

State Title In the Bag

U.S. Sacking Contest Next for BA Teen-Ager

By Mark Lee
World Farm Editor

The Price Mart supermarket in Broken Arrow owns bragging rights as home of the best bagger in Oklahoma.

Michael P. Smith, 16, won the Oklahoma Grocers Association Best Bagger Championship on Sunday in Guthrie.

He won a trophy, a \$1,000 scholarship and a free trip to Orlando, Fla., in February to represent his store and Oklahoma in the national grocery sacking contest.

"I'm the last person our customers see," Smith said. "Parting with money is a painful thing, so I try to make it fun. I try to make the customers laugh before they leave."

Supermarkets spend millions of dollars to please shoppers with the right product mix, economical prices, convenient locations, handy store layouts and advertising campaigns. But despite those efforts, grocers still depend on teen-age sackers to leave customers with a final good or bad impression.

That's why savvy supermarkets take an interest in what otherwise appears to be a mundane task performed by their most junior employees. That interest extends to supporting competitions and scholarship awards for sacking skills.

And a skill it is: People don't like mashed bread, crushed fruit or smashed eggs, but a broken food jar is Smith's greatest fear.

"Once, in February, I had just gotten contacts and couldn't see too well. I reached for a bottle of Worcestershire sauce and somehow it slipped — the bottle crashed on the floor. That was a real mess," Smith said.

In the contest, Smith was timed on speed and judged on the number of sacks used and how accurately he placed items in a sack. The trick, he said, is to use the items to build a foundation, build walls, fill them out and then fill up the sack. The goal is to stack



World staff photo by Steve Crane

Michael P. Smith shows off the grocery sacking skills at Price Mart.

stuff to eliminate shuffling and create a secure spot for crushable items.

Having one person running the cash register and another bagging the groceries makes check-out chores easier and faster for both workers and customers, Smith said. He's done both duties at the same time, and

it takes twice as long to send shoppers on their way.

"Packing it right makes sure the customer gets home with what they bought. When they get home and take their groceries out of the bag, I want them to be as good as See Bag on Business 6

... Bag

Continued from Business 1
when they took the items off our shelves," he said.

Smith is a senior at Broken Arrow High School, where he is a member of the National Honor Society. His parents are Phil and Jennifer Clemons of Broken Arrow and Steve and Colette Smith of Parsons, Kan.

Smith wants to be a certified public accountant, and the work at Price Mart — his first job — is a way to earn money for college. Smith has been with the grocer for a year and a half.

"They hired me at 15, and they were the only store that would. Price Mart gave me a chance, and I appreciate that," Smith said.

As an expert bagger, does he have a preference for paper or plastic?

"I like plastic, because it has handles. But you can put more in paper," Smith said. "I can put three 2-liter bottles in a paper bag and it won't break, but plastic would probably burst sometime before getting home."

Smith sacks up crown and earns scholarship, Orlando trip

BY MAIA MAXWELL
Education Editor

"Build a foundation, build walls, fill out and fill up."

That may sound like the words of a construction contractor.

But they are the words of the Oklahoma Grocers Association 1995 champion sacker - Michael P. Smith of Broken Arrow.

On the date of his one and one-half year anniversary with Broken Arrow's Price Mart grocery store, Smith won the 1995 Statewide Championship for Oklahoma's Best Bagger.

Oklahoma's Best Bagger Competition identifies the best bagger from each participating retail grocery store that belongs to the Oklahoma Grocers Association.

Each store's winner is sent to compete at the statewide competition, held annually at the Oklahoma Grocers Association Convention.

The competition was held Sept. 24 in Guthrie.

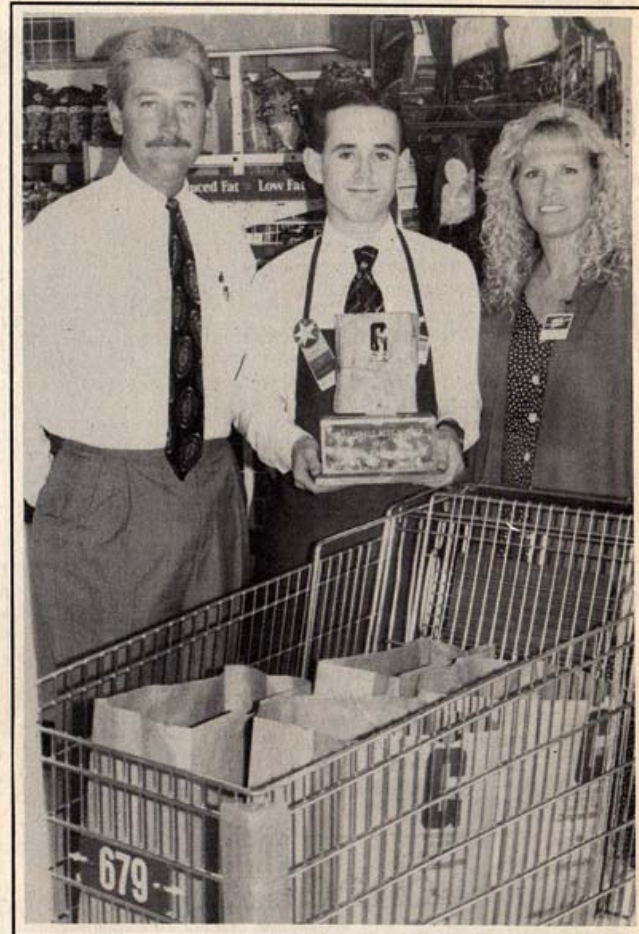
Not only did Michael win a huge trophy for his prowess with a paper sack, eggs, bread and milk, he also won a \$1,000 scholarship and an all-expense paid trip to Orlando to compete in the National Best Bagger Competition in February 1996. A win at that level guarantees him an appearance on the David Letterman Show.

One of the only Broken Arrow Price Mart cashiers to earn four "Star Performer" awards at his store for speed, accuracy, service and responsiveness, Michael was recently promoted from his clerk/cashier position to Pharmacy cashier.

The son of Phil and Jennifer Clemons and Steve and Colette Smith, Michael is a junior honors student at Broken Arrow High School.

He is a member of the National Honor Society and plans to pursue an accounting degree in college.

Michael is also active in his school's Christian Student Union and the Future Business Leaders of America at the Tulsa Technology Center.



BROKEN ARROW'S (and Oklahoma's) best bagger Michael P. Smith shows off his trophy along with Price Mart store manager Jim Buckmaster and office manager Teri Moos. (Ledger photo.)