At 88, this Dallas lawyer and civic leader believes ‘everyone has an oar to put into the water’

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wards, honors and government appointments are not what Forrest Smith tells me about when we meet up at Friedman & Feiger, the firm that Smith, now 88 years old, joined in 1944.

He doesn’t tell me about his mayoral run in the early nineties or the fact that he’s credited with unifying the Dallas Chamber of Commerce alongside both the Black and Hispanic Chambers of Commerce either.

No, he talks about his community – the region and the people that have helped define his professional and personal life – and the potential he still sees.

“I don’t think it matters about how old you are or what you do. I think what’s important is to realize what a tremendous opportunity and place we have to live in that we call the North Texas region,” he said. “There’s nothing like it in America. We need to continue to improve that, and everybody has an oar to put into the water.”

Smith first began focusing on the North Texas community in his time at Mobil Oil Corporation, where he served as counsel to the company for more than 30 years.

“During those years at Mobil, I learned to enjoy doing things outside of just doing the work,” Smith told me. “I did a lot of civic work and served on boards and committees and things of that nature, and that was my outside job. It was something that I really enjoyed other than just working in the office as a lawyer.”

Smith explained that it was good training for him to find out what was going on in the community and what he could actually do to help. This introspection led him to the president post at the Dallas Chamber of Commerce in the mid-eighties, a role he held, that set him up for success as a director for organizations like Dallas Fort Worth International Airport and the Better Business Bureau Serving North Central Texas.

“I think the lessons that I learned there (at the Dallas Chamber of Commerce) have helped me greatly understand what the staff needs and what my relationship to the staff is and how we work with each other,” shared Smith, who currently serves as chairman of the BBB. “Each of us has a job to do, and each of us should respect the other. I think that relationship can be tenuous at times but it can be great. And, when it’s great, it’s a good organization. And that’s what I strive to do.”

And he certainly isn’t done yet.

“When I tried to get on a board early in life, they said I was too young. Then, when I was 65, I was employed and trying to get on a board, and I was too old,” Smith said with a smile. “But, now I’m 88 years old, and I’m still just right to be a board member.”

“...What I encourage people to do to have any hope to be important in their business life is to take on any job. Do whatever you can to get to know people and try to help other people out – and that’s the best place I think that you can learn to make this a better place to live.”
A HISTORY OF EXCELLENCE.

For a decade, Forrest Smith has led the board of Better Business Bureau Serving North Central Texas with extraordinary wisdom and grace.

We laud you for your exemplary service to BBB and to the people of North Texas. Your mantra of, "helping the community to be the best it can be in every way," truly resonates.

Congratulations on receiving the Dallas Business Journal's Outstanding Director Award. It is a well-deserved testament to your relentless commitment to excellence. We celebrate your achievements.

Thank you.

Forrest Smith
Senior Partner, Furman Karger
Chairman of the board, BBB Serving North Central Texas
2016 BBB Outstanding Director Award Recipient.