

Milledge A. “Mitch” Hart III ‘56

Raised by a widowed mother in small town Texas, Milledge A. “Mitch” Hart III ‘56, who interned at age 11 as a page in the U.S. House of Representatives, spent a year at Texas A&M before entering the Naval Academy, where he met fellow Texan H. Ross Perot ‘53, with whom he would later forge an extraordinary business partnership. Hart swam butterfly for Navy, played water polo, was editor-in-chief of *The Log* and, for his last two years, was vice-president of the Class of 1956. After graduation, he joined the Marine Corps.

Following The Basic School, Hart trained officer candidates and platoon leaders, was stationed in McAlester, OK, to transition the base to a Special Weapons Base and was deployed to Okinawa as an artillery battery executive officer. After the Marine Corps, Hart was recruited by Perot to join IBM in Dallas. In 1962, Hart joined Perot to launch EDS, which provided companies with data processing personnel, computer equipment and long-term contracts to support them. As president of EDS, a global leader in information technology services, Hart favored hiring people with military backgrounds—those who exhibited both leadership and discipline and who understood and were willing to take risk.

After retiring from EDS in 1977, Hart’s first investment was as co-founder of The Home Depot, where he served

on the executive committee and remained on the board for more than 30 years. He played a vital role in launching the company’s much-vaunted programs supporting Reservists, National Guard members and retired and recently separated military personnel. He also founded and has been chairman of Rmax Operating, an insulation manufacturer, as well as The Hart Group, a diversified group of companies. Hart and his wife, Linda, a partner in both his business and philanthropic endeavors, have supported educational, cultural, civic and medical organizations and other institutions important to them.

During the Vietnam War, Hart focused on the chasm separating civilians and military personnel. He spoke on numerous college campuses about the significance of military service and the importance of the leadership opportunities and training afforded by the military. The Harts have believed that many of the challenges facing the nation resulted from a disconnect between the military and those they served, as well as the absence of ethics training and leadership education nationwide. The Harts responded by launching the Duke Hart Leadership Program, an undergraduate program grounded in ethical leadership, founded more than 30 years ago through which more than 12,000 students have passed, and the

SMU Hart Global Leaders Forum, geared toward high school students. In the late 1990s, in the wake of a cheating scandal at the Naval Academy, they turned their attention to the Academy. The Harts supported a dramatic expansion of the Naval Academy Leadership Conference to include students from civilian universities to foster interaction and understanding among them. Today, this annual midshipman-run event attracts more than 200 participants from more than 45 military and civilian institutions.

The Harts also established the SMU Hart Center for Engineering Leadership, which provides mandated leadership assessment and training to all engineering students.

Mitch Hart's volunteer leadership includes serving as a trustee of three universities: Texas Southern, Duke and SMU (where he is one of 10 trustees in SMU's 100-year history to be honored as "trustee emeritus") and SMU's School of Engineering. Hart was chairman of Docucorp International, and he and Linda were recognized by the National Society of Fundraising Executives as the 1999 Dallas Outstanding Philanthropists, received the 2013 UT Southwestern Medical Foundation Sprague Award for support of medical research and are recognized in the Naval Academy Foundation's Superintendent's Society and President's Circle. They live in Dallas and have four children and nine grandchildren.



“Mitch epitomizes those characteristics of duty, honor, courage and commitment the Naval Academy strives to inspire. A man of great integrity, by any measure, he is a distinguished graduate.”

*—Colonel George Mushalko '56,
USAF (Ret.)*