

CCA-TOP GUN

Eric Wylie '93

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Involvement. This may be the best word to describe Eric Wylie '93, President of Element Retirement & Investment Consultants, LLC. Having earned degrees in both Finance and Management from Texas A&M University, Eric was a member of Company A-2 and Company G-2 in the Corps of Cadets, served as a Student Body Senator, and was Treasurer of the Business Student Council. After graduation, Eric remained in College Station and worked for two large firms in the financial services industry. In 2011, Eric made the decision to open his own company in College Station.

Currently, Eric is the President of OPAS/Encore, a member of the College Station Noon Lions Club, Class of '93 Class Agent, Junior Warden at St. Alban's Masonic Lodge, Treasurer for the Bryan/College Station Chamber of Commerce Foundation and a member of the Texas Aggie Corps of Cadets Association. He holds numerous honors and awards including: Bryan/College Station Chamber of Commerce: Volunteer of the Year, 2004; Leadership Brazos Alumni Association: Outstanding Alumni Award for Service to the Association, 2007; Lions International Foundation: Melvin Jones Fellow, 2007; Jack Wiech Fellow, 2013; and Scottish Rite: Master Craftsman, 2010.

Eric's involvement in his community is nothing new. It began in high school but the Corps of Cadets and Texas A&M University were the perfect environment to help him understand that being involved is very important to his well-being. "Really to this day I have learned the more I have on my plate the better off I am," explained Eric, in a recent interview. "I was a typical kid that did not study much in high school and really had no study discipline," added Eric.

"I am so thankful I was in the Corps and so thankful for CQ (mandatory Call to Quarters)," Eric stated. "If it had not been for the Corps and CQ, I would have never graduated from Texas A&M," he added. The road he took to A&M may not have been unique, but as with many events in his Corps career and later business career, it was the helping hand of a fellow Aggie that made it possible.

"I had a Congressional Appointment to the United States Air Force Academy," Eric stated. "But as I was preparing to depart for the Academy I received a letter that stated I was medically disqualified. I had braces and the Air Force was not going to allow me to enter the Academy," he added. Needless to say, he was disappointed but by chance he received a letter from a sophomore in the Texas A&M Corps of Cadets. "To this day, I do not know how they [Company A-2] got my name," Eric stated. "In the letter, Sophomore Cadet Mike Mitchell '91 let me know I had a place at Texas A&M in the Corps of Cadets," Eric added. He did not know much about Texas A&M or the Corps of Cadets, but as Eric will be the first to tell you he has a "sink or swim" mentality and he headed off to the small town of College Station. "I did not know where Texas A&M was on a map, but someone from the Corps took the time to write me a personal letter and let me know that I had a purpose there," he stated. "That was enough for me, knowing someone wanted me to part of their organization," he added.

Eric will tell you that he did not get everything he wanted in the Corps but it is part of a process. "I had to achieve everything in the Corps I wanted and really work hard for it," Eric stated as he was looking up at his framed Company A-2 guidon field. "When you are fish you follow; but as you move up the ranks you must begin to make decisions that impact other people," he stated. "Some decisions are good and some can be the wrong ones," he stated as he began to think back. "The bottom line is that the Corps offers such a tremendous leadership opportunity that you may not realize at the time. But looking back I would not trade those experiences for anything," he added.

As Eric entered his "white belt" years in the Corps he began to see a different side to himself. "It was during my junior and senior years in the Corps that I realized that I enjoyed pushing myself both academically as well as organizationally," he stated. A friendly competition with a fellow junior in the Corps would lead to a turning point in his life. Eric had signed up for a finance class at A&M that was a renowned "weed out" class. "I knew FINC 341 was a tough class because many

management majors called it 'Fail 341',” he stated. “I was fortunate enough to have the class with a fellow Cadet, Richard Chastain '93. We made a friendly bet that we would each post the highest grade. This really pushed me to study harder and I learned I really liked the class,” he added. This friendly competition with a fellow Aggie opened a door to a new opportunity and Eric seized the moment. “I ended up with an A in the class and the professor asked if I would be interested in tutoring the class,” he stated. Eric, in turn, double majored in Finance and Management which in turn changed his career sights to the world of finance. This is a career he enjoys to this day.

During his freshman year, Eric sought a new challenge and took the opportunity to run for a Texas A&M student government office. “I ran for Student Body Senator and won the seat,” he stated. “I saw a different side to A&M, but I also had a great opportunity to serve the student body and the University,” he added. It was this position that also allowed Eric to fully understand that staying busy and tasked out was actually an important factor of his success. “I posted a 4.0 GPR each semester of my junior and senior years. I strongly believe that this was because I was so involved and so busy. It forced me to manage my time wisely; and, as a consequence, there was little or no down time where I could fool around,” he stated.

After graduation, Eric set out to find his place in the world of banking. Once again, a fellow Aggie helped open the door to opportunity. Terry Rowan '72 a former Cadet and 3rd Battalion CO, was working at Victoria Bank & Trust in 1994 and gave Eric a chance to work there. “I cannot put into words how much Terry helped me and mentored me,” he stated. “I was so fortunate the he was there and it was a great first job out of college,” he added.

Through the years, Eric has worked at different financial institutions where he has gained real world experience on the inner workings of the financial business. Just as important, he learned that lending and finance is a people business. He was a Business Banker at Wells Fargo from 1996-2000 and then a Trust & Fiduciary Specialist at Wells Fargo Wealth Management Group from 2000-2011. “It was at these other institutions where I learned firsthand that people are placing their trust in me to make decisions for them. I have to be responsive to the market place and stick with the decision I make,” he stated.



In 2011, Eric made the decision to go out on his own and open his own business. Element Retirement & Investment Consultants, LLC in College Station provides financial planning, investment management, and retirement services. “I am taking all my business, college and Corps experiences and putting them to work for my customers,” he stated. Eric explained that the Corps gave him invaluable experience on how to be responsive. “The day-to-day Corps experience teaches you how to be responsive, make decisions and follow them. I have done well over the years by following this simple but effective guideline,” he added. He will be the first to tell you that it is not a perfect science but people are entrusting him to make decisions for them.

As the interview came to a close, Eric became very introspective as the questions brought back memories of his days in the Corps of Cadets. As he looked back, he knows those tough decisions he made while being a Cadet helped him so much in his professional career. What he also realized was that over the years fellow Aggies have been there to help him along the way. Now in his own business he makes tough decisions for fellow Aggies and his customers on a daily basis with their financial needs. “As I said earlier, I would never trade any of my experiences in the Corps of Cadets. Like many, I have some great and not so great memories, but it is all part of the process,” he stated. “One of the biggest lessons I learned in the Corps is to get involved. Once you are involved what do you do?” he asked himself. “The bottom line is that I learned to be responsive, make tough decisions and stick to them.”