

AGENT PROFILE:

Not Content to Be a Big Fish In a Little Fish Bowl



Jeff Forrest, CLU.
ChFC, CFP, MSFS

A sound work ethic, education, and many cheerleaders have helped **JEFF FORREST** of the Smith Agency to achieve success.

Unlike most children, Jeff started working at the age of six. His family owned five acres filled with walnut trees. "As a child, my family was poor" in material possessions but rich in family values," stated Jeff. "We all had to shuck walnuts as soon as we were old enough. It was a family project." By 11 years of age, Jeff went into business for himself, mowing neighbors' lawns. "I was always working," continued Jeff. "I stayed out of trouble as a kid, because I didn't have any idle time."

Jeff's work ethic came from his father. "Dad worked hard for what we had," related Jeff. "As kids, we'd be watching television; and when Dad would come home so tired from work, we'd quickly turn off the TV and act as though we'd been cleaning house or something. Though Dad didn't expect it, we felt guilty if we weren't busy, too."

While on summer breaks during college, Jeff started a condenser cleaning company with his brother Matt ... and was earning \$20 per hour, while most other college students made \$3 an hour. Thus, confirming his entrepreneurial tendencies. One question Jeff asks his successful business clients is, "How old were you when you first started working for money?" They usually started very young.

Jeff's family was close. Always doing something together, such as camping at PG&E campgrounds or working on the walnut orchard. Jeff has an older sister, Lynne, who is a medical doctor, younger brother Matt, and younger sister Nanci, who also is in the medical field. Through family activities, athletic participation and adopting the proper work ethic, Jeff gained confidence and developed a positive spirit. In fact, Jeff said, "I'd rather be around someone who is *pretending to be positive* ... than someone who is *sincerely negative!*"

This attitude gave Jeff positive expectations for his future. Upon graduation from college in 1977 with a degree in marketing, Jeff had 16 job interviews.

He joined Guardian Life, because he knew that in the insurance business success was in his hands. "Guardian was a mutual company and a strong boot camp for someone just joining the industry," stated Jeff. "And my co-General Agents became important mentors."

Mentors Stress Education and Positive Attitude

Matt Kokkonen, a former General Agent with the Guardian, was Jeff's initial educational mentor. He encouraged Jeff and supported his efforts to learn. Matt emphasized the need for time and commitment to education. He taught Jeff that the more agents know, the more prospects will seek them out. "The greatest form of prospecting," commented Jeff, "is when qualified prospects *call you*, because their accountant or attorney advised them to do so. I've learned that if you have the necessary knowledge and build a successful financial planning service, the clients will be there." Jeff currently holds the designations of Chartered Life Underwriter (CLU), Chartered Financial Consultant (ChFC), Certified Financial Planner (CFP), the Masters of Science in Financial Services from the American College (MSFS), and will complete his second masters degree in May from the College for Financial Planning.

Matt's co-General Agent was Jack Smith, who hired Jeff from a college interview. He was and continues to be one of Jeff's cheerleaders, always there to give support and encouragement.

Jack left Guardian to join Central Life and start his own agency. Jeff eventually followed and joined Jack's agency and Central Life in February of 1982. "I moved to Central Life, because it offered me growth opportunity," remarked Jeff. "My Aunt Frances LaCrone (a family friend) warned me not to be content being a big fish in a little fish bowl, and she was right. In this industry, 20 percent of the people do 80 percent of the business. Just look at your own agency. How many are at Leaders' Club and President's Cabinet? They are the successful people that I can learn from." Jeff always is looking for people who are doing more

or doing something different than him. He sees them as fellow professionals with whom he can effectively network.

Jack is not the only cheerleader in Jeff's career. His family plays an important part in his success, too. "I have a family of cheerleaders," said Jeff. "I have three lovely daughters and a wife who have given me support and have been tolerant throughout the trials and tribulations of growing my practice." Jeff's daughters are Summer, who is 13 years; Jennifer, who is 11, and Kara, who is 9.

He met wife Pam in his sophomore year in college. They married in 1977. "At conventions, she's on the *varsity shopping team* with Cindy Bell [the wife of Baxter Agency's Tommy Bell]," laughed Jeff. "I don't think anyone loves to shop as much as those two."

It also has been noticed at conventions that Jeff and Pam love to dance. "In high school," explained Jeff, "everyone had to take eight weeks of ballroom dancing every year. They even forced us *macho* football players to dance. I actually liked it, because it gave me a chance to meet girls. Then in college, Pam and I even had the chance to teach dance classes to fellow classmates!"

For New Starters

Jeff's advice to new agents is to "dive in the deep end. Don't sit in the shallow water and put your toe in. Dive in and make a commitment — or you'll never make it."

The American College's Steve Leimberg once wrote Jeff, *'Best of Luck with your Estate Planning clients ... All you need is care and competence.'*

Explained Jeff, "If you care, they will feel it; and if you're competent, they'll know that, too." Jeff adds that the need for commitment, which clients also will know if it doesn't exist.

Jeff also advises that *all agents* — young or seasoned — should approach their work as a business person. His mission statement is *to provide competent and caring estate, financial and investment planning services to the financially blessed*. Additionally, Jeff has borrowed and



The Forrest Family Five on a winter outing at Lake Tahoe.

modified a one-liner from the movie **A Field of Dreams ... Build it, and they will come**. Jeff believes that you can establish a value-added financial planning practice that automatically attracts new clients — unsolicited.

Agents should have an organizational system with which to operate their practices. Jeff is sold on the Franklin System, "How can anyone in this industry be successful without such a system?"

Last, agents with growing practices should hire professional office staff with care. "Getting the right office manager can allow you to make quantum leaps in your production," concluded Jeff. "My office manager, Peggy Gosmeyer, views her position as a career. She's studying for her Certified Financial Planner's designation and is licensed in both securities and insurance. Without her, I wouldn't be as successful as I am today."