

MEDIA RELEASE

18 March, 2016

Last casting call for plaster technician

AFTER more than 40 years of working at Toowoomba Hospital, plaster technician Clive Smith officially retired this month.

Mr Smith forged a career in setting broken bones and has become well known not only at the local hospital, but also across the state for his honed skills and knowledge.

He trained during an era when orthopaedic surgeons provided tuition to anyone who showed an interest in learning.

“Plaster casting has become a field on its own,” Mr Smith said. “It needs to be done well, and if it’s not, deformities can arise.”

Mr Smith started his working life at Toowoomba Hospital in the mid-70s as a wardsman.

“In those days, you did whatever needed to be done,” he said.

“There was gardening, driving the delivery truck, collecting laundry, cleaning or working in the mother’s hospital helping ladies in and out of their cars.

“When you worked night duty, there was always plenty to do like getting the stoves fired up in the kitchen and security work.”

Mr Smith also spent many years working in the hospital’s mortuary alongside pathologists including the late Dr Roger Guard and the hospital’s first female pathologist, Dr Inara Strungs.

It was during these years, that Mr Smith came to see the best, and sometimes the worst, of life.

“It was a varied job, and it wasn’t always easy,” he said.

“The injuries and deaths caused by car crashes and drink driving were, at times, horrible. When seat belts and drink driving laws were introduced, there was a marked change.

“The mayhem mostly subsided. You now don’t see many people getting killed after they have crashed doing 60 kilometres an hour.”

After many years working in the mortuary and across the hospital, an opportunity for Mr Smith and his brother, Keith, opened in the orthopaedic outpatients’ department.

Both took up positions as plaster technicians and collectively amassed a wealth of knowledge and experience that is unrivalled across the state.

In their later years, they started sharing this experience through formalised programs with the Darling Downs Hospital and Health Service's training provider, the Cunningham Centre, the University of Queensland and the School of Rural and Remote Medicine.

To this day, the pair is known as the "Smith Brothers"; a nice change from being known as the "Brothers Grimm" during their mortuary days.

"Looking back there have been so many patients, but there is one lady who will always stick in my mind," Mr Smith said.

"We looked after her about six months. She was an artist.

"She told us that one day, when she was nearly better, that she was going to paint a picture for us. And she did and it's still there, framed in the fracture clinic."

Toowoomba Hospital acting general manager Brett Mendezona wished Mr Smith well in his retirement.

"Clive and his brother Keith are well liked and respected across the hospital," Mr Mendezona said.

"Collectively they have more than 80 years' experience.

"Their skills and knowledge were of great benefit to staff and patients at the hospital. And true to their good nature, both have shared these talents with the next generation of plaster technicians who are now working at the hospital."

The Darling Downs Hospital and Health Service farewelled Keith Smith in October 2015, and Clive joined his brother in retirement on 4 March.

Clive now looks forward to travelling Australia with his wife of 43 years, Anne.

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