

Monday, Sep 25, 2017

MPA alumna, newlywed turns obstacles into opportunities

After nine years on a Chrysler assembly line, OU MPA alumna, Wendy Smith took a buyout when it was offered in 2008.

"I learned a great deal about myself and who I was as a person during that time," said Smith. "I discovered I wasn't just looking for a job that paid well, I wanted a job that would also mean a life well-lived.

She was also determined to complete her bachelor's degree. Smith used the money from the buyout to pay bills so she could go back to school. While she was an undergraduate student at Baker, the mother of five divorced.

"Those were difficult days – when my children needed a little more than I could give sometimes, the bills, homework and more. I knew there were people who relied on me, but, most importantly, there were people who believed in me and were in my corner," said Smith.

In 2011, shortly after her divorce, she accepted a job at Bell Forklift, a forklift dealership in Clinton Township. She completed her undergraduate degree in business administration with a concentration in human resources in 2013. That same year, she accepted a position in Macomb County's Human Resources and Labor Relations (HRLR) department. Six months later, she received a promotion. Then she decided to apply to OU for the master's degree in counseling psychology.

Smith said, "I wasn't sure the counseling psychology program was really what I wanted to do and my supervisor mentioned she had earned her **Master of Public Administration** degree at OU. She really spoke well of the program. Then I found out her supervisor had taught classes in the program. So, based on their comments, I decided the MPA degree offered me a broader range of career opportunities."

During her second year in the MPA program, Smith received two scholarships – one from the Michigan Public Risk Management Association and one from OU.

"I had learned there were MPA scholarships for those who could demonstrate financial need. I was reluctant to apply. I knew I could use that assistance, but I felt embarrassed. I swallowed my pride, applied and found out I had been chosen as the recipient. It was so much more than just money. Their faith in me gave me faith in myself," said Smith.

Things have been looking up ever since. She graduated with her MPA degree in April 2017. Then, on Sept. 1, 2017, she married William Smith, also an OU MPA alum, class of 1999.

Looking back, Smith added, "My kids had insisted I sign up for online dating. After several e-mails back and forth, Bill and I realized we'd already crossed paths professionally many times. But, I guess the universe decided the time was right for us to get to know each other on a personal level."

William Smith is the director of human resources for Clinton Township. He's also taught classes in OU's MPA program.

Smith credits her children – or her 'variety pack' as she calls them – as a strong influence on her outlook on life and her career in public service.

"I'm more aware and sensitive to individuals and groups who are underrepresented. I think this serves me well in my career and service to the community," said Smith.

On Sept. 11, the Chesterfield resident and recent bride received her second promotion in Macomb's HRLR department.

"Professionally, I'm excited about my new role as a service partner and I want to provide excellent service to my coworkers and Macomb County residents every day," Smith said. "Personally, there's my new role as Bill's wife. He's stood by me through many ups and downs, he's been my biggest fan and always encourages me. We're embarking on a new chapter in our lives. I know I'm not done pursuing new challenges. Not sure what the future holds, but I guess that's part of the fun, right?"



Things are looking up for MPA alumna Wendy Smith, pictured here with her husband and children. She graduated with a MPA degree in April, had a recent job promotion and got married.

Clemens on Oct. 5 from 4:30 to 7 p.m. To register, visit oakland.edu/macomb/events. For information on the MPA program, visit oakland.edu/mpa.