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Lumberyard Closing Doors



Yvette Orozco After 63 years, Ray Smith, left, is closing South Texas Lumber Company on Pasadena Boulevard. ap

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By [YVETTE OROZCO](#)

It wasn't long after his military service and education that Ray Smith attended to his business aspirations.

More than six decades later, those aspirations, housed in an art deco construction built in 1947, have been fully realized.

That building, with its arching corners and glass brick ornamentation, one of the first of its kind in the Houston area and the first of its kind in Pasadena, remains one of the oldest institutions in the city.

After 63 years, Smith is closing the long chapter of the South Texas Lumber Company.

In July, the company will shut down, but its impact on the city's landscape still stands and although Smith has reservations about shutting the door, he is proud of the business' place in local history.

"I hate to leave," he said. "We've met a lot of wonderful people and made a lot of good friends."

Born in Timpson, Smith graduated from high school there, attended and graduated from Sam Houston State University, studied at the Harvard Graduate School of Business courtesy of Uncle Sam and did graduate work at the University of Texas.

“I went to work for South Texas Lumber Company (a retail line-yard company owned by the J.M. West family of Houston) in early 1947 in their general offices in Houston,” Smith said.

Smith worked at the South Texas yard in Texas City after the massive explosion in 1947. The yard in Pasadena was under construction in the spring of 1947 and opened for business that July 5.

Smith worked at the Pasadena yard for three or four years and then transferred back to the general offices as general manager of all the South Texas yards.

Although there have been several changes or partial changes in ownership and acquisitions since 1947, Smith has remained CEO for the last 55 years.

In the 1950s and early '60s, STLC focused on builder financing.

“This was before banks and S&Ls and mortgage companies started construction financing as they have done in more recent years,” Smith said. “During the last 10 or 12 years, we’ve been involved in land development in Pasadena.”

Throughout its more than 60 years, STLC’s stock in trade has been furnishing materials for home and commercial building.

“He (Smith) is a really good guy,” said Jane Lopez, who has worked at South Texas Lumber for several years.

From the north side to the south side of the city, South Texas Lumber Company has seen the city grow from a primarily agricultural industry to a thriving suburban residential community.

Smith can still set the scene of July 5, 1947, in Pasadena, the day the doors opened on what was then Tartar Street, now Pasadena Boulevard.

He remembers a depot, railroad track, a hamburger stand and a metal shop where State Highway 225 now goes through the city.

STLC originally stood out with its modern architecture, but with time, it stood out as a community-minded business that acted more like a neighbor than a successful company.

“He’s as good a guy to work with as there is,” said Richard Cansler, who owns Civil Concepts, a civil engineering land surveying construction company based in Pasadena.

Cansler began his association with South Texas Lumber in 1974 and later Civil Concepts collaborated with the lumber company in land development throughout Pasadena. Cansler values both Smith’s personal and professional integrity.

“He’s a great business partner and a very admirable man,” Cansler said. “He’s just top notch - everybody will tell you that.”

Because his definition of success was never just a matter of commerce, Smith, now 90 years old, will miss the more personal aspects of his business.

“We wanted it to be a part of the community,” Smith said.

In Pasadena from 1947 to 2010, subdivision after subdivision covered empty spaces and the strawberry fields were replaced with settling families. Smith hopes South Texas Lumber was part of that transition.

South Texas Lumber Company has issued a message to its community:

“We feel that we have been privileged to serve Pasadena and the surrounding areas for 63 years,” it reads. “We hope that we have made at least a small, positive contribution to the growth and development of the area. We hope to see many of you personally during the next few weeks to thank you. But now let us say, on behalf of our present employees and the many wonderful people who have been a most vital part of our organization for many of these past years, we thank you so very much, Sincerely, South Texas Lumber Company.”

Ray Smith wishes to thank his staff past and present: Rob Smith, Mark Masters, Jane Lopez, Tom Wright, Hollis Bonner, Elizabeth Rogers, Marie Roberts, Webster McEvoy and Bill McBride; as well as the drivers and yard personnel who have been part of the South Texas Lumber Co. throughout the years.