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Local News

Director of four nonprofits left a legacy of community service

Lorie Smith, 60, a director of four local nonprofit organizations, died Saturday following complications from heart surgery.

by [Joe Gamm](#) Dec. 22 2020 @ 11:25pm



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Lorie Smith, 60, shown above, died Saturday, Dec. 19, 2020, following complications from heart surgery.

One of the things everyone loved about Lorie Smith was that you always knew where you stood with her.

"Lorie just told you the way it was," said Ann Bax, president of the United Way of Central Missouri. "What you see is what you get."

Smith, 60, died Saturday, following complications from heart surgery.

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She left behind two children, Hannah Jo Coleman and Levi Smith.

"She had a contagious laugh and personality," Levi Smith said. "Everyone strove to be more like her. She inspired people to do better."

She left a legacy of community service.

"She was a shining light," Coleman said.

Smith understood there was a correlation between good times and bad. Her most recent tattoo reflected her outlook and was her motto.

She was fond of saying it, Coleman said: "No rain, no roses."

At the time of her death, Lorie Smith was director of four nonprofit organizations — the Sneaker Project and Dreams to Reality, which are United Way partner agencies; the Community Breast Care Project; and Working Wheels for Working Families.

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A breast cancer survivor, Smith and her son created the stained-glass window panels that have adorned the windows in the chapel at Goldschmidt Cancer Center on Southwest Boulevard since December 2010.

Working Wheels repairs and provides donated cars to low-income families so they may gain or maintain employment.

Dreams to Reality was formed to help low-income women in Mid-Missouri meet their employment goals and build self-confidence by providing appropriate interview and business apparel.

"When Lorie came on to Dreams, she was a master of running associations," Bax said. "That was why the Dreams board grabbed her."

The nonprofit needed stability. It needed strong governance, Bax said. That's what Smith offered.

"Lorie was a spitfire. She was passionate," Bax said. "She was always laughing. It was in Lorie's heart to help the ladies that they were serving."

And as important as governing was attracting the right people to the boards she served, Bax said. Smith understood how to surround herself with "amazing ladies that had the same passion," Bax said.

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About two years ago, a United Way partner agency was struggling. Community health clinics were providing services the Dental, Eye and Shoe Program had offered under-served youth for decades. The program's budget decreased from its high of about \$40,000 to \$15,000 over the years.

Although it needn't provide dental or eye care for children, it still needed to provide shoes for them. Adding to the stress was that the director and board positions were voluntary and undertaken when possible.

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The nonprofit quickly re-branded itself as the Sneaker Project.

After the change, Smith told the News Tribune she wanted the nonprofit to be accountable to the United Way.

"If you're not accountable for funds, you're not going to get funds from the United Way," she said.

She vowed to earn back the trust of the United Way.

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She immediately began drop-shipping shoes to the sites where they were needed, rather than warehouse and deliver them. She also ended a voucher program the previous nonprofit used to buy shoes.

Both moves made receiving shoes easier on the students who get them.

Finally, she added socks for the recipients.

Children who needed shoes probably also needed socks, she explained. And who doesn't like the feel of a fresh pair of socks, she asked.

An artist, Smith surrounded herself with items in which she found beauty. She started a business, Vines on Broadway. Her own creations decorated the building — from macrame plant holders to stained

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stained glass.

She was so loved, people made items and sent them to her. Smith kept everything. Her children dug up notes Smith wrote — she was fond of writing down anything funny someone would say.

Levi Smith read one of Smith's notes from 1992, when Coleman was a little girl: On the way to school, Hannah said, "Mom, God's not making my splinter better." I said, "Did you ask him to make it better?" She said, "Yes. He said, 'I'm busy.'"

That was a week before Levi was born.

An organ donor, Smith donated both her corneas (which will help two separate people), her kidneys and her heart valves, Coleman said.

"She was just amazing," Bax said. "She has helped these agencies become even better, to serve our community. I don't think she slept."

The agencies she served didn't have staffs other than Smith. They had happy, willing volunteers, Bax said.

She left strong foundations and wonderful people, Bax said.

If the United Way needed somebody from its agencies to speak during fund drives, Smith always raised her hand, Bax said. She was always available to pitch in.

"Everybody's reeling. We just need to breathe," Bax said. "She was such a dear friend."

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