

# Cotopaxi owner, SLCC alum Davis Smith recognized for making a difference

By **Ariel Widerburg** - September 30, 2021



*Davis Smith, owner of Cotopaxi, sits in one of his retail stores. Smith received a Distinguished Alumni Award from Salt Lake Community College in 2020. (Ravell Call)*

In 2020, Salt Lake Community College honored Davis Smith with the Distinguished Alumni Award for being a successful entrepreneur who uses that success to do good globally.

"This award meant a lot to me," he said. "The year I spent at Salt Lake Community College is really special to me. It gave me a place to prepare for my education and ended up being a huge stepping stone."



*Davis Smith, founder of Cotopaxi. Smith attended Salt Lake Community College for one year. (Courtesy of Cotopaxi)*

Davis Smith grew up in Latin America, moving to the Dominican Republic from Utah at age four. A few years later, he would move to Puerto Rico, then Ecuador. Growing up in these places, he saw people living in terrible poverty firsthand. Memories of malnourished children lining the streets without clothing followed him back to Utah.

These early experiences instilled in Davis Smith a sense of duty and purpose. The desire to help others served as a compass that would guide him to be a successful entrepreneur and fulfill his mission of helping others.

He is now the owner of Cotopaxi, a prominent outdoor brand that, according to [Outside Business Journal](#), has aided 822,000 people globally and, according to Davis Smith, that number will surpass one million this year. A part of the revenue made from Cotopaxi goes to the Cotopaxi foundation which distributes the money among non-profits focused on alleviating poverty.

While he was a student at SLCC, Davis Smith had the now-retired teacher Curtis Youngman, whose marketing class was transformational for him.

“He was phenomenal. He was such a dynamic teacher. So great at explaining concepts,” Davis Smith said. “A lot of the concepts he taught aided in my success and are concepts I still use to this day.”

Davis Smith attended SLCC for one year before transferring to Brigham Young University, where he met his wife, Asialene Smith.

"We met on a blind date after my sophomore year. We spent the entire summer together. We were engaged quickly and got married by the end of the year," Asialene Smith said.

"We both like change and excitement. So, when he is starting something new, it is always exciting. But I am never nervous because I believe in him," Asialene Smith said about life with the entrepreneur.

After graduating from BYU, Davis Smith co-founded his first business, Spencer Marsden, selling pool tables online.

Even though the business was a success, he did not know how to incorporate his mission to help people. As a result, he decided to sell the business and go back to school. He attended Wharton, earning two master's degrees in an MA and MBA in international studies focusing on Latin America.

After graduating, Davis Smith partnered with his cousin Kimball to address the high price of baby products in Brazil with baby.com.br. However, according to Davis Smith, the business grew very fast, putting a strain on his relationship with Kimball. Ultimately the two had different leadership styles, and Davis Smith would walk away from the business; a harrowing moment for the entrepreneur.

"There have definitely been painful moments and challenging times," Davis Smith said. "But you have to have the courage to push through those challenging times and the rejection that you will receive."

One evening while lying in his bed, considering his next move, Davis Smith suddenly felt inspired and had an overwhelming sense of direction.

"I needed to build an outdoor brand that used its profits to sustainably alleviate poverty. I came up with the name Cotopaxi, named after the volcano near my childhood home in Quito, Ecuador, our slogan Gear for Good, the llama in our logo, and the early concept for what would be later known as the Questival race," Davis Smith said in an article for [Utah Business](#).

Cotopaxi is now one of the most prominent outdoor brands and has helped people in poverty worldwide. Even though Davis Smith is highly successful, he still has a soft spot for SLCC and loves coming and speaking to the students.

"I have visited Harvard and Stanford, but I really love the students at SLCC," Davis Smith said. "I look out at the students and see people who haven't had everything in life handed to them. They have had to overcome some real challenges, and that inspires me."

Davis Smith was recently able to purchase his first business Spencer Marsden back. He converted his first business into a benefit corporation with a similar goal of helping those living in poverty.

“Dream big. Find a way to make an impact. Do something extraordinary,” Davis Smith said, offering advice to SLCC students. “Find a passion you have and find a way to use it to help the lives of others around you. If you do that, you’re going to find happiness and joy.”

# Utah, refugees help each other

By **Morgan Workman** - September 30, 2021



*While the state of Utah will take care of many needs for incoming Afghan refugees, government officials will encourage private citizens to give generously. (Sydney White)*

Utah Gov. Spencer Cox [announced](#) on Sept. 16 that Utah will welcome over 750 Afghan refugees, with the first group expected to arrive as early as October. Salt Lake City expects to be one of the 19 communities [refugees](#) will be resettled into.

“We’re working closely with Utah’s Refugee Services Office, resettlement agencies, humanitarian groups, private sector leaders, Afghans in Utah and engaged citizens to put processes in place to support new arrivals,” Cox said in a statement on Sept. 15. Cox noted the new arrivals will bring unique perspectives and compassion to the state.

Becky Wickstrom, a public information officer for the Utah Department of Workforce Services, spoke confidently about the public being as accepting of new refugees as Cox is.

“Offers of support we have received from so many in the community indicate that so many are welcoming of Afghan refugees into Utah,” Wickstrom said. “We have resettled several Afghans over the years, and they are valuable members of our community.”

Although it was done in another state, [research](#) done by Ramya Vijaya, a professor of economics at Stockton University, confirmed Wickstrom’s remarks. She took a sample the size of Philadelphia and found, “The median household income estimates for refugees resettled in the area for seven or more years was \$46,126, higher than the median income estimate of \$38,253 for the local population.”

In addition to a higher median household income, Vijaya discovered refugees worked at a higher rate than native-born Americans and pumped about \$48 million into the local economy in Cleveland, which lead her to conclude, "Refugees don't undermine the U.S. economy — they energize it."

Economic value is not the only thing Afghan refugees brought to communities, as Wickstrom pointed out.

"Refugees bring such a valuable worldview based on their experiences," Wickstrom said. "And they provide the greater community with diversity and inspiring resilience."

[Republicans are still divided](#) on letting Afghan refugees in, which made Cox's decision a bit puzzling on the surface.

Brittney Bills, an adjunct professor of political science at Salt Lake Community College and member of the Highland City Council, said Cox was not motivated by politics with this decision.

"Governor Cox has always been supportive of refugees," Bills said. "If you pay attention to the news nationally, some things are just more important than public opinion. I think sometimes there's clearly a right thing to do and that's how Governor Cox saw this."

Bills added that Utah does have a responsibility to provide for the needs of refugees once they take them in, saying: "If we're going to let people in, it's only fair to give them the support that they need."

According to the [UN Refugee Agency](#), many refugees are fleeing overnight and coming to the U.S. in need of resources for survival such as food, shelter, money and medical care. Wickstrom explained that Utah will be providing for many of these needs.

"[Refugees will be given] rent for one or two months, help getting a job, food for one month," Wickstrom said. "Additionally, they will benefit from the donation of goods including clothes, home needs and school supplies, among other things."

Donations will go a long way toward helping Afghan refugees, and non-profits such as Catholic Community Services and the Utah Food Bank are available to handle those donations, according to Cox's statement above.

Being mindful of what you give is important, too.

Bills recalled a time she gave canned food to an African refugee family who did not have a can opener, and added that people should make sure winter coats and blankets they are thinking of donating do not have open holes.

Wickstrom also pointed out two of the best ways Utahns can help: "Raise money for a refugee family, and volunteer to be a tutor for a refugee kid."

One of the main challenges tied to inviting refugees in is finding a place for them to permanently live. So far, Salt Lake City has been the only city in Utah identified where refugees can relocate thus far. According to Bills, future cities will be those with easy access to public transportation, affordable housing and near job opportunities.