

PROFILE

Ted Smith: Foes think he's anti-business, but fans say he's earth's advocate

By MARY HAYES

He's the local toxics avenger. Mother Nature's version of Big Brother. The Nancy Reagan of environmental causes, with a "Just Say No" campaign of his own.

"The electronics industry is chemically dependent and we want to find ways to help it kick the habit," said Ted Smith, executive director of the Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition.

Since local groundwater contamination became an issue in the early 1980s, Mr. Smith has been a diligent anti-toxics activist—and a thorn in the side of several high-technology firms. But Mr. Smith, a lawyer who gave up his private practice to devote time to environmental issues, said he's not out to destroy business. He just wants to see his children grow up drinking clean water and breathing clean air.

When he learned the valley's drinking water was contaminated by industry in 1982, "I jumped into that with both feet," Mr. Smith, 45, recalled. "I was concerned that this was the tip of the iceberg. And it was."

Before then, he knew no more about pollution than the average Joe. Since his awakening during the turbulent 1960s, however, Mr. Smith has been on one quest or another to protect the people from the evils of big business.

His appearance doesn't match the liberal stereotype of long hair and Birkenstock sandals. With no-fuss slacks, shirt and tie, he almost could pass for a businessman. Until you get to the black leather gym shoes.

Nor is his office at the coalition's headquarters on First Street preoccupied with outward appearances. Its worn carpet is patched with unmatched scraps and the few spotty chairs could use reupholstering, if not replacement. Walls are cluttered with family pictures and honorary plaques. A caricature of Ronald Reagan, with bolts in his neck and arms outstretched, labeled "Reaganstein," is taped to a file cabinet.

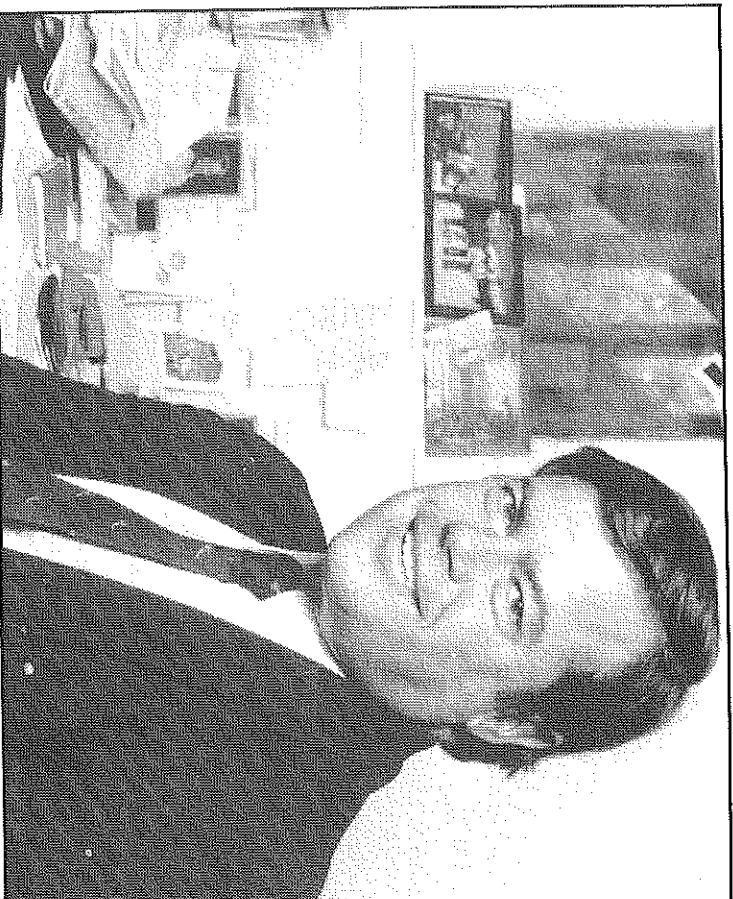
Mr. Smith said his father went to high school with Ronald Reagan, and even worked for General Electric Co. at the same time Mr. Reagan was starting in GE Theater.

"(My father) said the guy should never had been in politics," Mr. Smith said. "It should have been Moon (brother Neil Reagan), the smart one, that went into politics."

His father is Republican despite his criticisms, Mr. Smith said. "He's mellowed out as he's gotten older," he said of his father. "I think 'Tricky Dick' kind of got to him. We went through all the generational wars, but I think we're at peace now."

Mr. Smith grew up in New York state and earned his B.A. from Wesleyan University in Middletown, Conn., in 1967. He then spent two years as a volunteer for Vista, a domestic Peace Corps, in Washington D.C.

"It was a period of time when the Vietnam War was at its height and during the time Martin Luther King was killed," Mr.



Smith said. "I look back at that as my coming of age. Until then I'd led a pretty sheltered life."

"I decided I would go to law school and get some tools so I could be more effective in the struggle for social change." He then headed for the West Coast and attended Stanford Law School, receiving his J.D. in 1972.

Mr. Smith said after his years in Washington and his exposure to Martin Luther King, he knew his career path would be dedicated to fighting for people's rights. He said his current work, for example, supports people's rights to know. Dr. King served as an idol of sorts, and he took his children back East to the college chapel where he saw Dr. King for the first time in 1964.

Mr. Smith moved to San Jose in 1972 and began practicing law the next year. "I represented people who were kind of the underdogs, at the bottom of the ladder and struggling," he said. For example, he counseled cannery workers with claims of racial discrimination or personal injury acquired on the job. As he wasn't able to make a living representing laborers, Mr. Smith's legal work also included union representation, domestic relations and arbitrations.

In 1974, he met attorney Amanda Hawes, who also practices labor representation, and they married later that year. They now have three children: Gordon, 14, Kyle, 12, and Caitlin, 9.

Ms. Hawes said the two are both career and marriage partners, backing each other on issues and exchanging knowledge and expertise.

While Mr. Smith and Ms. Hawes are respected among environmental and occupational safety activists, they often are met with anger by those they've attacked—namely, the valley's electronics and high-technology industries.

John Greenagel, spokesman for Advanced Micro Devices Inc. of Sunnyvale, a semiconductor company, is not a big fan of Mr. Smith and Ms. Hawes. Calling the couple a "potent one-two punch," he said they work together on a personal vendetta against the semiconductor industry that stems from pro-labor sentiments.

Mr. Smith and Ms. Hawes said their children are relatively aware of the controversies surrounding their parents.

"We do stuff that's pretty unusual," Ms. Hawes said. "Our oldest son said at one point he'd like to see his Dad do a dif-

ferent job" that would provide him with a nine-to-five work schedule. However, "sometimes (Gordon) is very proud of him," she said.

Mr. Smith said he was "a real hero" in Gordon's eyes on Earth Day last year, when he took his son to a local rock 'n roll radio station where Mr. Smith was interviewed.

Mr. Smith phased out of practicing law in the mid-1980s, now devoting all of his time to environmental and anti-toxics causes. He became more interested in toxics issues when his wife was working with the Santa Clara Center for Occupational Safety and Health during the 1970s. He founded the Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition in 1983, which evolved from a SCCOSH project.

The coalition's goal was even broader than protecting electronics industry workers from hazardous chemicals on the job, Mr. Smith said. It would rally the support of homeowners and the health and labor sectors to provide a clean and healthy environment to live in. It remains a non-profit organization, surviving by private donations, sponsorships, membership fees and volunteer work.

Two of the coalition's biggest successes were providing most of the backing for both the local Right-to-Know and Hazardous Materials Model ordinances, passed in 1983. Santa Clara County was one of the first communities in the country to adopt a Right-to-Know ordinance, requiring companies to report extensive information on their hazardous materials, from what is used to how it is stored. The state took notice of the county's Hazardous Materials Model ordinance, which regulates how hazardous materials are stored, and adopted the law one year later.

The law, stemming from the leaky underground storage tank crisis, became the first of its kind in the country, Mr. Smith said. And one of the coalition's latest achievements was the county Toxic Gas Model Ordinance, requiring companies to improve their handling and work on the prevention of emissions of toxic gases.

"If it were not for Ted Smith and the Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition, these issues would have been dealt with perhaps only later, or perhaps not at all," said Frank Schiavo, an environmental studies professor at San Jose State University. "It's a hard thing to be a voice out there when no one wants to admit they have a (toxics) problem. He's challenged prac-

tices that are highly profitable but never questioned."

While Mr. Smith has been successful in pushing toxics laws and regulations, he has been exceptionally successful at reaching the public through the media and rallying public support. The coalition drew 2,000 participants for an Earth Day rally last year in a park near IBM Corp., and its focus was informing the public that IBM was the largest emitter of chlorofluorocarbons, which deplete the protective ozone layer. Since then, IBM has been openly active about working on environmentally safe practices and has developed a cleaning process that formerly used CFCs but now uses soap and water.

Mr. Smith is quoted regularly by local reporters. In addition, he's written several opinion pieces for local newspapers; published books on toxics issues; lectured to universities, government agencies and organizations; delivered more than a dozen testimonies at legislative and administrative hearings at all levels of government; and serves as vice president of the National Toxics Campaign.

"He's a hero, and his work is essential to the well-being of Silicon Valley," said Bruce Tichinin, an environmental attorney based in Morgan Hill.

Representatives from Silicon Valley firms, however, say that Mr. Smith has portrayed the electronics industry as a monster, lobbying for ordinances that are unnecessarily stringent and costly for companies to comply with.

"He has no credibility as an environmentalist," Mr. Greenagel said. "He's made statements that are bizarre. Most of what he does is playing through the media."

Mr. Smith said one of his primary foes is Gary Burke, president of the Santa Clara County Manufacturing Group. He said Mr. Burke is "too resistant," and encourages both the private and public sector against working with Mr. Smith.

"I have nothing against the man at all," Mr. Burke said. "It's just not a credible organization. Where he gets his information from and how he derives it I have no idea," he said. He added that the SCCMG prefers to work with other environmental groups, including the Sierra Club, the Green Belt Alliance and the Audubon Society.

Mr. Tichinin, however, said Mr. Smith has been the most effective environmentalist in the area, raising public consciousness that has, in turn, raised public official consciousness. Mr. Schiavo added that Mr. Smith has gone after the "hard issues," rather than the more "trendy issues," including the use of plastic foam.

When Messrs. Greenagel and Burke's comments were related to Mr. Tichinin, he responded, "The sheriff of Nottingham didn't have anything good to say about Robin Hood, either. I'm not surprised that they would say that."

Mr. Smith maintains that he's willing to work with industry, if only industry is willing to work toward a safe environment.

"Part of our tactics have involved some drama and confrontation, but always with the intent to get the attention of the powers that be," Mr. Smith said. His ego can take it when someone from the industry attacks his reputation, but it angers him to think that attacks could create obstacles preventing him from carrying out his environmental goals.

"The whole system is based on looking good for the next quarterly report," Mr. Smith said. "But we've taken the position that with (industry's) talent and wealth, they can do things a lot better. We can't go on like this—because we can't survive on a planet if we do."