SMITH, Morton

Additional information on some obituaries appears in Death Notices

Morton Smith, businessman, fund-raiser for John Chafee

PROVIDENCE — Morton Smith, an insurance executive who was a behind-the-scenes force in Rhode Island politics, died yesterday at home. He would have been 79 tomorrow.



From 1964 until recently, Mr. Smith was a chief fund-raiser for Republican John H. Chafee's campaigns for governor and the Senate. He had a golden touch, with individual events — sometimes starring celebrities like then-Vice President George Bush — bringing in as much as $200,000.

Mr. Smith said, "It's so easy when you've got a guy like Chafee who has some nice committee assignments and who does a nice job and is interested."

Mr. Smith, of 65 Hazard Ave., was the husband of Doris (King) Smith.

He was president and chief executive officer of Morton Smith Inc. and Medway Marine Corp. from 1950 to 1990.

Mr. Smith was an accomplished pianist who was active in a wide range of cultural and civic organizations. He was a life trustee of Miriam Hospital and an honorary trustee of the Rhode Island Philharmonic Orchestra.

He was a trustee of Bryant College, the Rhode Island Arts Foundation in Newport and the International Tennis Hall of Fame. He was a former trustee of Butler Hospital and the National Conference of Christians and Jews, and a former president of the Providence Preservation Society. He was a member of Temple Beth-El.

He was a member of the Clambake Club, the Hope Club and Bailey's Beach.

Mr. Smith was a 1937 graduate of Brown University.

A lifelong Providence resident, he was a son of the late Joseph and Sarah Smith.

Besides his wife, he leaves a daughter, Susan Levin of Canaan, Conn.; a sister, Leona Sherman of Providence, and two grandchildren.

A funeral service will be held at noon today at Temple Beth-El, Orchard and Butler Avenues, Providence. Burial will be in Swan Point Cemetery, Providence.

PJ-B 6-3-1994

SMITH, Morton

June 2, 1994. Beloved husband of Doris (King) Smith. Residence 65 Hazard Ave. Dear father of Susan Levin, Caanan, CT. Devoted grandfather of Benjamin and Hannah. Funeral Service 12 Noon Friday at TEMPLE BETH-EL, Orchard at Butler Aves. Relatives and friends are invited. In lieu of flowers contributions may be made to American Cancer Society. Memorial Observance at his late residence Friday 2-4 p.m. and Sunday 2-5 p.m. Arrangements by MOUNT SINAI MEMORIAL CHAPEL.

Mort Smith played game of politics without an angle



M. CHARLES BAKST

SMITH, Morton

The temptation is to say that Morton Smith, the insurance mogul who raised millions of dollars for John Chafee's political campaigns and who died yesterday, was the last of a breed. Except I didn't know anyone else like him.

Over the course of a generation, Smith stood backstage at the right hand of power and, as near as can be determined, never sought anything for himself.

He was wealthy — with a flair to his personal style and to the political fund-raisers he would stage.

He was the agent here for Lloyd's of London, would ride in a Rolls-Royce, fly on the Concorde. He had front-row seats at Fenway Park.

He'd get a kick out of calling to brief me about a coming Chafee affair. There'd be roast beef, turkey and baby lamb chops, and ice-sculpture decorations.

"Mort enjoyed going first class," Senator Chafee, a Republican, said yesterday. He said Smith's view was: "If they're paying $150 for a ticket, they're entitled to a lot more than a piece of cheese and a glass of wine, and make it an affair where they're going to remember it as a good time and not everybody lining up six deep around one bar. Give them extra, and plenty of it."

But the flashy persona was only part of the Smith profile. Bruce Selya, the federal appeals court judge who was in the inner circle of Chafee's campaigns for governor and senator, said Smith also was intensely private and could be content to shut himself in a room and play the piano for hours.

Republican Smith was also a friend of Democratic Gov. Bruce Sundlun, who said yesterday that what made Smith special was "his calmness, his directness, his honesty."

Sundlun declared, "He [illegible] fooled himself or t[illegible] body else."

In politics, almost everyone has an angle. But those who knew Smith say that wasn't his game.

"In every dealing I had with him," said Chafee, "I always knew that any advice or recommendations he'd make to me were solely in my best interests — he had no side ax to grind."

Selya said, "I honest to God never heard him ask once for anything for himself. He didn't want to be on a commission. He didn't ask for help for a client."

In recent months, Smith, 78 and suffering from cancer, took no formal role in the senator's current reelection drive, but Chafee said that they would speak periodically, and that Smith would warn against overconfidence. "He said, 'Don't take any of it lightly.' "

Although Chafee said Smith never sought anything for himself, as outgoing governor he did once do something for his pal: He gave him a coveted low-number license plate, 89. Smith, who put it on his Rolls, said years later that a man once offered him $15,000 for the plate. "I told him not to bother me," he sniffed. He said the offer insulted him because the plate had been a gift from Chafee. "You don't give a gift away," Smith said.

If Smith had a gift of his [illegible] perhaps it was, as S[illegible] he had "a p[illegible] done[illegible]

PJ-B 6-3-1994