

Stu Smith

Cocoa Beach, Florida



CitruSolution Carpet Cleaning of Brevard County

Learn about Florida Entrepreneur Stu Smith:

With his father in the Air Force, Stu Smith, owner of CitruSolution Carpet Cleaning of Brevard County, spent his childhood between Vandenberg Air Force Base, near Lompoc, CA, and Patrick Air Force Base, located between Cocoa Beach and Satellite Beach, on Florida's Space Coast. After finishing high school, he returned to Brevard County where Smith did two years at Brevard Community College before following in his father's footsteps. However, he chose to enlist in the US Army. After six years on active duty, Smith left the service to pursue new opportunities.

"When I left the Army, I was at Ft. Lewis, WA," he said. "I finished my graduate degree through Seattle University and went to work for the State Department of Veteran Affairs. After the VA, I worked for the community college system in workforce training. My wife, who was also in the Army, left active duty two years after I did and she was recruited

for a job in Atlanta. We made the move east during the summer of 1996."

After moving to Atlanta, Smith worked in the staffing industry, before being hired by a client to be their Business Unit VP of HR. He then ventured out to start his own consultancy focused on strategic planning.

From the time he left the military, he stayed connected with his fellow Veterans helping them transition from military to civilian careers. It was through a Veteran's networking group that Smith met Paul Romanick, the original creator of the CitruSolution concept.

"Paul and I met around 2009," he said. "At the time, he had already created the solution, the trademark and the cleaning process. He started off as a licensed co-op. He would license you the ability to use the trademarked material and then you'd purchase the supplies through the co-op. I had consulted with the South East Association of Franchisors and became very familiar with the franchise business model. I encouraged Paul to set up CitruSolution Carpet Cleaning co-op as a franchise that could be marketed to Veterans to allow them to start their own successful business after leaving the service. In appreciation for my effort, he made me a deal and sold me a five franchise area for the price of one. In the summer of 2012, I became the proud owner of CitruSolution Carpet Cleaning of Brevard County."

Smith and his wife, Janice, moved back to Brevard County and started building the business right away. The plan was to be the ad hoc representative and to sell the concept to fellow veterans. When things didn't go exactly as planned, Smith was forced to make a decision.

"At one point, I was considering closing the business," he said. "That's when my son, Connor, came to me and said, 'Dad, let me be the guy doing the work in the field and you run the business'. I agreed and he's been my primary technician, and partial owner, ever since. It was a muddy start, but after learning to properly manage the cash flow and getting the right people in place, one thing led to another and the business grew."

CitruSolution Carpet Cleaning focuses on doing three things very well.

They clean carpets, area rugs and upholstery. The active cleaning ingredients in the patented solution come from citrus fruits, which help to address some of the pitfalls with traditional cleaning such as soap residue and long drying times. As Smith shared, by utilizing a low moisture botanical-based carpet cleaning process, people get exactly what they want: less chemicals in their home. Unlike other commercial cleaners, CitruSolution Carpet Cleaning further distinguishes itself by including all services in an "exactimate", a price that does not change when they are in a customer's home or business.

"Regardless of what we experience when we get to the home or business, the quoted price stays the same," Smith said. "We don't try to up-sell while we're there. Any additional spot cleaners or add-ons are included with the service. We're also one of the few cleaners that will come back out to redo a job, that didn't produce the desired results, at no charge. We have a true service guarantee that says we'll work as hard as we need to in order to meet your expectations. Most of our clients have a certain level of service expectation that we're able to meet or exceed."

Since starting the business, Smith has learned that managing your time, client expectations, priorities and demands and deciding what to do yourself and what to pay someone else to do, are perhaps the most difficult parts of the job. As Smith shared, at some point you can create more value by doing one thing over another. When you've identified that task, it's time to find someone else to do it.

Regardless of the challenges or obstacles, Smith really enjoys providing his clients with exceptional service. He joked that having someone at a networking event tell him he's the greatest carpet cleaner in the world is what it's all about. The business has allowed him to build a solid reputation, get involved and connected with the community and provide his son with an opportunity to help run a business. As a founding board member of the Space Coast Association of Veteran Owned Businesses, Smith also takes pride in the fact that he has and will continue to focus on helping Veterans and Veteran owned businesses.

What advice does Smith have for aspiring entrepreneurs? "First of all, running a small business is not for the faint of heart," he said. "Do not do it unless you're fully committed. Don't turn a hobby into a business either. Be serious and committed. Before you move forward with an idea, find someone who's doing it and/or has done it and spend some time with them. Ask questions, be a critical thinker and challenge every single assumption. Lastly, it's important to remember that you can never go wrong by serving others. Paul coined a phrase that I love. He said, 'Be of greater value to the community than the products and services you provide them'."

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