



# Ann Bedsole

## Alabama Timber Titan



White Smith, far right

Ann Bedsole was born in 1930 to White and Sybil Smith.

*“My father was one of the people who began the Alabama Forestry Association. He was the second president, I believe,” said Ann.*

White Smith was part of the Southern Pine Inspection Bureau. The organization met each year in New Orleans. One year, he was elected President and asked to give a speech and took Ann with him. “He took me to New Orleans, which was a wonderful thing to have happen no matter how old you are. I don’t even remember how old I was at the time, but I do remember that he made a speech in New Orleans and I was very proud of my dad,” she recalled.

*(continued on p28)*



## EDUCATION AND LAND MANAGEMENT CAREER

When Ann was sixteen years old, she attended Fairfax Hall boarding school in Waynesboro, Virginia. She graduated in 1948 and then went to the University of Alabama, which Ann quickly decided she didn't like and went home. "After that I spent a year at the University of Denver because my aunt wanted me to move out there with her and she was going to study library science and become a librarian. I went to art school and absolutely loved it. I was fascinated with it," said Ann.

Ann married Palmer Bedsole in 1958. Palmer became the president of Bedsole Land & Timber Company after his uncle passed away. When Ann's father White passed away in 1964, Ann and her sister split his company, the White Smith Land Company, each taking ownership of half. Palmer managed the couple's half of the business until he died in 2006, then Ann took over the leadership of the company. "I love the land company! I have a good manager - a really good manager - his name is Dick Creel. I also have a good farm manager named Charles Goldman. This lets me be a farmer and head of the land company, and be close to the woods."

Dick became manager in 2006. He started with the company when he was in high school. The company has grown over the years, and while the staff has gotten smaller the company has grown. Ann explains, "Three full-time people and one part-time person do everything, and they manage more now than they did before. We've added land to the company. When I became president of the company, I said, 'What is our goal? What do we want to do?' All the directors said we should try to enlarge the company, get more land, and that is what we've done." Creel manages all the day-to-day activities of the company such as sales, planting and administration, but Ann is very involved in the operations. "I don't get out in the woods as much as I used to. I would go see everything we thought about buying or did buy either before or right after the sale. I haven't the last two years, but I know everything that he is doing, we talk a lot. Dick is just a wonderful person," she continued.

Ann may not go into the woods as much as she used to, but she spent a good amount of time in them as a child learning what she could from her dad. "When I was really young, like fifteen, he was trying to teach me to scale logs. I was not very good at it. I never got the hang of it, but I did try." That is another reason she says it is important to have a good manager; someone



who is willing to work with you and try to teach you while they manage. "He knows about forestry and I used to enjoy going and looking at the trees and finding out what he thinks is a good buy and what he thinks is good timberland and what is not good timberland. It's interesting and it's important for me to know. I enjoy learning. I was beginning to feel like I could tell how old a tree was, and the last time I rode around with him, I would say, 'This track is 14 years old,' and he'd say, 'No this is super-good quality land - these trees are 10-12 years old.' Well, you know you have to take all those things into consideration. It's just a learning experience and I am fortunate to have a good teacher," she said.

## LEGISLATIVE CAREER

In 1978, Ann decided she wanted to help make Alabama a better state and ran for the State Legislature. "I guess I ran for the same reason that I hope most people run, to make the state better and make the community I live in better through working in the legislature. I saw a need for representation for Mobile. I thought I could do as good a job as the current representatives. So that is what inspired me. You think, this needs to be done and it isn't getting done right, maybe I can do it better. I had a lot to learn. You really do have to believe, this is kind of a calling and I feel like I've got something that I can do and make life better." she explained. Ann said that her father also had some influence on her decision to run.

*"My father was instrumental in starting the Republican Party. The year he died, they dedicated the state convention to him and had a big picture of him in the program. So you know he got me very interested in politics. He had always supported candidates and been involved in politics and I had supported candidates too, sometimes his and sometimes not his. It made for interesting dinner conversations."*

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Ann reported to the Alabama State House of Representatives in 1979 and four years later was elected to the Alabama State Senate, where she served three terms. As a Senator, she chaired the Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Committee. "Nobody in the legislature cared about agriculture; almost no one farmed or was in the timber business. So, I got to be chairman of that committee and it was a glorious time for me. I could work with the Department of Agriculture, the Forestry Association, and the Conservation Department," she said.

While she enjoyed working on the committee, her time in the Senate was not always pleasant. "In the beginning they were hostile. Not only was I a Republican, but I was a woman, and one old guy said, 'I hope you don't take anything personally, but the truth is, we never wanted women in here,'" she said. Ann even told a story about how they held a special election just to get rid of her and

the other two Republican Senators who had been elected in 1982. "They said the redistricting was not done correctly and required a new election to be held. While they were working on it, I worried they were going to put me completely into Washington County and I thought I would lose the election if they did. I went up to the microphone and said, 'I will tell you one thing, if you try to take Washington County out of my district, you're going to have me to fight. I'll stand here until the cows come home.' Of course, they pulled my district right out of Washington County. They took it all away. I had 10% of the vote in Washington County during the first election. They said I tricked them; I had to. It wasn't so hard. When the election was over, they had four Republicans and two women. That is the opposite of what they were trying to do. From then on, things were not as hard, everyone was nicer, and the Republicans were treated almost equally with very little partisanship." *(continued on p30)*



Top Left: Ann Bedsole with Smokey the Bear and Bill Moody.

Top Right: Tom Kelly and a Scott Paper employee in the Delta looking at the old clear cut.

Bottom: Dr. Wilson Gaillard and a Corps of Engineers Official - naming Gaillard Island



## ALABAMA FOREST RESOURCES CENTER

With guidance from Bill Moody, I established the Alabama Resources Center, a stand-alone organization to promote the interests of forestry. The organization was designed to respond to the current needs in forestry. The first action we took was to produce, with much help from the Forestry Commission, a Fourth Forest Study. Today, the Center is engaged in land conservation easements.

## ALABAMA SCHOOL OF MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCE

In the late 1980's, Governor George Wallace read about a school for exceptionally intelligent students. He asked Ann to look into it. "I spent about two years researching these schools. Some wonderful leaders in the movement came to Montgomery and talked to me and talked to anyone else who was interested. The Mobile delegation was interested, as was Mobile United, a civic organization" she said. However, Wallace's dream didn't die when he left office. The Mobile delegation continued to promote the school and push to bring a similar one to Alabama. "In 1988, I filed a bill in the Senate and Steve McMillan filed in the House. All the house members from our delegation were cosponsors on the bill. The bill passed out of the Senate. When the bill passed the House and came back to the Senate, we passed it immediately

with one dissenting vote. You know, we may have had one dissenting vote, from a Senator who thought the school should be in Birmingham, but we passed it."

Ann had one year and \$100,000 to get the school up and running. A committee was formed to start the process. First thing to do was find a suitable location. The first contract on a building fell through and we scrambled to find another building. Ann said, "So here we are, we have the clock ticking and the only thing they could find was a vacant Baptist church. We bought the former site of Dauphin Way Baptist Church for twelve million dollars. We started a foundation. The foundation only supports the school. We all went down and signed a \$12 million dollar loan. I'll never forget how scared I was to do that, and how relieved I was when they said they finally paid it off."

Once the building was purchased, renovations began. "We had to rebuild all the buildings. They had four- and five-story buildings of Sunday School classrooms. We made one of those a dormitory. We had to have boys and girls in the same dormitory on separate floors. We had classes in another building, and we were fixing the other buildings on the other side. At one point, we had to issue hard hats to the students. We couldn't stop construction and wait until summer, we had to go right through," Ann explained. There are still some aspects of the old church at the school, and the current library is named after her, the Ann Smith Bedsole Library.

## THE SMITH FOUNDATION

Ann's mother Sybil established the Sybil H. Smith Charitable Trust in 1982. When Sybil died in 1993, Ann became the chairman. Ann said, "When my mother died, she only had one request. She asked that we look after homeless women. So we do." The name of the Trust was later changed to the Sybil Smith Foundation. The Trust built a transitional housing facility for homeless women and children. Single women and women with children were taken into the Sybil Smith Family Village. The women can stay for up to two years to be able to get back on their feet. It is run by the Dumas Wesley Community Center. Before the women could enter the Village, they had to be sober and willing to live by the rules of the Village and referred by other agencies. The women are taught how to take care of their families, how to earn a living and how to care for the money they earn. "We want to make sure they have a job when they leave us. They either have to finish school, get a GED or take some kind of special training. One of the early residents studied welding. She is truly a success story. She comes to some of our fundraisers and tells her story," Ann explained. "She now has a new home, a new car and, as she says, 'flowers in my yard.'"

The apartments were originally funded by the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). "One day, the Director of Dumas Wesley was informed that HUD would no longer be funding transitional housing facilities. HUD was changing funding to a rapid rehousing model which focuses on just getting people into houses. HUD suggested that the Village convert to rapid rehousing then it could still get their funding. The Village would also have to accept men and discontinue background checks." Ann recalled. This was not acceptable to Dumas Wesley or the Sybil Smith Foundation. The Foundation is now working toward building an endowment to replace lost HUD funding. To date, about half of the necessary funds have been secured to continue the successful program for women and children.

## PERSONAL LIFE

Ann celebrated her 90th birthday this year. She continues to run the White Smith Land Company, as well as the Smith Foundation. She has three children, seven grandchildren and one great grandchild. ▲