



PARK B. SMITH '50

profiles in excellence

The Man Behind Pingry's New Middle School

Alumnus, donor, and trustee. Park B. Smith's affiliation with Pingry is immeasurable. His tireless efforts to support his alma mater are most recently demonstrated with a lead gift of \$2,500,000 for the construction of Pingry's new Middle School. With the completion of The Carol & Park B. Smith '50 Middle School, students in grades 6-8 now have a place dedicated to their needs.

It goes without saying that Park's generosity stems from his kind spirit, but it is also rooted in his appreciation for his days as a Pingry student. During this time, Park participated in a range of activities—from football and baseball to the Glee Club and writing for *The Pingry Record*. Regarding his parents' decision to send him to Pingry, Park says, "In their wisdom, they wanted me to have not just a life of happiness but one of goodness. As a result, they chose that I begin my education at Pingry. It was a choice I never regretted they made. Sixty years later, I am here trying in a very small way to help a school that I love so very much and that I owe so much to."

After graduating from Pingry, Park attended the College of the Holy Cross, graduating in 1954 with a degree in business administration. He served as an infantry officer in the U.S. Marine Corps during the Korean War. He says, "The Pingry School, the College of the Holy Cross, and the United States Marine Corps — while at first view

one would assume these are indeed three very different institutions, they are in fact similar in that their missions share an adherence to the same three calls to action: to pursue excellence in all one does, to respectfully serve others, and to behave honorably."

Park continues, "The pursuit of excellence is a phrase used so frequently in marketing that its meaning has been diluted. The fact is that while most boast of excellence, few attain or maintain it. To truly pursue excellence one must be tireless in that pursuit. Complacency is mediocrity, and standing still is tantamount to moving backwards."

In his own pursuit of excellence, Park founded Dakotah in the 1970s. Once the largest textile company in South Dakota, Dakotah helped to drastically lower the unemployment rate in South Dakota by providing jobs for Native Americans in the

state. Likewise, he founded a textile company that became one of the largest employers in India, providing jobs for more than 25,000 weavers and sewers.

Following these operations, in 1972, Park and Carol built what today is the multi-million dollar company, Park B. Smith, Inc., Home Fashions Corporation. The company's accounts include Bed Bath & Beyond, Linens-N-Things, JC Penny, Kohl's, and Sears. It sells to every major retail store in the U.S. Park is quoted as saying, "Every step of the process is eco-friendly...naturally grown cotton to pesticide-free and bleach-free products. We don't pollute the environment."

Park's clout as a businessman has benefited his pursuits as a wine connoisseur. In 1999, he and a partner opened Veritas, a New York City restaurant that boasts more



Park B. Smith '50 with Board Chair Vicki Brooks and Headmaster Nathaniel Conard

than 3,600 different selections of wine, each from his own private collection. Park's passion for wine has earned him the titles "America's Most Passionate Wine Collector" (*Food and Wine* 1999), "Wine Collector of the Year" (Copia, the American Center for Wine, Food & the Arts in Napa 2003), and Honorary Mayor of Châteauneuf du Pape in France.

Nevertheless, it is Park's philanthropic nature that is his hallmark. He created The Carol & Park B. Smith '50 SEEDS Scholarship Fund in 1999 and was a lead donor to the building campaign for Pingry's Hosterter Arts Center. Park is a member of Pingry's Board of Trustees and the 2001 recipient of the prestigious Pingry Alumni Association Letter-in-Life Award. The new Middle School is yet another example of his willingness to give back to Pingry. He says, "Quite simply, I like being associated with a building or



At the dedication, Anne DeLaney '79 with her children Sean '14 and Reeve Carver '14, and Linda and Park B. Smith '50

what some people affectionately refer to as bricks and mortar ... I have spent a life designing things that are beautiful to look at and yet highly functional. I have always believed that beauty and functionality should have a synergistic relationship in the everyday things we use."

He adds, "I am proud to be a Pingry graduate. It is a great institution that can only be made greater with your help. Give that help and, like me, you will not regret it." 🍷



Middle School students celebrate during their "Sneak Peak" of the new Middle School on November 14, 2006.