

## ■■■ 60-SECOND PROFILE

# ANGLING FOR GROWTH

A professional bass fisherman, Joe Smith is casting a net for more development.

When you can't find Joe Smith on the job at Chesapeake Hospitality, you're likely to find him out on the water, fishing for bass. The executive vice president at the Maryland-based management company fishes on the professional bass tour. "On summer weekends, you can pretty much see me streaming around in my bass boat," Smith says. His weekends might not be that different than his workweek. He often finds himself casting and fishing for development and management contracts these days.

But like his fishing skills, Smith's leadership in hospitality is born from years of experience and practice. "I'm one of those guys who literally started as a dishwasher," he says. "My parents were transferred from Ohio to Milwaukee when I was in eighth grade. I didn't know anyone and I was looking to do something for the summer, so I went to a local college and washed dishes all summer. While you wouldn't necessarily think you'd end up liking the business from washing dishes, I did."

From there, it's been a life-long journey through hospitality. Smith worked at various local restaurants in Milwaukee throughout high school and college. Once he graduated from the University of Wisconsin-Stout, where he studied in the hospitality school, he took a job with Sky Chefs, a subsidiary of American Airlines. "That was a great job because I was able to fly all over, and worked in a number of cities," he recalls. One of those cities was New Orleans, La., where he ended up meeting his wife, Elizabeth.

He stayed in the restaurant business, moving to work at T.G.I. Friday's. He says that experience provided a good understanding of the hospitality business. "They had every system imaginable. They had it down to a science."

He took that experience and entered the hotel business, first with the Registry Hotel in Dallas, Texas.



It was short-lived, as he longed to return to his native Ohio. He applied to Boykin Management Co. in Cleveland to become director of restaurants at a Marriott hotel. "That started a 20-year career with the company," he says.

He eventually became a general manager of a Marriott hotel when he was just 26 years old. "I had a wonderful career with Boykin," he remembers. In fact, he eventually opened the Yosemite Marriott for the company and became an executive vice president and then president. "They walked in my office one day and said they were going to sell all of the REIT hotels," Smith says. That led to Smith's decision to depart.

His next stop was as president of Alliance Hospitality. "I had primarily worked with full-service hotels up to that point.

**{CLOSE UP}** **POSITION:** Executive Vice President, Chesapeake Hospitality  
**RESIDENCE:** Avon Lake, Ohio **FAMILY:** Wife; two daughters **ACTIVITIES:** Fishing  
**EDUCATION:** University of Wisconsin-Stout **LAST BOOK READ:** *Autobiography of Mallory and Irvine*  
**HOTEL MUST-HAVES:** Strong leader and a friendly and welcoming atmosphere

In joining Alliance we had 52 select-service hotels," he says. "But at the time, my two daughters were in high school. I was commuting every week from Cleveland to Raleigh, N.C. After a couple of years of doing that, my wife met me at the door one day and said that wasn't going to work.

"I was fortunate that Chesapeake Hospitality was interested in me and they allowed me to work from my home in Ohio," he continues. "It also took me in a new direction because I do development now."

Development has been a challenge for everyone, but Smith says Chesapeake has been able to grow the business with five new hotels over the last 18 months. "We continue to make deals today," he says.

Smith is optimistic that development will soon pick up again. "At our hotels, we've seen occupancy levels back to 2007 levels. From that perspective we're happy," he says. "Obviously average rate still needs to come back to where it was. I think that will be a struggle for a little bit more. We're dependent on the American traveler. We need jobs to come back and that will open up business pocket-books." ■