

37 of 60 DOCUMENTS

The Washington Post

January 01, 1996, Monday, Final Edition

Washington Builder, Philanthropist Charles E. Smith Dies

Martin Weil, Washington Post Staff Writer

SECTION: A SECTION; Pg. A01

LENGTH: 1164 words

Charles E. **Smith**, 94, a philanthropist and businessman who founded Charles E. **Smith** Cos., one of Washington's largest builders, developers and property managers, died Saturday after suffering a heart attack in Palm Beach, Fla., where he had a winter home.

Known for wisdom, energy and patient determination, **Smith** came to America from Russia as a boy unable to speak English and surmounted serious fiscal setbacks during the Great Depression and afterward before going on to build dozens of office buildings and thousands of apartment units in the Washington area.

A publicly held segment of the companies founded by **Smith** now owns or manages more than 20,000 apartment units; the portfolio of the privately held branch includes about 16 million square feet of office space. Few if any private individuals have had more influence on where and in what surroundings Washingtonians live and work.

In 1967, after 21 years at the helm of his companies, **Smith** relinquished active management to devote himself to community and philanthropic work. George Washington University's indoor athletic center and the Jewish Day School in Rockville are two of the facilities that bear his name in recognition of his support.

Smith, a leader in the development of the Jewish Community Center complex in Rockville, as well as in the United Way campaign, was regarded as a catalyst for the charitable energies of others, while satisfied with only modest public recognition for his own efforts.

"His philosophy was to let your deeds speak for you instead of . . . advertising your accomplishments," said Robert P. Kogod, his son-in-law. **Smith**, Kogod said, believed the test was "in how you lead your life and the example you set."

Smith and his descendants provided George Washington with an "extraordinary" level of support, university President Stephen Joel Trachtenberg said last night. **Smith** himself, he said, "made an investment in academic quality at George

Washington Builder, Philanthropist Charles E. Smith Dies The Washington Post
January 01, 1996, Monday, Final Edition

Washington University when it was still relatively new at fund-raising."

"His gifts helped to inspire others because of the esteem in which other people held him," both as an individual and as a guide in channeling philanthropy, Trachtenberg said.

His son, **Robert H. Smith**, said **Smith** "believed the route to happiness was becoming involved in the great joy of giving."

Charles Emil **Smith** was born March 28, 1901, in Lipnick, Russia, starting a life that was rich in dramatic turning points. His father, Reuven, was a farmer and a carpenter. Told by a rabbi that a fire at a windmill meant that he should leave Russia, **Smith's** father arrived in 1908 at Ellis Island, gateway to the New World. There the family name of Schmidoff became **Smith**.

In 1911, the father was able to reunite his family in New York, and Charles entered this country, speaking only Yiddish. Learning English easily, he graduated in accounting from City College of New York. His father became a builder, and **Smith** did, as well. "It was in his blood," said Robert **Smith**, president of Charles E. **Smith** Construction Inc.

Charles **Smith** prospered in New York, but the Great Depression wiped him out. He "lost everything," his son said. To support his family, he leased out parking spaces in a garage, bought some vending machines and "collected the nickels and dimes," his son said.

As World War II approached, the economy revived. Military priorities made construction materials hard to come by in New York, but Washington was promising. **Smith** came here in the early 1940s; aided by a friend's money, he put up houses in Prince George's County.

The 50 houses sold well, but water and sewer permits were hard to get. Buyers walked out, costs soared, the investment was lost, and **Smith** needed a job, his son said.

Answering an advertisement for a construction superintendent, he lined up in the morning behind other applicants and waited for hours, his son said. After finally getting an interview, **Smith** was hired by Waverly Taylor. **Smith** remained with Taylor for three years.

After the war, backed by financing from the friends he made in the area, **Smith** again went out on his own, founding Charles E. **Smith** Cos., concentrating at first on building apartment units under a federal program that provided generous financing for relatively low-rent units.

Garden apartments in Prince George's County were followed by many projects in Northwest Washington, including buildings in the 1800 block of Clydesdale Place, the 1500 block of Ogden Street and the 3800 block of Tunlaw Road. **Smith** put up several apartment houses along the Connecticut Avenue corridor, his son said, including the Brandywine and the Albemarle House, "and on and on." There also were office buildings in the 1700 block of Pennsylvania Avenue NW, the 1100 block of 17th Street NW and the 1100 block of Connecticut Avenue NW. The companies were insulated from fluctuations in the real estate market by integrating their functions and creating such units as a management arm, which "is almost immune to ups and downs," Robert **Smith** said, explaining that in any economic conditions, "buildings still need to be managed" and that thus there

Washington Builder, Philanthropist Charles E. Smith Dies The Washington Post
January 01, 1996, Monday, Final Edition

are "fees to be earned."

He said today's Charles E. **Smith** management company stems from a decision his father made years ago on the advice of his wife, Leah Goldstein **Smith**.

In 1967 came another turning point. **Smith**, his son and his son-in-law were having their customary lunch at Duke Zeibert's restaurant when **Smith** dropped a bombshell. "I have decided that there are more important things in my life to be involved in" than business, he said, according to his son. He expressed a wish to spend his remaining years helping the less-advantaged, his son said, and "that's exactly what he did."

But **Smith's** advice remained available, and Robert **Smith** recalled receiving it when he was contemplating the development that became Crystal City.

At the time, Robert **Smith** said, the Crystal City area, although convenient to Washington, seemed scruffy and unappealing. Visiting the area for the first time, Charles **Smith** looked about in dismay. Although location is everything in real estate, he told his son, the undeveloped Crystal City was "garbage" and "not our kind of merchandise."

But **Smith** finally was convinced of the project's potential and gave his son advice on how to make it work, demanding that the first buildings be top-of-the-line, creating an oasis of elegance amid unsightliness. From the two original buildings built based on **Smith's** suggestions, the development has grown to include 43 high-rises, his son said.

Among awards **Smith** received were honorary doctorates from Hebrew University in Jerusalem, the Jewish Theological Seminary and George Washington University.

His wife Leah died in 1972 after 45 years of marriage. A marriage to Miriam Uretz **Smith** ended in divorce in 1988.

Besides his son, survivors include a daughter, Arlene Kogod, six grandchildren and four great grandchildren.

NAME: Charles E. **Smith**

LOAD-DATE: January 01, 1996

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

GRAPHIC: Photo, CHARLES E. **SMITH**

Copyright 1996 The Washington Post