

LIONEL SMITH, LTD – THE BEST DRESSED MAN IN TOWN

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Lionel Smith, Ltd. operates as a high-end men's clothing store in Aiken, SC. Created in 1976 by Lionel Smith (Smitty), the store has become the premier destination for men's clothing and fashion within the Central Savannah River Area. This case details the management and retail career of Lionel Smith from his first job in retail sales at 16 to the present. During the early part of his career, Lionel Smith managed and operated several clothing stores, working in large chains as well as small locally owned locations. In addition to his management positions, Smitty also became a minority owner of an up-and-coming retail enterprise in the late 1960s. He was later refused to purchase any additional ownership and decided to start his own men's clothing store, opening the doors to Lionel Smith, Ltd. in March of 1976. Since that time, Lionel Smith, Ltd. has become the leading men's clothing store in the Aiken-Augusta area, serving customers from as far away as Florida and Alabama. The primary reason for the phenomenal success of Lionel Smith, Ltd. is attributed to Smitty's unique perspective on customer service and dedication to quality and customer satisfaction. This case emphasizes the importance of customer service and management skills as well as leadership in the workplace and community. A focus is placed on employee motivation, customer satisfaction, and management succession.

LIONEL SMITH, Ltd.

If you are going to be peddling your bike at sun-up, you have to get up REALLY early. But getting up early had never been a problem for Lionel Smith, or Smitty as he was known to everyone in the entire universe. This wasn't the first time he had decided to trek across the United States on a bicycle. As with most things in his life, he was confident in his preparation and ability, and also confident that a little luck would show up sooner or later. As he headed out for his Arizona destination that morning, his thoughts wandered from his family to his friends and to Lionel Smith, Ltd., his business of the past 35 years. Smitty had turned Lionel Smith, Ltd. from a local clothing store to one of the Southeast's premier men's fashion destinations, with customers ranging from Alabama to Virginia. Smitty had turned over the day to day operation and ownership

to his son Van years ago, but was still heavily involved with customer service. He was proud of his creation and its success. He was also concerned about the future of a high-end men's clothing store located in a quaint southern town with less than forty thousand inhabitants. So Smitty just did what he had always done. He knew where he wanted to go, he put his head down, and he started to pedal.

THE PREMIER MEN'S CLOTHING STORE IN TOWN

Lionel Smith, Ltd. operates as a high-end men's clothing store in Aiken, SC and has been in continuous operation since its opening in March of 1976. Its originator, owner, and operator, Lionel Smith, continues to be an integral part of the company's history and success. After an apprenticeship in several men's retail clothing establishments, Smitty established his own retail location and Lionel Smith, Ltd. opened its doors in 1976. In 1993, Smitty sold the organization to his only child, Van Smith, who became sole owner and operator. However, Smitty was still heavily involved in the overall focus of the store and initiated a personal, outside sales direction that basically "brought the store to the customer". The operation hires approximately 10 employees in the areas of sales and alterations.

GROWING UP IN THE RURAL SOUTH

Lionel Smith spent his formative teenage years in Edgefield, South Carolina and the name of the town tells all. The town was on the Edge of the Field. As with most parts of South Carolina in the 1950s, agriculture was not only King but also the only real economic endeavor to be found. However, during the late 1950s, Edgefield had encountered a minor economic boom with the advent of the Cold War. Edgefield is about 35 miles from Aiken, South Carolina, as well as Augusta, Georgia. It was also within close proximity of the new Savannah River Plant (SRP), a main component of the US government's response to the threat of nuclear attack from the Soviet Union. SRP was a 350 square-mile area of swamp and farmland that soon became home to tens of thousands of workers whose main job was to make the nuclear core of atomic bombs. In fact, the facility soon became known as the "Bomb Plant". This rapid influx of humanity into a small southern rural area had an incredible economic impact on the entire area. Not only was money pouring in from the wages of these workers, but also demand for products, such as housing and retail was sky-high.

EARLY YEARS

Lionel Smith was born in Easton, NC in 1942 and moved to Fayetteville, NC shortly thereafter. His father owned the Dr. Pepper distributorship for that area and Smitty spent his formative years working in the bottling plant and delivering Dr. Pepper to retail outlets, a process known as "slinging drinks". When he wasn't slingin' drinks, Smitty

became good friends with Richard Hughes. Richard had a car and in those days that was an unusual luxury. His family also had a credit account at a local men's clothing store called Leon Sugar's. Richard would go to the store with Smitty in tow and pick out the latest in men's fashion. As Smitty recalls, "this was the first time I can remember really liking fashion. I really enjoyed shopping for clothes and was pretty good at being able to understand how things went together". However, the family shortly moved to Edgefield, SC, in 1959 when his father took over a larger Dr. Pepper distributorship which encompassed the entire Central Savannah River Area (CSRA). The CSRA is a large Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) including, Augusta, GA, Aiken, SC, Edgefield, SC and all of the small towns in-between.

Moving to a new place right before his senior year in high school, Smitty had no choice but to immerse himself in what activities he could find in such a small southern town. To his surprise, there was a small men's clothing store in Edgefield called Nick Scraven's. Smitty was drawn to this retail store and quickly became friends with Mr. Scraven. Not long after they met, Smitty asked Nick for a job. Scraven wanted to help, but being such a small location meant there really was no need for another employee. However, Nick called a friend, Manly Peeler, in Aiken, SC (about 30 miles away) that worked at the Belk's department store. Belk's was a large department store located in several southern states. Peeler was the assistant manager at the Aiken location and upon Nick Scraven's recommendation, hired Smitty as a part-time employee in the men's department. Smitty was 16 at the time and thought he had hit the big time. A job – in a reputable department store – selling men's clothing. Could it get any better than that? This attitude has been present in Smitty's personal demeanor his entire life. Decide what you want to do, go do it, and enjoy it to the fullest.

BELKS – A REAL JOB AT LAST

A year after going to work for Belk's, Smitty was offered the job of Head of the Boy's Department. While it was a huge compliment, Smitty protested that he had no training at all of the requirements needed to be "Head" of a department. But Peeler said not to worry and that he would personally help train and oversee. As can be imagined, that training and oversight never happened. As Smitty recalls, "I was literally thrown in the deep end. No training. Just come to work every day and figure it out. But boy I loved that job". For the next five years, Smitty continued to work as "Head" of the Belk's Boys Department. He was responsible for buying and planning, focusing on seasonal men's (boy's) fashion. He was also responsible for all of the other functional activities including personnel, booking, sales, and inventory. The first five years of Smitty's retail career set what became a five year pattern in Smitty's career. As he tells it "looking back on my life, something big has happened every five years and it has always been for the better, even though it often didn't seem like it at the time".

BIG EXPLOSION – MANNING-OWENS TO THE RESCUE

Belk's was located on Laurens Street in downtown Aiken. The downtown area consisted mainly of three blocks of retail, banking, and restaurants. The Belk location was prime real-estate, located in the middle of the middle block, the actual "heart of downtown". As is true in a lot of old southern towns, all of the buildings were attached to each other, sharing common walls. The effect was that all of the stores were nestled up against each other, forming one block-long building. Sharing a wall with Belk's was Holley Hardware, the largest and oldest hardware store in Aiken. Back in the 60s, there was no Wal-Mart or K-Mart. Aiken didn't even have a Sears and Roebuck. If you needed any type of hardware product, from duct-tape to washers for your sink, you had to go to Holley Hardware. Until the explosion. On that fateful day in 1966, the store exploded from a gas leak. As Smitty remembers, "I mean it exploded. It is amazing that Belk's wasn't destroyed, much less the entire block. I don't know if it was divine intervention or what, but right after the explosion, things started happening for me. "The next five year period of my life was just beginning".

Not long after the explosion, a friend of Smitty's mom, Ms. Gene Hunt, called Smitty. Mrs. Hunt was the bookkeeper for a local men's clothing store known as Manning-Owens. She suggested that Smitty go talk to Mr. Owens because they were looking for a store manager. Manning-Owens had been around for what seemed like forever and was known as a place where professional, yet conservative, men shopped. This was the mid 1960s and even though the US was going through a cultural revolution, news of that revolution had barely reached Aiken. A professional man wore a dark suit and a white shirt and that is what Manning-Owens specialized in. Smitty knew Mr. Owens (Smitty knew everybody!) and met with him and the meeting went well. However, Smitty recalls telling Mr. Owens "you can't afford me. I make \$80 a week and get a \$200 bonus at Christmas!" Mr. Owens was insistent that Smitty run his store, even changing up his compensation package so he could keep Smitty and the other employees happy. Lionel Smith was now the MANAGER of Aiken's premier (really only) men's clothing store, Manning Owens. In addition to Smitty and Mr. Owens, a third salesman worked full time, along with two bookkeepers and one seamstress for alterations.

Smitty's relationship with Mr. Owens was good but tumultuous. They would have big differences of opinions (Smitty remembers some of them as almost coming to blows), but would always work through it. This type of relationship was invaluable to Lionel Smith. He realized that there were at LEAST two sides to every decision. Smitty realized early on that Mr. Owens knew what he was talking about and had many years of experience that had resulted in a very successful business. Smitty remembers being young and sometimes impulsive, but Mr. Owens would always let him have his say and then state his opinion. On one instance, Smitty ordered thirty dozen ties (do the math, that's 360 ties). Mr. Owens blew his top. Why, he demanded, would anybody need 360 ties in inventory? Smitty's only response was that he loved ties. On a side note, Lionel

Smith, Ltd. is known for its huge tie selection to this day as Smitty readily admits that he is fascinated by ties and what they can do for a man's wardrobe. At the end of the day, Smitty realized that he could learn a lot from Mr. Owens and settled in for his apprenticeship.

BIG DEPARTMENT STORE BLUES – NEW OPPORTUNITY

Over the next five years, Manning-Owens continued to grow. The Aiken economy was vibrant, in part, to the continued build up of the Savannah River Site and its continued involvement in the production of defensive nuclear material. In fact, business was so good that Manning-Owens relocated to the Kalmia Hills Shopping Center, Aiken's newest retail location. Shortly after moving to the new location, Mr. Owens' health began to decline rapidly. Realizing he could no longer maintain the rigor of a six-day-a-week retail operation, he decided to sell the business. His first offer went to Lionel Smith, who unfortunately could not afford the asking price. Smitty was in his late twenties and was not in a position to raise the money that he needed to buy the location. In the end, Mr. Owens sold the business to Cullum's department store, a large retail operation from Augusta, GA., located 25 miles away. Smitty had no idea that Mr. Owens was talking with Cullum's about the sale. He had just assumed that would be brought in to help negotiate any deal. But Cullum's bought the store and offered Smitty a job as a salesman. He still had a job, but he felt like the chain had come off of his bicycle.

Now remember, this is at the end of Lionel Smith's five years with Manning-Owens, so something big has to happen. While there was no physical explosion this time (remember Holley Hardware?), things started to happen. Four months after Manning-Owens was sold to Cullum's, a gentleman by the name of LeGrand Flake approached Smitty about opening a men's store in Aiken. LeGrand's Men's Wear was a fixture in Augusta and had operated for many years as one of Augusta's premier men's clothing stores. Flake had wanted to get into the Aiken market for years, but knew he needed the right person to run the operation, as he was still handling the Augusta shop. Smitty needed a job, Flake was offering him a wonderful opportunity, but something needed to change. Over the years, Lionel Smith had learned the men's fashion business from the ground up. He had paid his dues and then some. Along the way, he had managed, restructured, and created several very successful and profitable operations, but all he had received for that activity was a weekly pay-check. Smitty saw the LeGrand's opportunity as a way to take some ownership. He countered Flake's offer by agreeing to set up the new location, select the inventory, hire and train the necessary personnel in exchange for half ownership in the Aiken location. Flake counter counted with a one-third ownership offer and the opportunity to buy up to one-half of the business and Lionel Smith was finally part owner in a high-end men's retail fashion location. All of this business was done with a hand-shake and a pat on the back. And so began the next five year chapter in the life of Lionel Smith.

During the next four years, LeGrand's in Aiken took off. Under the direction of Smitty, LeGrand's became the premier men's clothing store in the CSRA – even outselling the original LeGrand's in Augusta. In fact, LeGrand's phenomenal growth had forced Cullum's out of business. With the closing of Cullum's, LeGrand's was the only men's clothing store in Aiken. Smitty became heavily involved in buying and used his outgoing personality to bring in many of the top vendors in men's fashion. He was excellent at customer service and created a customer base that was loyal and also acted as a constant advertisement. If Smitty had ever sold you anything, you would make sure your friends went to him too. As the next five year period was coming to a close, Smitty approached Flake and informed him that he was ready to buy his remaining interest in the business, which would give him 50% ownership. Flake, not needing any money because of the increased profit provided by Smitty, refused. That's when Lionel Smith earned a valuable lesson. If it is not in writing, it does not exist. The agreement to sell him up to 50%, consummated with a hand-shake, was worth nothing at all. As can be imagined, the relationship between Smitty and Flake, which was never strong, was now permanently damaged. Start the clock ticking because this begins the next five year cycle in Smitty's career.

THE BIRTH OF LIONEL SMITH, Ltd.

Buddy Platt was an established businessman in Aiken who owned several properties, retail, and service companies and Smitty knew him well. In fact, Smitty knew EVERYBODY well, which was a talent that has served him his entire career. Platt was leasing a property that was going out of business and knew that Smitty was not happy at LeGrand's. This was just before Christmas of 1975. Platt, looking for a tenant and knowing that Smitty had always wanted a store of his own, called Smitty and informed him of the vacancy. Smitty told Platt that he didn't have any real money to convert the place into a men's retail outlet but Platt was a good business man. He asked Smitty how long it would take to fix the place up and was told at least until March. Platt then said "you can have it rent free until March, but then you have to start the monthly payment." Lionel Smith jumped at the chance and immediately started renovating the location while still working at LeGrand's across the street. In fact, he informed Mr. Flake of his intentions and suggested that Flake buy back Smitty's interest. Again, Flake refused. At this point in time, Smitty's 10% interest in LeGrand's was worth \$40,000. After three months of working at LeGrand's all day and laying carpet at night, the new rented location, under the name of Lionel Smith, Ltd., opened for business in March of 1976. During the day, Smitty worked at his NEW store, but would occasionally walk over to LeGrand's to look at the books. "I knew exactly what they were selling, how much, everything. I owned 10% and they couldn't stop me. I offered to be bought out. They continued to refuse".

Renovating a space for retail is one thing, but getting vendors to fill your store with

inventory is another. Remember that Smitty had been the driving force at LeGrand's for the last five years. He knew all of the vendors and suppliers and, as usual, they all knew and liked him. He quickly began seeking out the best brands to also supply his location. Some brands had signed exclusive agreements with LeGrand's, so they were almost a lost cause. However, the one's that weren't, such as Sero shirts and Hart-Shaffner-Marx suits quickly agreed to supply Lionel Smith, Ltd. And to Smitty's surprise, Corbin suits, one of the best quality high-end producers, broke their agreement with LeGrand's and went exclusively with Lionel Smith, Ltd. Shortly after the opening of Lionel Smith, Ltd., LeGrand's experienced a dramatic drop in sales. Smitty continued to be a presence at LeGrand's, checking the books, and Flake finally offered him \$10,000 to go away. Now completely free of LeGrand's, Smitty turned on the customer service charm. "People in Aiken saw us as the underdog, the small guys who were up against the big city (Augusta) machine. Customers just rolled in. I had done my best to always help people and it paid off. It finally hit me that they wanted to buy their clothes from ME."

It wasn't long before Lionel Smith, Ltd. became the most popular men's store in Aiken. "We had the customers, we just didn't have any cash. Inventory cost a fortune, and even though a lot of the vendors were my friends, they had to have some form of collateral or they wanted cash quick. I took out a second mortgage, but that is the ONLY money we borrowed. We would beg vendors – just give me an extra 30 days – and we always delivered. Looking back, I know there was a lot of luck involved – but there was also a ton of hard work". Lionel Smith, Ltd. was open six days a week and had just a few employees. In fact, Smitty ran the day to day sales operation and his wife, Dot, did the books (for free). LeGrand's eventually closed its Aiken store and for several years there were only two men's clothing stores in Aiken, one of them being Lionel Smith, Ltd.

LIONEL SMITH, Ltd. TAKES OVER

Smitty had always been everybody's friend and still is. His engaging demeanor and knowledge about men's fashion have served him well during his career. But one of his key characteristics is his ability to see the market and realize what the customer would like to have. Aiken is a small traditional Southern Town. Even as late as the 1970s, most businesses closed at 12:00 noon on Wednesday, which was an old Southern tradition. However, Smitty's aggressive drive led him to the decision to be open on Wednesday afternoon. After several months of these new hours, Smitty had not noticed a change in sales and wondered if he also needed to close on Wednesday afternoon. As luck would have it, one Wednesday afternoon, Smitty walked across the street to Aiken Drug store to get a Coke, a fountain Coke (ask your parents what a fountain Coke was). As he started back across the street to his store, he looked up and down Laurens St. No cars, all the doors closed, all the lights off. "It hit me that this looked like a ghost town. If anybody came driving down Laurens, the main street of Aiken, they wouldn't know we were even open on Wednesday afternoon." Smitty immediately went back to his store and

opened the doors as wide as they would open. He cranked up the air conditioning and informed his employees that the “doors would stay open”. Within one week, sales on Wednesday improved by 30%. To this day, Lionel Smith, Ltd. often has its doors open, even though everybody knows they are open. “Not only does it let people know we are open, it is an inviting gesture saying come on in”.

Remember the five year increments of Smitty’s life? Lionel Smith, Ltd. opened in 1976 and the clock began ticking again. Lionel Smith, Ltd. was at a far end of Laurens street and Smitty always wanted to be closer to the center of town where there was more foot traffic. It just so happened that a fire broke out in the Famous Brands Shoe store in 1981. Famous Brands had been an established business for years in Aiken, but its owner, Abe Wolfe, was ready to retire and now his building had been damaged by fire (an explosion in 1966? a fire in 1981?). Smitty knew Abe and told him that if he would renovate the building, Smitty would lease it from him. Abe was a shrewd businessman and saw a lot of himself in Smitty. Abe said “I know what you really want and I know what you really need to do. You need to BUY your own place and I will sell you this building” This all took place at the end of 1981. Abe, being in retail all his life, knew that if Smitty had any money he would have it at the end of the year. After negotiating a price, Abe agreed to finance the building, with Smitty making a significant down payment and then making payments twice a year. Smitty had a good friend that worked at the Savannah River Site and did carpentry/construction work on the side. It took six months to renovate the location and Lionel Smith, Ltd. opened its new location, right in the middle of Aiken, in the Fall of 1982. To pay for the renovation, Smitty had to use his IRA which meant losing 10% of its value immediately. At that time, however, there was a government plan that let you take a 1 for 1 tax credit on the loss. The purchase of the new store was a turning point in the history of Lionel Smith, Ltd. Smitty finally owned his own facility and it was located in the prime location of downtown Aiken. Since its inception six years ago, Lionel Smith, Ltd. had gained a loyal following and sales were growing yearly. In addition, the store’s excellent sales had vendors willing to make deals because they knew they would sell a great deal of product. Vendors became so comfortable with Lionel Smith, Ltd. that many agreed to make the sale in June, deliver in September and not expect payment until the end of the year. Smitty was selling clothes and the vendors were selling clothes and business was booming. Lionel Smith, Ltd. had become THE clothing store in Aiken.

MENS’ FASHION INDUSTRY

Clothing accounted for \$373 billion in 2010 US GDP. While this number may sound high, the trends in high-end men’s clothing have seen decreasing sales since 1990 when men’s clothing accounted for 5.3% of disposable income compared to 3.5% in 2008 (American Apparel & Footwear Assoc./www.apparelandfootwear.org). While the major economic downturn seen between 2000 and 2010 can account for some of this loss, more casual and less expensive fashion trends may account for much of this decline. Lionel

Smith, Ltd. has managed some immunity to this decline in sales, focusing on individual customer service. The interior of the Lionel Smith, Ltd. location takes you back to the late 1960s and this effect is purposely created. Old school college banners are found everywhere and the smell of leather and fine fabric is dominant. There is a seating area with comfortable chairs and a large couch, complete with a coffee table armed with the latest GQ and Esquire magazine, along with a copy of the Aiken Standard and the Wall Street Journal. You are greeted the minute you walk in the door – “Welcome to Lionel Smith, Ltd., may I help you”. Not only is the help immediate, but professional. If you ask one of the salesmen for help, they are ready to make a suggestion. In fact, most of the salesmen have regular customers that will wait on them if they are helping someone else. Lionel Smith, Ltd. also catalogs everything you buy and can let you or your wife or your girlfriend know what you need because they know what you have recently bought. This type of personalized customer service works remarkably well on creating repeat business. Many of the customers of Lionel Smith, Ltd. have been shopping there for decades and would not go anywhere else.

Lionel Smith, Ltd. prides itself on putting the customer in a suit of clothes that is of quality construction and also one that fits. They have two full-time seamstresses that can rework a suit so that it fits perfectly. Buying a suit at Lionel Smith, Ltd. is a two week process, sometimes requiring two fittings or more. And those ties. Smitty is still obsessed with them. From conservative to paisley to who-knows-what, Lionel Smith, Ltd. is well known for its large and unusual tie collection. It is not uncommon to meet old friends in the store. It sometimes has the appearance of a high school reunion. The atmosphere is relaxing and laid back. No hurry here. “Spend all the time you want. If you get hungry, just go next door to Malia’s and get one of those great salads and come back, we will be here.”

THE VAN YEARS

Smitty’s son, Van, had worked in the store part-time during his high-school and college years and became a full-time employee upon graduation from the University of South Carolina. In 1993, Van Smith became the manager and entered into an agreement to buy Lionel Smith, Ltd. from his father with an agreement calling for a 15 year pay-out plan. Smitty continues to own the building. As could be expected, Van was a chip off the old block. Even though they don’t look anything alike, their demeanor and salesmanship are the exact same. Over the years, Van had taken in the new clients, the young professionals and had his own following. Even though Smitty had turned over the reins and the ownership to his son, he continued to work in the store as salesman. As the years went by, the customer base for the store started to expand geographically. Many of Lionel Smith Ltd. customers had grown up in Aiken, gone to college, and now lived elsewhere. However, the store often received calls for orders and many of these individuals would drop in when visiting family members in town. Smitty remembers the

day he received a call from an anesthesiologist living in Birmingham, AL. It was an old customer that had shopped with the store while in college and med school. He wanted Smitty to open a store in Birmingham and promised that he had many friends that would love to shop there. Although he was flattered, Smitty knew the logistics and finances involved in opening a distant location and gracefully declined. However, being the sales oriented individual that had made him successful, Smitty saw a great opportunity. He told the anesthesiologist that he would make a trip to Birmingham loaded down with a large selection of clothes. When he arrived in Birmingham, he met with the doctor and several of his friends and came back to South Carolina with a “big bag of money with over \$16,000 in it”.

Smitty also came back with a great new business model. Many of his customers were professionals whose jobs did not allow them to shop, but who appreciated fine fashion. Why not take Lionel Smith, Ltd. to them. Smitty outfitted his old SUV with several clothes racks and started making phone calls. He would meet a client in his office, home, or wherever. Word quickly spread and Smitty soon began to dedicate every Tuesday and Wednesday to this personal service. Smitty would also come and review an individual's wardrobe and make suggestions as to what pieces were needed or could use updating. Women began to ask that Smitty come and evaluate their husbands' closets and make suggestions, and these suggestions always seemed to be purchased immediately.

As Smitty likes to say, there are three kinds of people “those that make things happen, those that watch things happen, and those that wonder what happened”. Lionel Smith was always trying to make things happen. Over his career, he has always had a vision of what he wanted for his future. There were many times when he could not do what he wanted because of financial, personal, or professional circumstances. However, when he COULD make these things happen, he never backed down. He realized early on that he could not accomplish these goals on his own and understood the importance of lasting and meaningful business relationships. He continues to work in the store usually one to two days a week, seeing old customers by appointment or just helping walk-ins, who immediately become his friend and he continues to make private showings whenever requested.

One last story about Lionel Smith as told by an old time customer. “I remember going into Belk's when I was in Junior High School. My mom loved to shop and probably used my needing clothes as a reason to go to Belks, the only real clothing store in Aiken in the mid-60s. The first thing she did was take me to the Boy's department because she knew a kid that worked there named Smitty. She would hand me over to Smitty, tell him what I needed (two pairs of jeans and a couple of shirts) and then she would go shop on her own. When she got back to the Boy's department I would be all decked out. I got to know Smitty pretty well, he was older and had his own job and really seemed to like everybody. Over the next couple of years, I would run into Smitty. I remember

him working at Cullum's when they opened but then we moved from Aiken during my high-school years. Fast forward to the late 70s. I had graduated college and a few years later moved back to the Aiken area working for a large national bank. One day somebody at the bank mentioned a place called Lionel Smith, Ltd. that had great clothes and I wondered if that could be the Smitty that I knew. About a month later, I needed some shirts and thought why not go there and see. As soon as I walked in, there he was, right in the middle of everything. I walked up to him and said, "I bet you don't remember me, but..." and was cut off. He said "you are Hank Eubanks, sure I remember you. How's your mother Nancy? Does your dad still work for Exxon." I had not seen the guy in over twelve years and even then I was just some dumb kid who needed some clothes. But HE remembered everything. From that day on, I haven't shopped anywhere else."

Lionel Smith, Ltd. continues as Aiken's premier men's clothing store. Sales continue to steadily grow and the store currently employs six full time salesmen, one bookkeeper, and two seamstresses. The location has not changed since 1982 and probably won't. Smitty has been approached by both the Aiken and Augusta Malls over the years, with incredible deals to relocate. Both times Smitty and Van politely refused. Lionel Smith, Ltd. has spent the last 35 years creating a reputation and product that is best served in a local, downtown atmosphere. Smitty believes that part of the attraction and charm of the store is its downtown location. Aiken has often been described as a village, with shops and restaurants designed with a village focus. Starting at Belks and moving through Manning-Owens, Cullums, LeGrand's, and finally Lionel Smith, Ltd., Smitty feels that he has been an integral force in the downtown development of Aiken. Even though he does not run the day-to-day operations of Lionel Smith, Ltd., Smitty is still active in personal sales and continues to be in the store several times a week. But as he says, "its nice to work on my schedule – but come to think of it – I always worked on my own schedule – I'm just doing what I always loved to do – and I'm still loving it."