

Faidra Smith, B.A. English & Allied Language Arts, 1991

By Sarah K. Miller

Public Information Coordinator, Hilton Head Island

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Faidra Smith graduated *summa cum laude* in 1991 from the English department with a BA in English and allied language arts. She also earned her secondary educational certification. Her first job out of school was teaching English, which she did for four years at both the middle school and high school level in public and private schools in South Carolina. While teaching, she obtained her paralegal degree. “At one time, I thought about going to law school but was not sure if I could financially pay for it on my own, so I decided to go to college classes at night to earn my paralegal degree while I was teaching. As a paralegal student, I had to write numerous legal pleadings and documents, so my degree in English provided me with a strong writing background required for drafting of legal pleadings.”

She used this degree to work as a real estate paralegal starting in 1995 in South Carolina. “I remained there until I was hired as the Town of Hilton Head Island Paralegal in 1996,” Smith said in her alumni survey. “As the Town Paralegal, I utilized my writing skills in drafting legal contracts, ordinances, resolutions, proclamations, and various real estate legal documents. In 1997, I passed a 2-day legal exam administered by the National Association of Legal Assistants and earned the title of a Certified Legal Assistant.” Smith believes that her English degree helped her by providing her with a strong set of written and verbal communication skills that helped her adapt to all of her professional career changes. “The Town of Hilton Head Island prides itself on providing excellent customer service. In public information, I utilize written communication, interpersonal communication, and verbal communication daily. I must adapt my communication skills to the needs of my customer (whether internal or external).”

Smith now works as the Administration Manager/Public Information Coordinator for Hilton Head Island. “Over the years, my job responsibilities at the Town of Hilton Head Island began to evolve, and due to my writing and speech communications background, I transitioned more from legal work to public information and administration. In public information, I perform the daily activities of a community information office. I draft and review correspondence, press releases, commendations, proclamations, newsletters, etc.; provide information to the public and media; and process town-wide Freedom of Information requests.” She manages, oversees, and supervises the administrative functions of the Administration Department, which also includes performing paralegal, community information, legislative liaison, and supervisory duties. “I write a great deal in my current job,” Smith continued. “I write letters, news articles, press releases, speeches, proclamations, resolutions, and ordinances. The skills I achieved through my English degree have contributed greatly to my success in my current job.”

Smith suggests that current students should place a focus on the development of their academic skills. “I would suggest to study hard and take as many upper level writing classes as possible. The writing skills will be valuable in almost any position one gets hired for after college. Keep your mind open to all possibilities and explore all options. There are many opportunities after college. You just have to be willing to step out of your comfort zone. The possibilities of what you can do when you are truly determined are endless.”

