



## Edward M. Smith

September 9, 1954 - January 3, 2024

IN MEMORY OF:

Edward M. Smith

Serving Location:

CRAIN FUNERAL HOME – CAIRO

4815 Sycamore Street, Cairo, Illinois

Edward M. Smith (1954-2024) passed away with his family at his side on January 3, 2024.

A champion of the American Labor Movement with a visionary business mind, Ed Smith left a tremendous impact on the labor world and touched the lives of many. From his earliest days at the Laborers' Union (LiUNA), through his tenure as Chairman and CEO of Ullico, a labor-owned financial services firm, he moved boldly—seizing opportunities, developing winning strategies, and leaving every place he worked better than he found it.

Ed's impressive accomplishments were rooted in his sharp business acumen and practical knowledge of the labor world, but also in the way he treated people. At the end of each day, Ed asked himself, "Who have I helped today?" It was a habit he learned from his father, but it also spoke to his generous spirit, moral conviction, fierce loyalty, and infectious optimism.

Born on September 9, 1954, in Cairo, Illinois to Connell F. Smith and Mary Jewel Smith, Ed thought of the labor movement as his calling rather than a job. He inherited this passion from his father, who served as the Laborers' Local 773 Business Manager from 1942-1976. Ed joined the union at age thirteen, worked as a laborer not long after, and was elected Local 773 Business Manager by age twenty-one.

Ed was a unique combination of experience, intelligence, and personality that produced success in everything he touched. He was the first LiUNA member in the country to graduate from the National Labor College. He participated in the Harvard Trade Union Program—attending classes with Harvard MBA students and debating case studies in labor history. Observing the critical role politics has played in advancing labor's interests, he devoted himself to understanding the legislative process and developed relationships with decision makers and government leaders. All this experience allowed him to develop a comprehensive understanding of the labor world. That knowledge, paired with his strong will and passion for supporting working people, fueled a tremendously successful career.

He focused his efforts at LiUNA on using innovative strategies to protect labor rights. With his signature “all-in” approach, he led forty organizing drives during the 1970s and '80s with groups across southern Illinois, including police, government workers, healthcare employees, and highway workers. Thirty-nine of these drives proved successful, boosting Local 773's membership from 300 to 4,000.

Over the course of his career, he moved up through the ranks within LiUNA, winning election as Southern Illinois Laborers' District Council Business Manager in 1985 and later becoming Chairman of the Central Laborers' Pension Fund. In 1994, he was appointed Midwest Regional Manager and

was elected as Vice President and Regional Manager of LiUNA and also served as Assistant to the General President. The Midwest Region was expanded from three to ten states during his tenure.

He greatly expanded LiUNA's political influence throughout the Midwest Region, lobbying at statehouses and urging members to run for local office. He served on the Democratic National Committee and was a delegate to many national conventions. Smith pioneered regional Tri-Funds programs for contractor cooperation and worker protection. A committed advocate for protecting construction workers' rights, he helped forge the National Alliance for Fair Contracting.

During his time as Vice President and Regional Manager he was appointed to the Illinois State Board of Investment and served as Chairman.

Over the years, his experience on pension boards fueled a passion for leveraging the financial power of the labor movement's pension capital. Frustrated that investment managers often invested union funds with companies that were anti-union, Smith began formulating plans for an infrastructure fund that could offer a competitive return on investment dollars while also including union construction mandates and neutrality on worker organizing efforts. This goal set the stage for Smith's next chapter at Ullico Inc.

Ed joined Ullico in 2008. At the time, the company was facing serious financial obstacles, which were only exacerbated by the ensuing Great Recession. Undaunted, Smith assembled an experienced management team, fought to give them the resources they needed, and worked hard to redouble the company's commitment to the labor movement.

Rather than play it safe, he offered bold leadership and strategic ideas to move the company forward. As there was no labor-friendly infrastructure investment fund in the marketplace, Smith set out to start one. Despite vocal critics saying it couldn't be done, he hired the right people and started traveling the country to convince labor leaders to invest in what was then just an ambitious idea. Eventually, Smith's force of will, deep network of relationships, and practical understanding of the labor movement helped him and his investment team raise the capital necessary to launch the fund. More than a decade later, the Ullico Infrastructure Fund is a pillar of the company's five-year run of tremendous success and record profits.

Smith was proud of running a profitable company, but he was adamant that Ullico would do it the right way. He urged his insurance team that when there was a close call and when possible, lean in favor of the claimant, arguing that as labor's company, Ullico should favor protecting union members. During Smith's tenure, Ullico enhanced its insurance program for union leaders and benefit plan trustees, and grew its union-supporting commercial real estate financing fund. Under his leadership, Ullico generously gave back to the community, donating millions of dollars each year to philanthropic causes. Internally, Smith was insistent that the company take care of its employees. He built a culture that put people first. In addition to offering a robust benefits package, he maintained a personal touch—sending birthday cards each year to every employee.

He believed in treating people with dignity. As Smith would say, "It's all about the people."

Of course, Ed Smith was more than a list of professional accomplishments. He was a devoted husband to his wife and closest advisor, Betty, and a loving father to Jordan and Matt. He was also known to spoil his grandchildren and his dog. A loyal friend, Smith would be the first to congratulate you during the exciting moments of success or be there to offer support if you experienced a tragedy.

He never knew a stranger and made friends wherever he went. He was an avid reader and found great joy in discussing labor history with any curious listener. A sports fan, he rooted for the Kentucky Wildcats, who also happened to wear his favorite color—blue. Smith had a sweet tooth and carried a particular fondness for chocolate chip cookies. He had a booming voice and an easy laugh.

Ed Smith will be dearly missed, but his profound impact on Ullico and its employees, the labor movement, and those around him will live on through his accomplishments and the countless stories told by all those whose lives he touched.

Visitation will be held Saturday, January 13, 2024, from 11:00 AM until 3:00 PM at Shawnee Community College in Ullin, Illinois with the funeral to follow at 3:00 PM.

A celebration of life ceremony will be held in Washington DC at a later date.

In lieu of flowers, the family requests with gratitude that memorial contributions be made to the Connell F. Smith Homer Brown Scholarship Fund, 5102 Ed Smith Way, Marion, IL 62959 and/or TLC (The Laborers' Care) of Southern & Central Illinois, PO Box 3249, Carbondale, IL 62902.

Arrangements have been entrusted to Crain Funeral Home.

# Previous Events

## Visitation

JAN 13. 11:00 AM - 3:00 PM (cst)

Shawnee Community College  
8364 Shawnee College Rd  
Ullin, IL 62992  
(618) 634-3200

## Funeral Service

JAN 13. 3:00 PM - 3:30 PM (cst)

Shawnee Community College  
Ullin, IL

# Tribute Wall



“ *Beautiful in Blue* was purchased for the family of Edward M. Smith.



January 15, 2024 at 11:37 AM



“ *Simply Elegant Spathiphyllum* was purchased for the family of Edward M. Smith.



January 12, 2024 at 11:44 AM



“ *Ocean Breeze Spray* was purchased for the family of Edward M. Smith.



January 11, 2024 at 10:03 PM



“ *Larry Paradise and Family purchased the Fairest of All* for the family of Edward M. Smith.



**Larry Paradise and Family** - January 11, 2024 at 06:23 PM

LF

“ Larry Paradise and Family planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Edward M. Smith.

Larry Paradise and Family - January 11, 2024 at 06:23 PM

MR

“ Milta R. planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Edward M. Smith.

Milta R. - January 11, 2024 at 04:36 PM



“ Lavender Reflections Spray was purchased for the family of Edward M. Smith.



January 11, 2024 at 10:10 AM

ON

“ Officers & Staff of NCDCL purchased the Tropical Tribute Spray for the family of Edward M. Smith.



Officers & Staff of NCDCL - January 10, 2024 at 08:03 PM



“ Ocean Breeze Spray was purchased for the family of Edward M. Smith.



January 10, 2024 at 04:50 PM



“ *Magnificent Life Spray* was purchased for the family of Edward M. Smith.



January 10, 2024 at 02:38 PM



“ *Peaceful White Lilies Basket* was purchased for the family of Edward M. Smith.



January 10, 2024 at 12:49 PM



“ *With Distinction* was purchased for the family of Edward M. Smith.



January 10, 2024 at 12:24 PM



“ *Reflections of Glory Wreath* was purchased for the family of Edward M. Smith.



January 10, 2024 at 10:01 AM

UP

“ Union Plus planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Edward M. Smith.

Union Plus - January 10, 2024 at 10:01 AM

BS

“ Brown, Hay & Stephens planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Edward M. Smith.

Brown, Hay & Stephens - January 10, 2024 at 09:15 AM



“ Simply Elegant Spathiphyllum was purchased for the family of Edward M. Smith.



January 10, 2024 at 09:15 AM

TS

“ Condolences to Edward Smith's family. Thanks to Edward Smith for his work supporting working people and unions. We're all better off because of it.

Terry Sheridan - January 09, 2024 at 04:58 PM

MF

“ Matt Corzine and family planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Edward M. Smith.

Matt Corzine and family - January 09, 2024 at 04:43 PM



“ *Crystal Cross Bouquet was purchased for the family of Edward M. Smith.*



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January 09, 2024 at 04:43 PM



“ *Lavender Reflections Spray was purchased for the family of Edward M. Smith.*



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January 09, 2024 at 04:25 PM



“ *There is nothing I can say that will convey my heartfelt sorrow over Ed's passing. Ed, Thank you for your Leadership and friendship over the last 30 plus years. It was my honor and privilege to have been blessed by your presence in my life. And, Betty Jordan and Matt you will always be in my heart and thoughts! Rick Porter*

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**Rick Porter** - January 09, 2024 at 04:20 PM



“ *Peaceful White Lilies Basket was purchased for the family of Edward M. Smith.*



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January 09, 2024 at 01:07 PM



“ *Lily and Rose Tribute Spray was purchased for the family of Edward M. Smith.*



January 09, 2024 at 12:58 PM



“ *Lily and Rose Tribute Spray was purchased for the family of Edward M. Smith.*



January 09, 2024 at 11:35 AM



“ *Gary Perinar, EST planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Edward M. Smith.*

**Gary Perinar, EST** - January 09, 2024 at 11:35 AM



“ *Ed was a great leader and inspiration to the Ullico family. He will be sorely missed. My heartfelt condolences to his family and friends*

**Chris Noland** - January 09, 2024 at 09:28 AM



“ *Atticus F. planted a grove of 5 [Memorial Trees](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Edward M. Smith.*

**Atticus F.** - January 08, 2024 at 05:41 PM



“ Sentiments of Serenity Spray was purchased for the family of Edward M. Smith.



January 08, 2024 at 03:18 PM



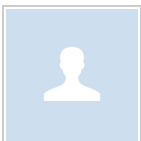
“ Nikki Budzinski planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Edward M. Smith.

Nikki Budzinski - January 08, 2024 at 03:18 PM



“ Ed was an amazing boss and an amazing person. I sure am going to miss our days in the office together. He always had time to discuss business, politics, culture, and world events, usually educating me in the process. He had a great laugh and a great smile. I am truly going to miss him.

Jenn Schuessler - January 08, 2024 at 02:58 PM



“ A [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) was planted in honor of Edward M. Smith.

January 08, 2024 at 02:57 PM



“ Sentiments of Serenity Spray was purchased for the family of Edward M. Smith.



January 08, 2024 at 02:38 PM



“ The Directors, Officers of Bank of Labor purchased the Enduring Grace for the family of Edward M. Smith.



**The Directors, Officers of Bank of Labor** - January 08, 2024 at 01:39 PM



“ Aisyle Deriquito planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Edward M. Smith.

**Aisyle Deriquito** - January 08, 2024 at 11:28 AM



“ Aisyle Deriquito purchased the Basket Full of Wishes for the family of Edward M. Smith.



**Aisyle Deriquito** - January 08, 2024 at 11:28 AM



“ *Simply Elegant Spathiphyllum was purchased for the family of Edward M. Smith.*



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January 08, 2024 at 09:33 AM



“ *Sweet Remembrance Spray was purchased for the family of Edward M. Smith.*



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January 08, 2024 at 09:04 AM



“ *Eddie Smith is my Cousin and trusted Friend. He will be missed by all but never forgotten.*

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**Richard T Kearney** - January 07, 2024 at 02:02 PM



“ *Simply Elegant Spathiphyllum was purchased for the family of Edward M. Smith.*



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January 07, 2024 at 10:17 AM



“ *Ed was my friend and always ready to offer his advice and leadership. We will miss him forever. Rest in peace my friend.*

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**Jim Stevens** - January 06, 2024 at 02:31 PM

JS

“ Jim S. planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Edward M. Smith.

Jim S. - January 06, 2024 at 02:18 PM

EH

“ Ellen Hill lit a candle in memory of Edward Smith



Ellen Hill - January 06, 2024 at 11:55 AM

MF

“ My deepest sympathies to the family. I can't think of anyone I respected more. He was a friend and mentor to me I will miss him. His character and his personality will live on for generations to come. What he has accomplished in his lifetime few ever achieve. And what he has done for me and my family I will never forget. His legacy will live through his kids and grandchildren like his father and mother through him.

mark franklin - January 06, 2024 at 11:18 AM

TJ

“ I can still remember recruiting Eddie to play basketball at Shawnee College. He lived with his parents in East Cape. Eddie was a part of the first basketball team that represented the Saints. Tom Jones

Tom Jones - January 05, 2024 at 12:52 PM

JW

“ Ed, a true friend from our first meeting at the S&S coin laundry in Cairo Il over 60 years ago. My prayers are with Betty, Matt & Jordan and the rest of the family



James Wilson - January 05, 2024 at 11:25 AM



“ Peaceful White Lilies Basket was purchased for the family of Edward M. Smith.



January 05, 2024 at 11:18 AM

L1

“ LiUNA Local 1001 planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Edward M. Smith.

LiUNA Local 1001 - January 05, 2024 at 11:18 AM

ES

“ Ed Finkelstein & Labor Tribune staff planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Edward M. Smith.

Ed Finkelstein & Labor Tribune staff - January 05, 2024 at 07:34 AM



“ *Peaceful White Lilies Basket was purchased for the family of Edward M. Smith.*



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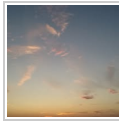
January 05, 2024 at 07:34 AM



“ *I have known Ed for years. Coached him many years My condolences to his family. He will missed. Coach Aden*

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**Joe Aden** - January 05, 2024 at 04:23 AM



*Remembering when Eddie first came to Shawnee Jr. High in eighth grade. I think we were in Mr. Aden's home room. It isn't just any boy that goes on to get a cat named for him. My sympathies to his family.*

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**Gayla Oyler** - January 05, 2024 at 10:19 PM



*I have been friends with Ed since 1968. We played ball for Coach Aden at Shawnee Dist #84, lots of great memories. I could write a book about all the things we did. Ed excelled in sports as he did in life. Respect to you Mr Ed Smith and our deepest sympathy to the family.*

*Rollie and Kathy Matlock*

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**Rollie Matlock** - January 06, 2024 at 01:27 PM



*So sorry to hear about Eddie. Our thoughts and prayers are with you all.*

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**Carol & Randy George** - January 07, 2024 at 03:27 PM

GP

*Three things I know about my friend Ed Smith. 1. He was a true son of his father. "Have I done enough today to help someone along the way." He lived it. 2. He didn't come up through the ranks, he came up with the ranks. Because he brought everybody in his union up the economic ladder with him. He left no-one behind. 3. When a British corporation got the first contract on the Olmsted Lock and Dam and refused to hire local people, Ed looked their CEO in the eye and told him it would be the last contract they would ever get. I know, I was in the room with him in Washington DC when he faced the guy down. He had courage. And he won those jobs at Olmsted for his people. He never backed down from a just fight. I loved him for it. Betty, Matt, Jordan, we loved your husband and dad and we always will. Glenn Poshard*

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**Glenn Poshard** - January 13, 2024 at 12:33 AM