The Outstanding Achiever for this issue is Bennie Smith who we have selected as the 2011 Delmarva Black Businessman of the Year. He is the Chairman and CEO of Bennie Smith Funeral Homes, based in Dover, DE with 14 locations in Delaware and Eastern Shore Maryland and Virginia. Mr. Smith has grown his business across Delmarva making it a point to acquire vacant buildings, renovate them, and make them a facility that contributes to the beauty of the communities. He has also made it a point to give back to the community establishing scholarship programs for area high school seniors including one at UMES.

Born on a rural farm in Faceville, Georgia, Bennie Smith has risen from humble beginnings into a successful and caring businessman setting the standards for funeral homes across this country. The son of Earlie and Lera Smith, and the youngest of six children, he attended a four-room schoolhouse until the eighth grade and a high school with sub-standard facilities. To assist in supporting his family, he worked a full-time job for the local Black funeral home his junior and senior years of high school. Early in life, he knew he wanted to own a business, but it wasn't until he worked for the funeral home did he decide he would one day own and operate his own funeral home business.

After a tour in the Armed Forces, Bennie studied at the John A. Gupton School of Mortuary Science in Nashville, Tennessee and worked full-time until his graduation. Then, he enrolled at the University of Minnesota and earned his BS Degree in Mortuary Science a year later. Again, he was a full-time student working a full-time job. Earning this Degree enabled him to become licensed to operate in any state without restrictions.

His first full-time position as a Mortician was for one year at Hawkins Funeral Home in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania from 1972 to 1973. In 1973, he moved to Dover, Delaware and worked for the Reese Funeral Home. While working for Reese Funeral Home, he earned a Master's Degree in Counseling at the University of Delaware.

Smith founded Bennie Smith Funeral Homes in 1982, establishing a chain of 14 funeral homes. This was a first for any African American Funeral Director in the Country. To date, 12 of those establishments are still in operation and two new locations in Virginia were opened recently. Currently, he has one of the largest African American owned operated funeral homes in the Country and has over 75 employees and contractors. He is licensed to practice funeral services in Delaware, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and New York.

Smith has invested in other businesses as well. He was the owner of the largest African American-owned fleet of school buses on the Eastern Shore of Maryland and Delaware when he operated 35 buses for the Capitol and Smyrna School Districts. He is the past owner of the Ebony Restaurant and Lounge in Dover and a Real Estate investor with extensive property holdings. He offers limousine services to the public and owns three florists.

Among his numerous awards and recognitions are being awarded an honorary Doctorate by the University of Maryland Eastern Shore, being named Delaware Minority Business Person of the Year, and being appointed to the board of Trustees of Delaware State University.

Mr. Smith and his wife, Shirley, reside in Dover, Delaware. They are the parents of two daughters and two grandchildren.