

# 2006 Washingtonians of the Year: William C. Smith

By [Leslie Milk](#), [Ellen Ryan](#)

“It’s great to take part in children’s lives and broaden people’s horizons.”



Photograph by [Matthew Worden](#)

Nearly half the District’s children live in Southeast. Some 7,000 live within a mile of one spot. If someone were to create on that spot a gym, a school, ballet, social services, art, music, job training, college classes, and healthcare, those families would burst through the doors.

Someone did: Christopher Smith, CEO of William C. Smith & Co., the District’s largest residential-management firm.

At first, Smith’s vision was a small community center for a renovated apartment complex. But “even the pool was serving only half the kids who wanted in,” Smith noticed. “We decided to open it up.”

He started talking to potential partners: the Levine School of Music, Children’s Hospital. “Good news travels fast,” says Smith. “Next thing we knew, we had the Washington Ballet, the Corcoran, Washington Middle School for Girls, the Boys and Girls Clubs. An all-star cast.”

Revised plans for 30,000 square feet were suddenly too small. Nearly that much went to Covenant House alone; the nonprofit offers at-risk youth everything from legal services to life-skills and job counseling.

Fifteen months ago, Smith and partners unveiled a gleaming, 110,000-square-foot facility in Anacostia named Town Hall Education Arts & Recreation Campus. In its first year, they expected to see 800 children and adults. Instead, they got 2,000 a week.

Neighborhood groups book up the meeting space. More than 30 schools host graduation in the theater. This year’s Nutcracker premiered there. “The synergy is incredible,” says Smith. “The ballet held a dance camp; they did a field trip to the Kennedy Center. Back here at the Corcoran, the kids drew images of what they’d seen. Then the gallery on the first floor displayed them.”

New stores and housing are sprouting nearby. Parents are furthering their education at Trinity University’s branch. The Double Nickels seniors group volunteers with programs throughout. “The children of this neighborhood know that THEARC is a safe haven,” says Jennifer Gibbs-Phillips, former head of the Washington Middle School for Girls. Thanks to Smith, all of Anacostia is learning that, too.