

2003 Engineer of Distinction



Richard Melvyn Smith
B.S. Electrical Engineering, TTU, 1963

Chief, Office of Engineering & Technology (retired)
Federal Communications Commission
Washington, DC

Citation

Richard Melvyn Smith, a distinguished alumnus of Tennessee Technological University, has made significant contributions to the field of telecommunications. Born in Lebanon, Tennessee, Richard grew up in Mt. Juliet, Tennessee, where he attended the Mt. Juliet High School, Class of 1958. He received a B.S. in Electrical Engineering from Tennessee Technological University in 1963. While attending TTU he took flying lessons at a grass landing strip at the old Cookeville airport, current site of the high school. He holds a private pilot license with instrument landing.

In June 1963 Richard began his now four decades long career in the telecommunications field when he went to work with the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) as a field engineer in Los Angeles, California. His work specialty was radio spectrum management; specifically, radio direction-finding, electromagnetic compatibility, and technical standards activities of FCC that were designed to ensure the best use of the radio spectrum. He continued his work in the field at various locations in the United States, including Philadelphia, PA, where he was promoted to Engineer-in-Charge of the local FCC office in 1974. His advancement within the FCC continued with his move to the FCC headquarters in Washington, DC, where he held various engineering and management positions.

In 1980 he was appointed to the US Government Senior Executive Service (SES) by President Jimmy Carter and in 1981 he was named to the position of Chief of Field Operations Bureau (FOB), FCC. In this position he was responsible for all engineering activities conducted by the FCC field offices and radio monitoring stations stretching from San Juan, Puerto Rico, to Honolulu, Hawaii. In this position, he guided the design and development of all radio monitoring and direction finding equipment used by the FCC field engineers.

In 1994 he was appointed Chief of the Office of Engineering and Technology (OET) (FCC's Chief Engineer), a position he held until his retirement in 1998. His responsibilities in this position included management of the FCC laboratory, and development of FCC policy regarding spectrum allocation and technical standards. His last project at the FCC was the development of the Digital Television (HDTV) Table of Allotments.

During Richard's career at FCC he was involved with most of the many advancements in telecommunications we now enjoy. For his many contributions and accomplishments, Richard was recognized by the presentation of the FCC's highest award, the Gold Medal Award and the Senior Executive Service Outstanding Performance Award of FCC.

Since his retirement, Richard has served as an advisor to foreign telecommunications bodies looking to privatize the telecommunications industry, particularly in Eastern Europe, the Commonwealth of Independent States, and Latin America. Richard still keeps his hand in the communications business as a part-time international consultant via his "virtual" office on the internet and lots of international travel.

Richard has been very active in supporting Tennessee Tech's College of Engineering and the Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering. He has been serving as a member of TTU's Engineering Development Foundation and was recently elected as its Vice President/President Elect. He is a member of TTU's President's Club. Richard is also involved in charity works relating to Shriners Hospitals for Children and Crohn's & Colitis Foundation of America.

Richard and his wife, Patti, now live in Jackson County, Tennessee. Their son and daughter-in-law, both attorneys in the telecommunications sector, live and work in the Washington, DC, area.



Richard M. Smith receives his citation from ECE Chairperson P.K. Rajan