been with them, I was with them for 38 years.

In your opinion, what does it take to achieve success?

I think that success is always someone else's judgment but from, from my personal opinion, to have success is to be able to do a job that you enjoy doing. If it's work, then you're probably not successful. I had – if it's, if it's a job you enjoy doing, which I was very lucky to have a career that it put me in position to visit, work with people on issues that were important to them, and

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so every day was a, a new experience. It wasn't, it wasn't boring. It was constantly challenging. And, and Ag Economics allowed me to address a number of issues with lots of different people. From, from my personal position, that 38 years of public service, is a success because I enjoyed doing it. I enjoyed it to the day I retired.

What are your thoughts on being selected to the Tyrus R. Timm Honor Registry?

Well, I at look the Honor Registry, I know, I know about 50% of people in there. And so, I'm very, very humbled to be selected for this award. It's, it's very, very important when your, your colleagues nominate you and, and bestow this type of award. And I'm, I'm very, very appreciative of it and very proud.

How were you able to manage time for family, work and other priorities throughout your career?

That's a, that's a good question. Obviously have a good wife, Elaine. We've been married for 40 years. And so, she basically raised the, the family while I was out on the, on the job. I told them at the retirement that she was the most nervous about my retiring because she said we've been in extension 38 years; you've only been home about five of those years. And she didn't want that ratio to change. She didn't want that much of me. So, no. A supportive spouse and partner and it's been great, and we've had a, a great life.

What advice do you have for student of Agricultural Economics?

I think, I think they follow the same lines as my answer in some of the other questions. I would, I would say find something that you love to do. Find a job that you, that you love to do. If you find a job you don't like, then you're not going to be successful in it. Find a job that you love to do, where it's not work, where it's a, it's a joy to be paid for doing something that you, that you love to do. And then you're, you're likely to excel. And then, of course, we work with good people. I haven't done that much, so I'm humbled about this award, but I've always worked with good people and those good people have made everybody look good.

You have had a highly varied career. What personal aspects helped you maintain your flexibility?

Well, I just, I told people I was just the pretty face of extension. And they started laughing just like you have when I had said that. No, I don't think, I think, I think you got to be flexible. You work with lots of different people, with lots of different experiences. And, and if you don't take things that seriously, if you, if you put out quality work but don't intimidate people or don't make them feel, if you make them feel comfortable in the area of economics that we worked in, it, it's their livelihood on the line. And if they're comfortable you're going to be successful in dealing with it.

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Is there anything else you would like to add?

Again, it's an honor to, to be the bestowed this recognition in the Tyrus Timm Registry. He was a, he was my, he – he retired the year that I graduated in '73. So, he was the Department Head while I was in undergraduate. And the characteristics that he showed are characteristics that are universal and, and basically could be principal. Listen to the people, get out, visit, see what their needs are, and try to address them as best you can.

Thanks for watching!

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