Operation Admiral Harms:
A Student Interview with the President of Lake Highland Preparatory School

By Siddarth Pinnamaneni

- Where did you grow up? Do you have any siblings?
  I grew up on a grain farm in Central Illinois. Yes, I have an older sister and younger brother.

- What was your favorite hobby growing up?
  I loved all sports and enjoyed music (choir and band).

- When you were a child, what did you dream of becoming?
  I dreamed of being a professional ball player (football or basketball). Reality set in during college (I was not good enough to play pro ball), and I joined a Naval ROTC program with the hopes of flying in the Navy.

- Where did you go to college? What was your major?
  I attended the University of Illinois and earned a BS in Biology. Later, I received an MS in Statistics from Texas A&M University. I also had the privilege of completing U.S. Navy Test Pilot School, the U.S. Navy Nuclear Propulsion Training Program, and the NATO Defense College in Rome. Recently, I completed an MBA from the University of Illinois.

- Did your upbringing influence the path to your current occupation?
  My upbringing most certainly influenced my ultimate career choices as the notions of hard work, honorable service, and independence/self-reliance were consistently addressed and modeled by my parents, teachers, and coaches.

- What was your occupation prior to arriving at Lake Highland?
  Following graduation from college, I served 34 years in the U.S. Navy, about 8 years at the University of Central Florida, and 3 years as an independent consultant with varied board service.

- What does a normal day at Lake Highland entail for you? Do you have a daily routine?
  At this point, a “normal” day means a 0400 wake up; early morning domestic chores until about 0630; then a 45-minute to one-hour commute to LHPS. Next, the fun begins! My days are full with meetings, classroom visits, business calls, working group discussions, answering emails, and finally, one or two late-day “entertainment” activities (ball game, concert, theater show or similar). Following my return home commute, a brief dinner, some late-day reading, catching up on national and worldwide news, and then as early to bed as possible.

- How was the transition from working with Lake Highland’s Board of Trustees to working as the school’s President? What were the differences between the two jobs?
  The transition was easy as my board service helped me better understand and appreciate the “magic” of LHPS. The jobs are completely different. The purpose of the Board is to guide and assist the school in executing its mission; the President’s job is to lead the entire LHPS family – including students, parents, faculty and staff, alumni, and community supporters – in successfully accomplishing the school’s important mission.
• What is one aspect of the Lake Highland community that you appreciate? Why?
  I truly appreciate and admire many aspects of the LHPS community, but most importantly, I am extremely grateful for the widespread goodness, unwavering passion, and positive motivation of our grand team.

• How have your experiences in the U.S. Navy altered your personality?
  I know my U.S. Navy experiences strengthened my understanding that everyone has the potential to contribute something useful and positive to the team. One’s job as a leader is to recognize that potential and motivate individuals to voluntarily give their best efforts in all endeavors.

• Did your experiences in the U.S. Navy prepare you to be Lake Highland's President?
  The answer is unequivocally “yes” with words like “honor, integrity, discipline, service, candor, positive spirit, trust, hard work, kindness, persistence, sacrifice, respect, fun, and happiness” all immediately coming to mind. Clearly, there are other meaningful sentiments, but most important is the power of teamwork and the ability to accomplish anything when working together.

• What is your most interesting experience in the U.S. Navy?
  This is easy…meeting and serving with thousands of magnificent young men and women from all over the country and world!

• What goals have you set for your future? How do you plan to achieve these goals?
  Do my best every day! Always conduct myself in a manner that I’m proud to share with my family!

• Reflecting back, what advice would you give to your younger self?
  Worry less…laugh more!