

# SMITH

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doing and why.”

Pat Owens, certified family nurse practitioner, was encouraged to go to school by Smith and was one of the employees who was like family to Smith.

“I started as an x-ray technician, and one time we had a kid come in that had been in a wreck,” she recalls. “After a while, the kid was feeling better, started laughing and was able to walk out. I realized I had not gotten his vitals and panicked and told Dr. Smith. He asked, ‘Did he walk out?’ I said, ‘Yes,’ and he told me, ‘I reckon he is okay.’”

Smith remained an active pilot throughout his life, and took Owen’s child up in his plane. Owens recalls that day and was able to smile ... after the fact.

“I was outside and, all of a sudden, I heard a buzz,” she relates. “I looked up in the sky and I can see them in the plane, just smiling at me — they were so close.”

Linda Dixon, health information department manager, says Smith was easy to work for in how he approached his job and responsibilities.

“He always had a smile, but he was

a problem in the department when he was chief of staff, we always had an answer from him. We worked very well together,” Dixon says.

Dixon was also one of the county residents whose family was treated by Smith. She recalls when her father came to see Smith.



“I came to him and asked him about my dad, but I used his real name instead of his nickname,” Dixon remembers. “He didn’t know my dad’s real name, because he only knew him by his nickname. And you could tell he was serious.”

In 1990, Smith, along with Dr. J.T. O’Connor and Dr.

Hutchins, made a decision which would secure the future of the hospital in Love County. With community hospitals closing throughout the state, the three men agreed to blend their clinics into the hospital and join the staff as salaried workers.

“We talked about it probably for six months or a year, weighing the pros and cons,” O’Connor says. “It was something the hospital needed and it was a chance to combine resources. One day, we literally showed up.”

“We had to close one wing of the hospital and use it for the clinic,” says Richard Barker, Mercy Hospital Love County administrator. “There were literally people sitting in the hallway.”

Barker said the vision of the men

further into the future ensured Love County would have a hospital, which continues to grow and thrive.

For now, the family of Smith, as well as friends and co-workers, are left to grieve for their friend as his loss is felt throughout the community.

“When I got here Tuesday, it was kind of quiet,” Hutchins says. “It was not the same, and I remember walking in and knowing things would never be the same.”

Counselors have been available to staff this week as they try to come to peace with their loss.

“You can see the different aspects of realization, and you just wait for the endpoint,” Barker says. “The only constant is love, and everybody deals with it different.”

The community will honor Smith at 11 a.m. today during his funeral service in the Marietta school auditorium.

“I was 20 years old when he gave me a job,” says family friend Sissy Burge. “I was a kid, and they just took me in and taught me a lot. Not just about medicine, but about life. A lot was given up personally so the community could have healthcare for years.

“He also leaves a huge void. So many people have no idea what it’s like to not have Dr. Smith in our community. He has always been there for us.”

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