

## A Foundation of Support

Native Texan George Strake seems to have lived many lives. At age 75, he is chairman and CEO of Strake Energy, an independent oil and gas operator in Houston. He's a politico too: he served as Texas Secretary of State under Governor Bill Clements from 1979 to 1981 and as State Chairman of the Republican Party of Texas from 1983 to 1988.

As president of the Strake Foundation, he's also a philanthropist. "We give to hospitals, non-tax supported schools, think tanks and Veterans Affairs buildings," Strake said. "Our [funds] have been diminished with the fall of the stock market, but we intend to keep going." He also donates to Helping a Hero, a foundation chaired by fellow Houstonian Meredith Iler, that builds houses for wounded soldiers back home from Afghanistan and Iraq.

"My foundation is about education, hospitals, and being strong American patriots," Strake said. And with all the awards he's received for his extensive community and charitable work (he was given the title Honorary Lance Corporal from the United States Marine Corps), it's pretty obvious he, too, is one of those American patriots.

Strake first heard about the Naval



*"The Naval Academy stands for something good, and I am proud of the Academy's young men and women."*

Academy's Center for Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies (CMEIS) while serving as chairman of U.S. Congressman John Culberson's screening committee, which selects stellar high school students in Texas for appointments to the Naval Academy.

Established in 2005, CMEIS serves as an on-campus resource on the history, religion, language, politics, and cultures of the Middle East, where many midshipmen will serve during their professional military careers. The Center coordinates curriculum development and study abroad opportunities for midshipmen, and brings guest lecturers to the Academy. The Center is thriving thanks to generous private gifts including significant support from the Strake Foundation.

"Federal dollars weren't covering teachings on the Arab world. It made a lot of sense to give to the Center," Strake said. With travel and study abroad opportunities in places such as Egypt, Jordan, Yemen, Oman, Kuwait, and Israel, CMEIS is providing midshipmen valuable knowledge about this pivotal region of the world,

Strake explains it this way: "If you were going to be sent to France, your chances of being accepted in that country would be greater if you had made some attempt to learn basic French and become accustomed to the culture. We need to give every opportunity to the young men and women who will be on the ground in the Middle East to know more about the people they're helping or even fighting against."

Strake has long admired the

Naval Academy. "When I got out of high school, I considered attending the Naval Academy, but ended up going to Notre Dame," he says. "I always liked the idea of serving in the military, but the physics and calculus requirements kept me away from the Academy," he laughs.

Strake fondly recalls the first time he ever visited the Academy. It was 1956, and he was Senior Class President at Notre Dame. Some members of the senior class traveled to Baltimore to see a Notre Dame-Navy football game. He stopped in Annapolis to tour the Academy and was impressed. Years later, when a friend's brother announced he'd been recruited by the Air Force Academy, Strake convinced him to go to the Naval Academy instead.

Strake earned an economics degree from the University of Notre Dame in 1957. Commissioned in the United States Navy at graduation through the Naval Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC), he served for two years aboard RICE COUNTY." The Navy is where I went from being a boy to a man," he says. He went on to earn an MBA from Harvard University in 1961.

Strake and his wife, Annette, live in Houston. They have six children and 17 grandchildren. Could any of his grandchildren attend the Academy one day? "Maybe," Strake replied. "The Naval Academy stands for something good, and I am proud of the Academy's young men and women." ■