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Celebrating the Past ring the Future

A Profile of President Glenn Smith

BY ANITA BLUMENTHAL

Glenn Smith had his first job interview at the age of 47—after 24 years in the Naval Civil Engineer Corps. That was in 1997, and he still remembers a certain apprehension. “I had no idea how to convince someone to hire me,” he recalls. But he needn’t have worried. That first interview was with Bryn Mawr College; he was hired as director of facilities services and has been there ever since.

Smith points out that a number of APPA colleagues are Navy CEC veterans, and with good reason. Many of the skills he developed in the Navy have served him well in his current career—especially leadership.

LEARNING LEADERSHIP

Raised in a small town in upstate New York, Smith attended Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute on a Navy ROTC scholarship. Freshman year, he met his future wife Susan; they were married after he graduated with a BS in civil engineering, and he stayed on for another year to earn a master’s in the field.

Smith was commissioned as an ensign at age 23 and immediately thrown into leadership roles, with older people reporting to him. He had no formal leadership training. “I led by intuition,” he says. Fortunately, his intuition was good and is still the basis of his approach. “I

learned to rely on the expertise of people who worked for me. And by listening to them and supporting them I tried to earn their respect,” he says.

About 15 years later, the Navy started to embrace Total Quality Leadership. Smith

heard Dr. W. Edwards Deming talk about leadership. “His message,” Smith says, “was simply this: Your job as a leader is to restore pride and joy in the workplace. Create an environment where people truly enjoy and take pride in what they do—where they become intrinsically motivated—and they will constantly amaze you.” Subsequently, Smith augmented Deming’s

philosophy with Stephen Covey's principle-centered leadership approach and became a certified facilitator of Covey's 7 Habits of Highly Effective People.

Meanwhile, at a dozen tours of duty, he managed day-to-day facilities maintenance, master planning, and administration of major construction projects. "Admittedly, these were Navy buildings," Smith says, "not historic collegiate gothic landmarks intended to endure forever."

By his twenty-fourth year in the Navy, Smith had reached the rank of captain, three of his four children were in college, and he felt the time was right to move on to something else. He considered becoming a leadership/management consultant but realized he would "rather be doing it than just talking about it." He was drawn to education and to the business of educating people. Also, he sought a position "with an ownership role."

In a neat piece of serendipity, Smith's final duty station was at the Navy Yard in Washington, D.C., just across the Potomac River from APPA's headquarters in Alexandria, Virginia. His relationship with APPA began when he visited the office, read the publications, used the Job Express service, and applied to listings, including Bryn Mawr.

LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT

A small, prestigious private college with Quaker roots, Bryn Mawr College is located 12 miles west of Philadelphia. The 120-acre campus has an enrollment of 1,300 undergraduate women and 450 graduate students. Not only did Smith fall in love with the campus on his first visit, but he also thought that a private

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college would offer a greater degree of freedom and less bureaucracy than a large public institution. In addition, he liked the idea of a small school, where he could be more involved in the day-to-day running of the campus.

Today, his responsibilities include the daily care and major renovation of buildings (excluding housekeeping/custodial functions), master planning, capital project design and construction, maintenance of grounds—including more than 3,600 trees—and operation of the high-voltage electricity systems that feed all buildings. Projects have run the gamut from rerouting streams to building a stormwater retention pond to adding modern additions to 100-year-old historic buildings.

All of this is accomplished by a facilities services staff of only 22 people, "but each a true professional in their respective field of responsibility," Smith says. "I inherited some talented mechanics and craftsmen and was able to hire or promote people in the early years who are still here and are the absolute best at what they do. When you are only 22-strong," he says, "each person's contributions and willingness to be part of a team are vital to success."

Smith's management style is a well-honed version of his

early intuition filtered through Deming's philosophy and Covey training—to keep joy and pride in the workplace. "My style is hands-off leadership," he says. "I hire people who are good at what they do, empower them to make decisions, and give them free rein to excel—only stepping in where there are gaps. We focus on building strengths—helping each other become even better at what we are already best at—and then supporting one another in those areas where specific skills are not as strong."

But all this is not enough for a leader. Smith stresses that you will always have to deal with some one above your level, making decisions you will have to live with. "So the challenge," he says, "is to make sure you get a seat at the decision table."

Smith was able to gain a seat at the Board of Trustee's table on the Building and Grounds Committee and also was able to gain the respect of senior administrators. He admits he was lucky to arrive at Bryn Mawr the same time as a new incoming president. Both getting started at the same time, they grew into their jobs and developed a mutual respect.

CHANGING THE CULTURE

Smith learned that, before he arrived, the department frequently delivered bad news to the Board—capital projects had



developed a history of running late and over budget. He committed to delivering projects on time and on (preferably under) budget. Also, he has developed a clear view of the vital role of the facilities department in the financial well-being of the college.

“When the facilities management department is working well, we are in the business of cost avoidance, even though we actively manage and invest more money day to day than any other department,” he says. “Our decisions have a major effect on the college’s finances. If we do well, we avoid potentially huge expenses. For example, construction done right the first time means no litigation or rework down the road. Timely repair and preventive maintenance avoid major, more costly and disruptive breakdowns. Investment in slightly more expensive, but more energy efficient and sustainable solutions today can pay dividends downstream.”

As for sustainability, Smith explains his department is sensitive to the issues and takes a practical approach, incorporating LEED design principles wherever possible and looking for opportunities to reduce energy consumption and the college’s overall carbon footprint. “Most importantly,” he says, “we are engaging the faculty, students, staff, and senior administration in active dialogue and practical projects that promote sustainability. We are gradually changing the culture to one where sustainable solutions are part of every decision-making process.”

MANAGING SPACE

Unlike many colleges, Smith says, “At Bryn Mawr, we are not focusing on additional buildings or new construction but on maintaining what we have and getting greater value from under-used space. Some buildings were so neglected that faculty did not want to teach in them or students to go to classes in them. It is really satisfying to perform quality renovations to give a building an added 50- to 100-year lease on life. We are particularly proud of our dorms,” Smith says. “We have a reputation of having dorms like palaces, even though most are over 100 years old. The current Harry Potter generation of students say the buildings feel a little like Hogwarts—gracious rooms with elegant, albeit nonworking, fireplaces and grand public spaces.”

However, Bryn Mawr’s location on a hill and the age and style of the buildings raise the issue of accessibility. Most dorms do not have elevators. The oldest, most iconic building on campus cannot be entered without climbing stairs. “But we’re making progress every year,” Smith says, while preserving the landscape and aesthetic signature of the campus. He thinks of his team as long-term stewards of the campus.

QUICK TO JOIN APPA, QUICK TO BENEFIT

Not surprisingly, given his success using APPA’s job-listing service, Smith joined his local Delaware Valley Chapter (DVAP-



PHOTO BY KIT FARMAN

The Bryn Mawr Facilities Team.

PA) almost immediately. “You get out what you put in,” he says. “I have benefited from every service APPA provides. Early in my career, I found APPA’s books to be invaluable references in transitioning. I was able to get better perspective on what I was getting into. And APPA has continued to publish excellent books on all aspects of facilities management.”

APPA has also given Smith research, training, teaching, publishing, and leadership opportunities. He was part of an APPA research project that, he says, was “a deep exploration of institutional culture and its effect on people and on how people interact.” He also joined the faculty of APPA’s Leadership Academy. Given his experience as a Covey facilitator, he began teaching the first track of the program. “I enjoyed this outlet, which did not exist for me outside of APPA,” he says. Recently he has been asked to teach leadership sessions to Bryn Mawr students. Another personal satisfaction has been the opportunity to publish articles in *Facilities Manager* magazine, “to share some thoughts and hopefully some wisdom with others,” he says.

“Thinking what I would have missed out on if not actively involved in APPA is mind boggling,” he says. “My career would not have been such a rich experience; I would not have been as good at my job, nor would I have had the opportunity to expose my staff to professional development opportunities. One of my staff has just become a Certified Education Facilities Professional. Two others are on the verge of graduating from the Institute for Facilities Management. Several have attended and taken part in conferences. It has been a richer experience for all of us.”

JOURNEY TO THE PRESIDENCY

In 2003, Smith was chapter president and therefore co-chair of the planning committee as the Delaware Valley chapter hosted the regional conference that year. In 2007, he became president of the Eastern Region (ERAPPA). Because all regional presidents ultimately have a seat on the APPA Board, Smith



Glenn speaking at APPA 2013

became familiar with the international aspect of APPA and with the workings of a large national nonprofit.

By 2010, he was dean of the Leadership Academy and ran for APPA Vice President for Professional Development. In 2012, he ran for President-Elect.

As he begins his presidential year, Smith says, "My theme is *APPA's Celebrating and Building Upon APPA's 100 Years*. Each of us has a unique story of involvement with APPA and of the degree it has served us in our lives and professions." In part, he says, this is a year for "celebrating and for reflecting on our history—how far we have come, not just technologically, but professionally. The facilities manager just used to be the blue-collar power plant manager, not considered a professional, not college educated, with no voice when major decisions were being made. People should realize that an institution's buildings are as valuable as its endowment—perhaps more valuable," he says. "You have to have professionals managing them right."

Smith also wants to focus on keeping professional development vibrant and accessible and on finding and encouraging the next generation of facilities managers. "Professional development is the cornerstone of APPA," he says. "I am especially interested in the professional development continuum and wish to encourage those programs to grow." The problem is that, when institutional money is tight, training and professional development funds dry up. Yet, he says, it's precisely when money is tight that "you need the most educated workforce because you have to be able to work effectively.

"If, in the current economy, our members cannot afford to come to us for professional development, we want to be able to go to them," he says. "Locally delivered Drive-In Workshops, Supervisor's Toolkits, and Leadership Academy programs will

reach more people and cut down on time away and travel. I want to make sure we move in that direction," he says. "Deferred professional development is more dangerous than deferred maintenance of buildings, and we know how dangerous that can be."

In addition, Smith wants to seek ways for APPA "to find and encourage the next generation of facilities managers. We are seeing the graying of senior facilities managers," he says, "and anytime the economy has a downturn, people postpone retirement. We really need to look at how we can reach out and recruit new people to come into the profession." While unusual career paths can add interest to APPA journeys, Smith says that APPA needs to come up with a better plan for a more direct path and make people aware this is a satisfying and stable career field. In pursuing this goal, Smith hit the ground running, hosting the first Emerging Professionals Summit at APPA's annual meeting in August.




Glenn and Susan Smith

Another focus will be to expand APPA's global outreach, particularly with increased collaboration with existing international alliance partners

and the establishment of new APPA chapters in Mexico. Smith believes the time is right to reach out to our neighboring institutions south of the border, align them with APPA's existing regions, and embrace the many opportunities for mutual growth.

Often in his career, Smith has stretched himself to accomplish worthwhile ends. He hopes to continue to do this as president of APPA. He cites lines from *Flow* by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi: "The best moments in our lives are not the passive, receptive, relaxing times.... The best moments usually occur if a person's body or mind is stretched to its limits in a voluntary effort to accomplish something difficult and worthwhile.... Optimal experience is thus something we make happen.... For each person, there are thousands of opportunities, challenges to expand ourselves."

For Smith, it is all about the journey—constantly moving forward with a clear sense of direction while exploring opportunities, facing challenges, experiencing adventure, and gaining a sense of accomplishment along the way. "APPA has provided me an exciting journey thus far," he says, "and it's far from over." 

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