University of Colorado Regent Lesley Smith spent nearly 30 years as a scientist and educator at CU; she has a son who now attends CU Boulder.

Smith graduated from the University of California Santa Barbara, then earned a Ph.D. at the University of Maryland. While writing her dissertation, she became the first woman aquanaut in the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s underwater research habitat, Aquarius. Only a few women worked at the University of Maryland’s marine labs, and Smith was the only one selected to join the aquanaut team, where she lived underwater and conducted research on coral reefs for a week.

Her CU career began in 1989 with a Visiting Scientist Fellowship at CU Boulder’s Cooperative Institute for Research in the Environmental Sciences (CIRES). She loved working
in the field as a research scientist, but also wanted to share the joy of inquiry-based scientific exploration and discovery with students. She taught an intensive, three-week Lake and Stream Ecology field class at CU’s Mountain Research Station for 10 summers.

At the time of her April 2018 retirement, Smith was associate director of education and outreach for CIRES, the largest research institution at CU. She raised more than $7 million in grant money from the National Science Foundation to bring science alive in classrooms with professional development support for rural and Front Range teachers, and fellowship support for science graduate students to partner with teachers in the Boulder Valley School District. She also directed the Research Experience for Community College Students program, which prepares students from across Colorado to be successful in four-year STEM degree programs.

As a community leader, Smith in 2005 won election to the Boulder Valley School Board, on which she served for eight years.

Smith and her husband, Michael, live in Boulder, where they raised two now-grown children.

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