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# 'World needs more Marie Smiths'

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Warren County Deputy Judge-Executive Marie Smith. (Grace Ramey/gra  
Grace Ramey

“Hello. How are you today? Do you want to pull that chair up? You’ll be more comfortable.”

Hearing Marie Smith say those words, in an unmistakable accent that isn’t quite syrupy Southern but is somehow sweeter, gives you the idea that you’re being welcomed into Smith’s home.

In a way, you are.

Smith, Warren County deputy judge-executive, was speaking to a visitor at the Warren County Courthouse, which has been her home for nearly 60 years.

Now Smith, whose career spans almost the entire tenures of judge-executives Basil Griffin and Mike Buchanon and the beginning of Doug Gorman’s term in that role, will be leaving that home.

Smith and another courthouse fixture, Fiscal Court Clerk Brenda Hale, will retire at the end of March.

Gorman, who started as judge-executive in January, has already brought on Joy Guess as executive assistant and Crystal Cummings as assistant fiscal court clerk, but he knows there will be a void when Smith and Hale walk out the courthouse doors for the last time.

“We’ll absolutely be losing a lot of institutional knowledge,” Gorman said. “We have a plan in place and people in place who are going to step in and do the best they can, but it will be different for sure.”

Knowledge, though, isn't all that will be lost when Smith retires.

Both Gorman and Buchanon say Smith's presence on the second floor of the courthouse or at the other end of a phone call has helped them immeasurably.

"When Marie Smith is talking to you, you feel like you're the most important thing in her day," Gorman said. "That's a trait that everyone needs to work on.

"I guarantee when people get off the phone with her they feel much better about themselves and their problems. In our society today, we need more kindness and compassion. It's like the world needs a lot more Marie Smiths."

Called "the face of county government" by County Attorney Amy Milliken, Smith and her calming demeanor headed off some potentially heated confrontations for Buchanon during his 29 years as judge-executive.

"Someone would come in with a problem," Buchanon recalled. "They might want to be hateful, but they couldn't after talking with her. I never witnessed her change her helpful demeanor."

That courteousness just comes naturally, it seems, for the lifelong Warren County resident who grew up in the Plano community.

“I’ve always wanted to be helpful and courteous to the public, no matter what their problem might be,” said Smith. “I would talk with ‘em and try to explain what we could do.

“If it was a situation we couldn’t do anything about, I’d try to explain the reasons. They’d kinda calm down and not be as mad.”

It’s obvious today that Smith was a natural fit for a front-office job at the courthouse, but she fell into the role almost by accident.



After graduating from Warren County High School and studying at Bowling Green Business University and Western Kentucky University, Smith was looking for work in 1964.

It found her.

“I was at Guys and Dolls (a downtown Bowling Green restaurant at the time) when judge Griffin came in and asked me if I needed a job,” Smith remembers. “He indicated he had an opening and wondered if I would be interested.”

That started a 59-year career that put Smith in a front-row seat to observe and play a role in the growth of Warren County.

From the days of typewriters and carbon paper to the Internet Age, Smith says she has enjoyed it all.

“The 59 years have just flown by,” she said. “It doesn’t seem like it has been that long. This is a great place to work, and I have met so many interesting people.”

Including Griffin and Buchanon, both of whom “treated me with respect”, Smith said.

“Judge Griffin was a kind person but very stern,” Smith said. “He expected good work out of you. Judge Buchanon has been a wonderful person to work with, and he’s a really good leader.

“They were different in their personalities, but they had the same goal in mind: to do what’s best for the county.”

Smith is optimistic that Gorman will work toward the same goal, saying: “He’s knowledgeable about what’s going on in county government.”

Gorman, though, will be missing two great sources of knowledge when Hale and Smith leave at the end of the month.

Hale, who worked at the Warren County Regional Jail before moving to the courthouse in 1994, said retirement is bittersweet for her and her longtime coworker.

“We’ve both enjoyed our jobs,” Hale said. “We’re part of the fixtures here. Everybody has been good to us. I’ll miss everything about my job and will miss the people.

“This has been a wonderful place to work.”

Smith agrees, saying: “I hate to quit, to tell you the truth.”

But Smith, widowed since husband Arthur “Buddy” Smith died in 2015, plans to stay busy with her two daughters and her grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

“I’ve got so many things I want to do,” Smith said. “I want to do a lot of traveling, and I will go to a lot of the grandchildren’s ball games. They keep me busy.

“It’s time to retire.”

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