



During the 1950s, Smith (second from left) worked with WLOX radio, which broadcast out of the Buena Vista Hotel in Biloxi. Also pictured: Smith's wife of 53 years, Polly (right).

# Radio pioneer enjoys retirement in Hancock, but misses 'glory days'

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Even though he has been retired for 17 years, Hugh Smith still has his radio voice.

For almost 50 years, the 78-year-old resident of Clermont Harbor worked in the broadcast industry. His career began in 1942, when the manager of his hometown radio station asked him if the then 17-year old Smith needed a job.

"I thought it would only be temporary," Smith said. "I assumed that I would be drafted like most young men during World War II."

Smith's chosen profession ended up keeping him out of the war entirely, however.

"Radio was declared to be indispensable to the war effort," Smith said. "I couldn't quit or change jobs without an official release."

At the time, KFFA, based in Helena, Arkansas, was the first station to play blues and jazz, which was at the time categorized as "race music," and frowned upon by the broadcast industry.

While Clarksdale, MS has long been credited for starting blues on the airwaves, Smith said that KFFA beat them to it by about 10 years.

"We were doing that before Clarksdale even had a radio station," Smith said.

King Biscuit Time, the program that Smith hosted for nearly a decade, featured many musicians who would later go on to become household names in the industry: "Sonny Boy" Williamson, Robert



Hugh Smith, at his Clermont Harbor home.

Lockwood Williams, "Pinetop" Perkins, and the now-legendary B.B. King.

While working for The Blue Network, which would later become ABC, Smith said he travelled the country working at various stations. While on the west coast, he became friends with several celebrities, including Alan Ladd, perhaps best known for playing the title role in "Shane," and Joe Price, an animator who created "Tom and Jerry," as well as voicing characters such as Speedy Gonzales and Droopy Dog.

After marrying in 1951, Smith took a job at WLOX in Biloxi, which was at that

time a radio station. Smith said that WLOX broadcast out of the Buena Vista Hotel.

"On commercial broadcasts on the networks, we were not allowed to approach a microphone without a tux," he said.

Smith said he felt that radio today has none of the class or charm that it used to.

"After I retired in 1987, I walked into the remains of WLOX studios. It was heartbraking after being a part of the glory days in the Buena Vista Hotel."

Smith spent much of his career working for radio stations in the Louisiana-

Mississippi area. He helped to prepare WLOX TV's application to the FCC, but left the station soon afterwards, as he has never enjoyed television work.

These days, Smith serves as an organist at St. Anne's and St. John's Catholic Churches. He enjoys gardening, and especially raising tropical plants.

Although he loves living in Hancock County, he said, he would like to tour the Caribbean Islands and Central America.

"It's still one of my unrealized ambitions," he said.