

Tribute Story, Arthur Ryan Smith
By Liesa Evans

Arthur (Art) Ryan Smith, an avionics legend, philanthropist and champion of SAIT, died of cancer at the Intercare Chinook Hospice in Calgary on June 30, 2008. He was 89 years old.

According to Guy Mallabone, vice president of external relations at SAIT, Smith supported the polytechnic in multiple ways.

"The relationship between Art Smith (and SAIT) is deep and very rich," Mallabone said.

"He was a great man."

In addition to being a donor, Smith was a patron of SAIT's Art Smith Aero Centre and a member of the institution's Chairman's Circle Advisory.

A private funeral was held by Smith's family at Christ Church Elbow Park on July 4, 2008.

For the public, Mallabone confirmed a memorial service, which included a military jet fly-over, was held at the Art Smith Aero Centre in Northeast Calgary.

The service, which was held at 5 p.m. on July 11, 2008, was packed with people wanting to recognize the man nicknamed "Mr. Calgary" for his contributions to the city he was born in.

Mallabone said his many contributions include being twice awarded the Order of Canada and also serving in public office at all three levels of government.

Smith is also considered a war hero who was decorated with the Distinguished Flying Cross in the Second World War. The cross is given to those who displayed acts of valour and courage in battle.

However, it was his business and public service to Calgary that earned him his nickname.

Ralph Klein, a former Calgary mayor and Alberta premier, knew Smith personally for

over 25 years and considered him a close friend and mentor.

The two first met when Smith was with the Calgary Chamber of Commerce in the '80s.

The city was in the middle of an economic recession when Smith spearheaded the Calgary Economic Development Corporation.

Through this corporation, Smith and Klein travelled the world to promote and sell Calgary as a top business destination.

"We used to say the oil is still in the ground and it's bound to come out at a good price," Klein said in an e-mail interview.

The former politician also said Smith was a fantastic individual who contributed so much to Calgary.

In 1998 Smith became a champion to needy citizens by founding the Calgary Homeless Foundation.

Touched by the news of people being turned away from emergency shelters, Smith created the foundation with the political support of Klein, who was then the premier.

Still, his philanthropy didn't stop at the public level. Friends say he was equally helpful in his private life as well.

Mallabone, who also knew Smith personally through church, remembered his friend showing up each Sunday an hour before service to help the choir set up.

This participation was typical of a friend who the SAIT executive said would not hesitate to roll up his sleeves and help fix problems at any level of society.

"He wasn't just involved in the big profile pieces of the city and the nation, he was in the basement of our churches helping the volunteers get ready," Mallabone said.

"He will be deeply missed."