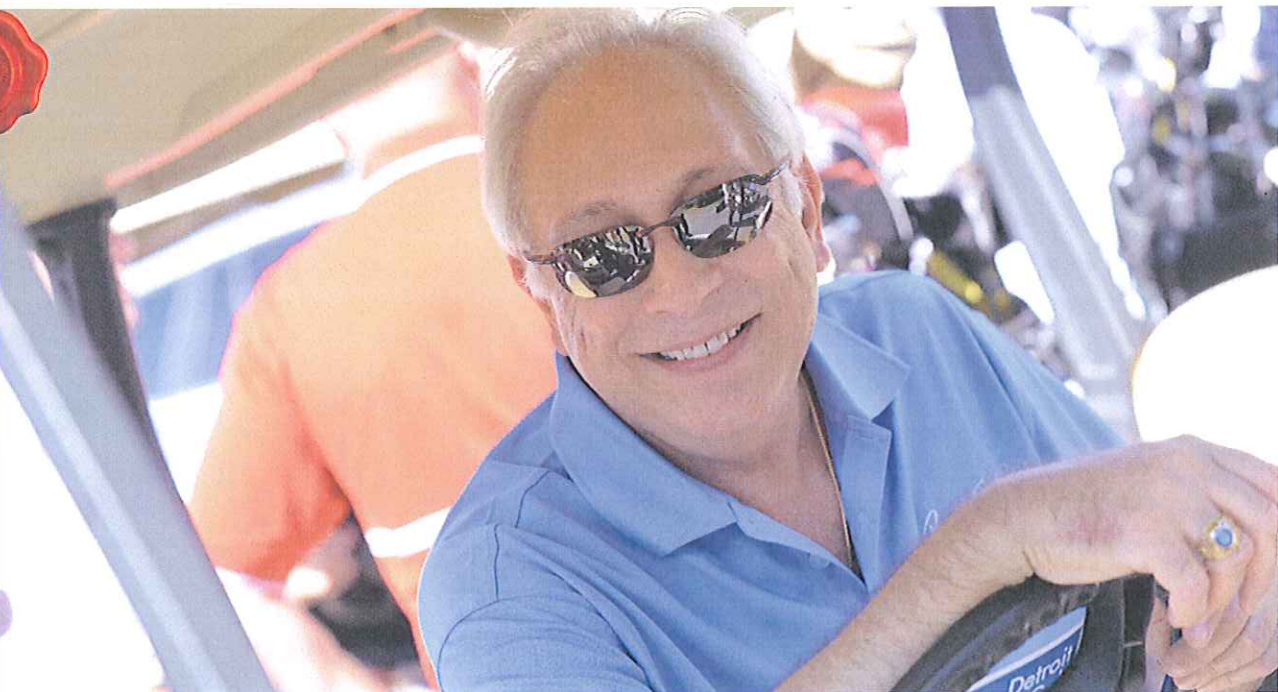




ambassador of the year

PAUL W. SMITH

photo: Courtesy of the Paul W. Smith Golf Classic



# THE KING OF TALK RADIO

## PAUL W. SMITH FINDS A CAUSE OF HIS OWN

Metro Detroiters know Paul W. Smith from News/Talk 760 WJR, for which his popular, provocative and always positive morning drive-time show prompted *The Wall Street Journal* to crown him “The King of Talk Radio in Detroit.”

What many people may not know about is Smith’s deep commitment to charity. In fact, upon returning to his hometown of Detroit in 1996 after a combined 11 years working for major radio stations in New York City and Philadelphia, Smith became involved in so much volunteer work that he was faced with a decision.

“I would be out several nights a week emceeding events and helping out with different causes, but it got to a point that I began to realize I had to find my own charity to devote my time to instead,” Smith explains.

It so happened that WJR was looking for someone to take ownership of an annual golf benefit for the Detroit Police Athletic League that was started in the 1970s by Smith’s late predecessor, radio hall-of-famer J.P. McCarthy.

Smith says that he volunteered and “we were off to the races.”

His first order of business was cutting expenses by ending the tradition of paying big-name pro golfers to participate in the event. Instead, he focused on recruiting corporate sponsors and local golfers so that a larger percentage of the proceeds would benefit the charity.

PAL, which merged with like-minded Think Detroit in 2006, runs extensive athletic leagues and programs for Detroit-area youth, a cause Smith believes in deeply. The Paul W. Smith Golf Classic has become the biggest fund-raising event for Think Detroit PAL, and Smith himself is the single largest fund-raiser for the organization. In the eight years since he took over, the golf classic has raised nearly \$3 million in net proceeds, and more than \$520,000 in 2011 alone.

“We’ve made more money each year than the year before,” Smith says, adding that the stagnant economy has made it more challenging but not impossible to find funding.

“It is very tough out here, but that means I just work harder getting people signed up, and we have a lot of generous donors,” he says.


Michael Porter, CEO of Think Detroit PAL, says that the golf classic has had a profound effect on the organization, providing 20 percent of its annual operating budget.

“Because of being on the radio, Paul’s able to reach the entire region and talk about us and the great things we’re involved in,” Porter says. “You couldn’t ask for a better supporter both because of his passion and the pulpit that he’s got.”

The organization empowers the community by training volunteer coaches and creating safe places for kids to play. Among its many accomplishments, Think Detroit PAL operates one of the largest inner-city youth football programs in the country with more than 80 teams, and has also renovated numerous parks and recreation centers across the city. Yet Porter insists that they are much more than a sports organization.

He says, “We use team sports to engage youth and teach them the lessons that will help them grow into accountable and productive adults in the community.”

Smith serves as emcee during the August golf outing, kicking off the modified scramble in the morning and hosting the awards banquet that follows. He also visits the links himself.

“I’m not the best golfer but I love the game and I take a lot of balls with me,” he says. “It’s a lot of fun.”  —Wensdy Von Buskirk

[paulsmithgolf.com](http://paulsmithgolf.com)