

# Former PSH student helps make TMI safer

By Steven C. Standridge  
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Gus W. Smith is a hard-working man. He begins his day at 5 a.m. and usually works until 6 p.m. He has been with the same employer for almost 19 years. Smith started as an intern while attending Penn State Harrisburg and worked his way up the ladder.

In fact, he sounds just like most others with a normal job except for one thing: Smith, 36, works at the Three Mile Island nuclear power plant; the site of the worst nuclear power plant scare in American history.

On March 28, 1979, improper maintenance in the plant's cooling system caused the core to overheat. As a result of this partial meltdown, radiation leaked out into the surrounding area. This scared area residents, and many evacuated. The American public was fearful of nuclear energy for years to come.

Smith started out as a utility worker for the plant when he was 18, only five years after the 1979 accident. Smith said the accident had little influence on his desire to work there. "It was scary to live here at the time, but it's something that we all just got used to," Smith said. Smith's family never had a problem with his job. His mother Nancy Smith also worked at Three Mile Island for several years.

Smith chose to work at Three Mile Island because of the educational benefits the plant provides. The plant paid for his education while he worked his way through the ranks. He became an engineer at the plant when he graduated in 1998 with a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering.

Smith's proudest moment came when he was selected to create and man-

age the "Fix It Now" team. He and his team have the responsibility to prevent future accidents from occurring. If any abnormalities occur in the plant's everyday processes, Smith's team responds immediately. "Their job is to be quick and effective. My job is to make sure they have the means to do it," Smith said.

Although Smith feels comfortable with nuclear energy, many Americans are still unsure. Smith said that in the 1980s, people were concerned about the safety of nuclear power, but in the last decade it has shown to be a viable resource. Still, the opinion about nuclear power is split.

Safety became an even larger issue following the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States. Since then, security at Three Mile Island has increased. Plant tours have stopped and access to the facilities is restricted. Now, the National Guard keeps constant watch over the plant. "We are aware of the risk, but we don't dwell on it," Smith said. Smith hopes to one day be the director of a major department.

Continued learning is also important to him. He would like to go back to school to earn his masters. "My education at Penn State was very beneficial. It helped me advance," Smith said. He plans to just let things fall into place and take what comes his way.

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Photo by Steve Standridge

Gus Smith, a PSH graduate, manages the "Fix It Now" team, which works to prevent future TMI accidents.

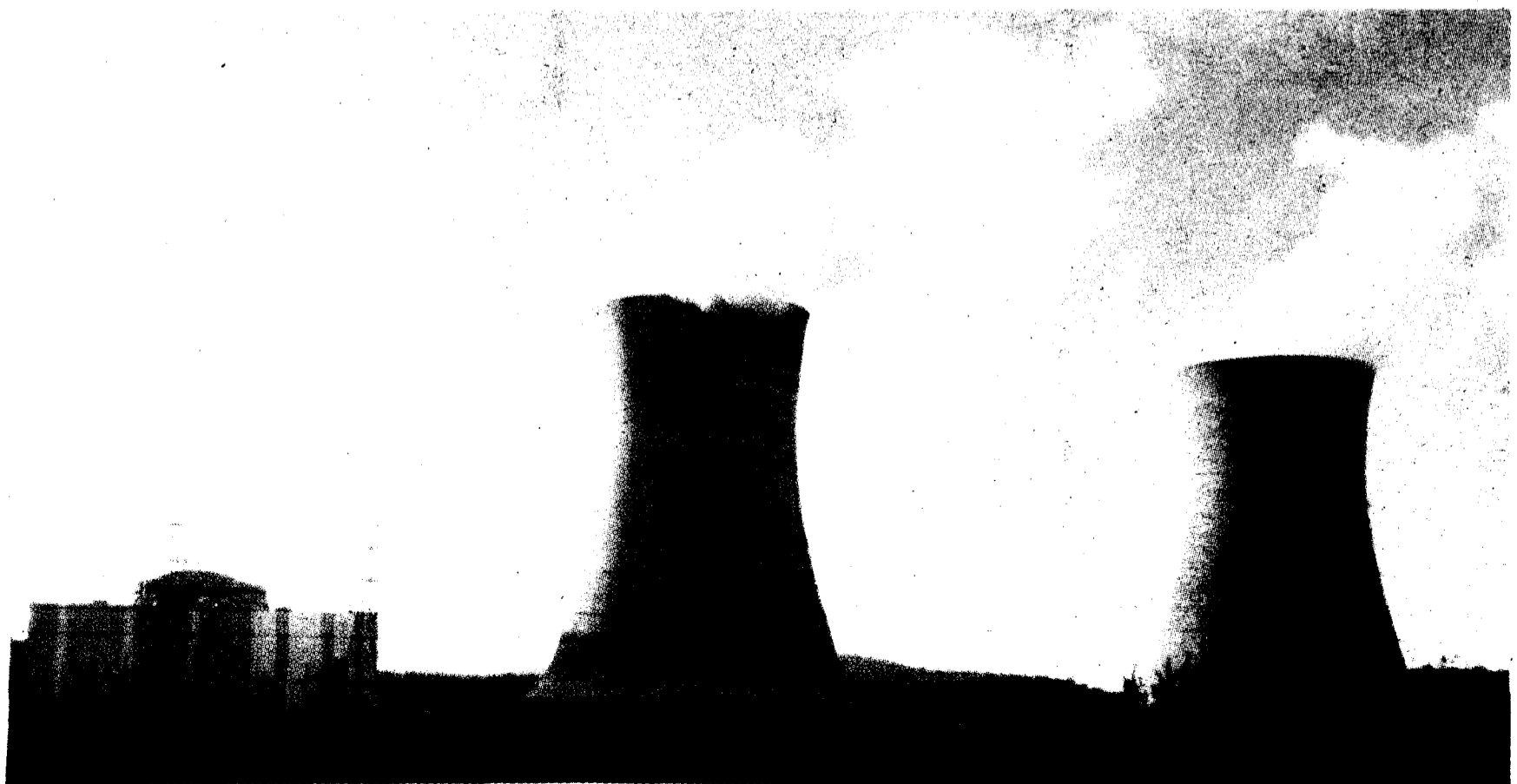


Photo by Steve Standridge

The two main cooling towers at the nuclear power plant on Three Mile Island, which is a couple miles from PSH