



Oklahoma Aeronautics Commission

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Henry Appoints Smith to State's Aeronautics Commission

OKLAHOMA CITY – Mary E. Smith of Tulsa, Okla., has been appointed by Gov. Brad Henry to serve a six-year term as District 1 commissioner on the Oklahoma Aeronautics Commission. She replaces Bob Jandabeur, also of Tulsa, whose six-year term has expired.

The Oklahoma Aeronautics Commission's role is to promote aviation in the state. This includes the preservation and improvement of the state's 114 public airports in communities and promotion of the aerospace industry, one of Oklahoma's top employers.

"Mary is a great supporter of aviation and a true champion for the aerospace industry," Commission Director Victor Bird said. "She is a tireless worker and the citizens of Oklahoma will benefit greatly from her knowledge and expertise. She will be a great addition to the Commission and we look forward to working alongside her as we continue to promote aviation in the state."

As vice president for economic development for the Tulsa Metro Chamber, she leads the chamber's efforts to retain and expand the region's aerospace companies, and attract new aerospace companies that will enhance the existing aerospace cluster, including workforce development and talent attraction.

According to Smith, her passion for aviation began as a little girl when her father introduced her to flying, and it culminated when she earned her private pilot's license many years later.

"My father flew single-engine planes for fun. I had the pleasure of flying with him many times," Smith said. "I guess those early flights with a man I admired so much produced a life-long interest. Many years later, those childhood memories prompted me to learn to fly. That was the beginning of my passion for anything to do with flying – flying airplanes, fixing airplanes, manufacturing airplanes, airports."

Smith wasted little time in becoming involved in aviation and the aerospace industry. Not long after she earned her pilot's license at Tulsa's R. L. Jones, Jr. Airport, one of the busiest general aviation airports in the nation, she met Brent Kitchen, director of airports for the Tulsa Airport Authority.

"My background in marketing and my enthusiasm for aviation led Brent to offer me the job of director of marketing for the Airport Authority," Smith said.

With nearly seven years of service in that position, she found a host of opportunities to enhance the region's air service and airport operations, as well as to support the state's aerospace industry. While serving at the Airport Authority, Smith created the Aerospace Alliance of Tulsa (AAT), a 300-member organization dedicated to promoting the region's aerospace industry. She also worked with several city, state and industry leaders to establish the Oklahoma Aerospace Alliance (OAA) in 2004.

The Commission has taken an active role in ensuring the success of the OAA by providing \$150,000 annually to the organization. Once the OAA was created, the AAT was dissolved and its membership became part of the OAA.

Smith hails from a district that is home to more than half of the approximately 400 aerospace companies in Oklahoma, such as American Airlines, Spirit AeroSystems, NORDAM, Bizjet, Mingo Aerospace, Southwest United Industries, First Wave and Southern Aeroparts.

Altogether, the aerospace industry provides approximately 150,000 jobs in Oklahoma, making it the state's largest employer. It also produces an annual industrial output of \$12 billion.

"The aerospace industry is currently in a strong growth mode, from MRO (maintenance, repair and overhaul), manufacturing and support services to educating and training a workforce that has to be strong in numbers and skills to ensure that Oklahoma aerospace companies have the human resources necessary to succeed as they compete for new business," Smith said.

"The Oklahoma Aeronautics Commission, state and local leaders, the education community and industry officials must work together to ensure that the needs of the state's aerospace industry are met now, and that a plan of action to help these high-paying, established companies stay strong and grow is developed and executed. Future generations will reap the benefits – higher-paying jobs, better education and training opportunities, and a sense of pride – as the long and rich aviation history that has been part of our state's heritage is carried forward."

Smith has served on numerous boards of directors for various professional and civic organizations, including the Tulsa Air and Space Museum, Tulsa Metro YMCA Board of Directors, Tulsa 99s/Women's Pilot Organization and Airports Council International of North America. She served on several advisory boards, such as the OAA. She is a Leadership Tulsa graduate and was appointed by Gov. Henry in 2003 to the Oklahoma Space Industry Development Authority (OSIDA). She later resigned from OSIDA, citing scheduling conflicts with her job at the Airport Authority.

Smith was also a member of the 2004 Governor's Aerospace Task Force, comprised of leaders from the aerospace industry, education and government whose role was to recommend actions that would improve the ability of Oklahoma aerospace companies to compete in the global marketplace. The Commission was the driving force behind the creation of the task force.

Smith was raised in Illinois and graduated from Illinois State University. She and her two daughters, Sara and Maggie, live in Tulsa.