

Ken Smith – early S. Tahoe doc, former mayor dies

By Kathryn Reed

Ken Smith, Barton Memorial Hospital's first chief of staff and former mayor of South Lake Tahoe, died June 28 in South Lake Tahoe. He was 87.

Dr. Smith was born in Alameda on April 21, 1926.

During World War II he spent much of his time in the Army in the Philippines. He left the service as a second lieutenant.

He returned to the Bay Area, where he had grown up, to do his undergraduate work at UC Berkeley. In 1954, he graduated from McGill University's medical school in Montreal.



Ken Smith

On July 16, 1950, he married Ruth Marilyn "Lynne" Zant.

It was in 1960 that the Smith family moved to South Lake Tahoe from Guerneville in Sonoma County. At that time there was no hospital in town. He was the second doctor in South Tahoe, with the other being Jim Whitely. The two had first met in the Bay Area.

Minor surgeries could be performed in their office, which was

near where the senior center is now located. More intricate medical services required going to Carson Tahoe Hospital. A few beds were in their office in case someone had to spend the night.

While he delivered babies in his time, Dr. Smith was a general practitioner. Most people knew him as Doc Smith.

His daughter, Connie Hendryx, remembers as kids not being allowed to be on the phone for more than five minutes at a time because her dad was on call. This was at a time before call waiting or cell phones.

Barton Memorial Hospital opened Dec. 23, 1963. Dr. Smith became the first chief of staff.

With Whitely and Peter Irving, Dr. Smith opened a practice close to the hospital. At age 65 he retired in 1991.

At one time Dr. Smith was the medical director for Sierra Recovery Center, a drug and alcohol rehabilitation center.

Local politics and the environment were important to him.

"They were very much environmentalists," longtime local Patty Olson said of the Smiths. She said they were into the ecology of the lake.

The Smiths were each other's best friend, according to their daughter. Bird watching was a passion of theirs. When he would see a particularly interesting bird on the feeder outside his window it was his wife that Dr. Smith would call.

He was one of the key players in helping incorporate South Lake Tahoe in 1965.

Dr. Smith was appointed to the South Lake Tahoe City Council on Jan. 5, 1971, was elected in his own right, and then resigned on March 12, 1974. He was mayor for one year starting in spring 1973. He was also on the Planning Commission for

about a decade starting in 1983.

While on the council Dr. Smith was instrumental in ridding the city streets of billboard advertisements as well as getting the power lines on Highway 50 to be put underground.

“A favorite thing after dinner was all six of us would sit around the table and just talk about environmental issues, politics, everything,” Hendryx said.

He served on the board for the Tahoe Resource Conservation District, was active with the League to Save Lake Tahoe, and was on the board of the Tahoe Rim Trail Association.

“He was so thrilled when it got built,” Hendryx said of the 165-mile trail around Lake Tahoe.

Dr. Smith was also involved with the Boy Scouts, having served as a Scout leader.

Olson recalls when their kids were growing up – she and husband Neil had three, the Smiths four, Whitelys four and Ledbetters four – that they created their own day care so the adults could all have a day free of kids.

She said socially they played bridge together.

Olson remembers that as being a much different time in Tahoe, when people knew each other and pitched in to help one another.

For at least a decade the Smiths were known for having a party after school got out. All the neighbors were invited, hot dogs and popsicles were served, and it was a time for Dr. Smith to share his dry sense of humor.

His wife, Lynne, in 1999, and sister Jean Sharp preceded Dr. Smith in death. He is survived by sons Ken “Casey” Smith (Glenda) from Saratoga and Larry Smith (Debbie) from Butte, Mont.; and twin daughters Kelsey Julander (Dale) from

Bakersfield and Connie Hendryx (Michael) from Yreka; and grandchildren Emilie Hendryx, and Allison and Adam Julander.

Services are pending. In lieu of flowers, the family asks donations be sent to one's favorite charity.