



The U.S. Naval Academy Distinguished Graduates Class of 2025 were honored on 4 September in Alumni Hall and recognized on 6 September during Navy's victory over UAB at Navy-Marine Corps Memorial Stadium.

LIFETIME OF SERVICE

The members of the U.S. Naval Academy Distinguished Graduate Class of 2025 are models for selfless service, mentorship and moral leadership.

This year's honorees: **Admiral Jonathan W. Greenert '75, USN (Ret.), Vice Admiral Anthony L. Winns '78, USN (Ret.), Captain Sunita L. Williams '87, USN (Ret.), and JoAnna L. Sohovich '93** exemplify the Academy's mission. They reached the highest levels of their professions and are dedicated to ensuring the Brigade of Midshipmen has world-class facilities, programming, mentoring and the necessary resources to deliver unparalleled leadership development opportunities.

The 2025 Class of Distinguished Graduates have made significant impacts through their service in uniform, board rooms and the International Space Station. Their legacies will

endure as future generations benefit from their guidance, leadership and philanthropy.

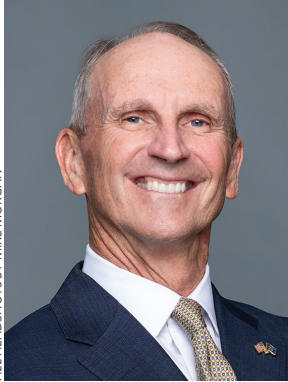
This year, *Shipmate* asked the Distinguished Graduates to share some of their experiences and leadership advice in the form of a Q&A to accompany their stories.

Originally, the 2025 Distinguished Graduate Class was scheduled to be honored in March. However, Williams' nine-month delayed return from the International Space Station put the ceremony on hold until 4 September when all honorees could be celebrated together.

For more on the 2025 Distinguished Graduate Award medal ceremony, including video coverage and complete honoree biographies, visit www.usna.com/dga or scan this QR Code:



ADMIRAL JONATHAN W. GREENERT '75, USN (RET.)



ALL HEADSHOTS BY MIKE MORGAN

Admiral Greenert's 40-year Navy career included commands of submarine HONOLULU, Submarine Squadron 11, U.S. Naval Forces Marianas, U.S. Seventh Fleet and U.S. Fleet Forces (Atlantic). He capped his life in uniform by serving as the 30th chief of naval operations.

Classmate Commander Chris Cikanovich '75, USN (Ret.), said Greenert's leadership attributes were evident during their time at the Naval Academy.

"From 14th Company Commander, to USNA '75's first flag officer, to chief of naval operations, Jon consistently and continuously demonstrated the personal and leadership qualities that inspired those around him to achieve mission success in every endeavor," Cikanovich wrote in Greenert's DGA nomination.

Greenert served aboard submarines FLYING FISH, TAUTOG, NR-1 and MICHIGAN (Gold). His flag assignments were deputy commander, U.S. Pacific Fleet and deputy CNO (Resources and Requirements-N8), commander, U.S. Forces Micronesia; deputy comptroller, Department of the Navy and vice chief of naval operations. He served as CNO from 2011 to 2015. He retired from military service in October 2015.

He now serves as a director on corporate boards, as a consultant and advisor, and as a volunteer for nonprofit and philanthropic organizations. He served as chair of the Naval Academy Distinguished Graduate Award selection panel for the 2020 through 2022 selection cycles.

General Peter Pace '67, USMC (Ret.), the 16th chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, credited Greenert for his leadership during "a period of immense change and unparalleled combat operations tempo." Pace said Greenert championed cutting-edge technological advances, such as unmanned underwater and aerial vehicles, and electromagnetic and directed energy laser technology.

"He wrote the book—quite literally—in cybersecurity, establishing the U.S. Navy's strategy and doctrine that served as the model for all of DoD," Pace wrote in the DGA nomination submission.

As vice CNO, Admiral Greenert delivered tangible benefits to the Naval Academy by instituting the Flagship Institution Improvement Council, which identified and funded capital improvements to buildings, utilities and the seawall. As CNO, he oversaw the funding for what became the Academy's elite cyber education center, Hopper Hall, which cost about \$143 million.

"Normally projects of this size take 10 years or more to work their way through the Navy MILCON program from

concept to funding," Admiral Dennis Blair '68, USN (Ret.), is quoted in the nomination package. "Due to Admiral Greenert's personal commitment, his understanding of the importance of the project and his skills in financial management and congressional relations, the project was funded in about three years, and is fulfilling its mission today. This was the first major construction project at the Academy in 25 years and simply would not have happened without Admiral Greenert."

How did the Naval Academy prepare you to lead and serve others?

Greenert: To me there are some key attributes needed to be a successful leader. Below are some of those that are instilled in the USNA experience:

Integrity. The Honor Concept is a terrific way to teach young men and women the importance of integrity, while providing consequences (and remediation opportunity) for integrity failures. Also the "close-quarters company" existence and relationships over the four years makes it clear to midshipmen that certain environments, including the Naval Academy, the U.S. Navy and USMC, require unconditional trust and surety that those with which you interface will always deal in the truth.

Communication. Midshipmen are organized at the basic level in a squad. Communication with peers and subordinates is routine and daily. Further, underclass have the opportunity to observe upperclass develop as leaders—someone to emulate.

Empathy. Because everyone has a Plebe Summer and plebe academic year, all upperclassmen have walked in the shoes of those to whom they provide oversight. This same concept is a key part of Youngster Cruise and the YP Cruise in PROTRAMID. This sequence, the multiple experiences, show midshipmen how important (and useful) it is to have "been there and done that" when directing subordinates to conduct a task, mission and assign expectations. Finally, it is understood throughout Plebe Summer that one doesn't show up without their roommate. Looking out for the general welfare of your roommate, and those in your company, is inculcated.

Performance Under Stress. Memorizing "rates," grasping the "five basic responses" and learning (memorizing) *Reef Points* helps train one's mind to respond quickly, coherently and sequentially in a crisis. This is an essential skill when dealing with casualties at/under sea, in the air and in combat. The ability to set the hierarchy of orders (direction) and deliver them loudly and clearly must be honed to be an effective watch officer or infantry officer. The plebe year, which includes this repetitive training, embeds it in the subconscious of an officer; it becomes automatic in time of crisis.

Social skills, protocol and courtesy. Tea dances (plebe year), after dinner speaking exercise and indoctrination in proper protocol and military courtesy set a foundation and appreciation for these social skills, which are mandatory to be successful in command and beyond (and in a corporate landscape).



DGA CEREMONY PHOTOS COURTESY OF USNA PAO

ADM Jonathan W. Greenert '75, USN (Ret.), served as the 30th chief of naval operations. He began his Navy career as a submariner and helped secure financing for Hopper Hall during his time as vice CNO.

What did you learn as a junior officer that had a profound impact on your career/life?

Greenert: Give people a second chance. For example, allow and enable retaking exams and qualification boards, use suspended sentences liberally when compelled to assign nonjudicial punishment (minor offenses). In general, avoid action that could permanently damage a career, unless circumstances absolutely dictate it.

Aspire to, and prepare for, assuming your boss' job. You will be there sooner than you think.

Subordinates want officers to be friendly leaders; but they want officers to be their leaders, not their friends.

You get what you inspect; not what you expect. Look into the details.

Take chances on people; they are not algorithms. They will surprise you and take ownership.

How have your connections with fellow alumni influenced your personal and/or professional life?

Greenert: A grad can be assumed to be honest, loyal, trustworthy and patriotic. It's a special and unique bond rarely found among other academic institutions. As a long-time career naval officer, I found that I had more episodic, as opposed to routine, interface and interactions with USNA grads.

Why is it important to support future generations of midshipmen, young leaders?

Greenert: USNA depends on legacy (grads in the fleet and business) for its future success. Feedback helps ensure producing skilled and relevant leaders. USNA products must be useful to the nation, Navy and USMC.

Success of the Naval Academy depends on "paying it forward." Invest in USNA future (people, money, time) to help today's leaders (i.e., superintendent, dean, commandant) stay on course and provide feedback to help sustain relevance.

VICE ADMIRAL ANTHONY L. WINNS '78, USN (RET.)



Vice Admiral Winns welcomes challenges.

He was the first in the U.S. Naval Academy Class of 1978 to achieve flag rank. During his 32-years as a naval officer, he commanded Patrol Squadron Eleven, ESSEX (LHD-2), Patrol and Reconnaissance Force Pacific and Task Force 32, and served as vice director and acting director for operations (J-3), joint chiefs of staff and the naval inspector general. Commander Carl Eric

Lindstrand '78, USN (Ret.), lauded his classmate's enthusiasm for navigating toward assignments others might avoid. Winns and Lindstrand served together as lieutenants onboard the aircraft carrier FORRESTAL.

Lindstrand wrote in Winns' DGA nomination package: "As the only officer qualified as both tactical action officer and officer of the deck underway simultaneously (in decades), he pursued the most demanding ship assignments. His constant willingness to assist others while promoting the highest levels of performance resulted in his hand selection by the commanding officer to become the assistant operations officer, a position normally held by much more senior officers. A true leader, not just a participant, he always took charge in demanding situations, accepting responsibility and risk, while ensuring his superiors, peers and subordinates received appropriate recognition."

Winns is the first and only Black Naval Academy alumnus to earn three stars as a naval aviator. He retired from military service in 2011 and joined Lockheed Martin, serving as president of the Middle East-Africa region and later as deputy, Lockheed Martin International and regional executive, Africa-Latin America, overseeing global partnerships, business development and corporate strategy.

Winns continues to be an active volunteer and mentor. He founded the Becoming Everything You Are (BEYA) National Scholarship Foundation and co-founded the BEYA National STEM Student Mentoring Program. To date, these endeavors have reached more than 7,000 high school students and engaged more than 3,000 active-duty admirals, generals and members of the federal Senior Executive Service (SES) to serve as mentors.

Winns is an avid trustee of the U.S. Naval Academy Athletic & Scholarship Programs (A&SP) and a former board director of the Navy Mutual Aid Association.

During his time at the Naval Academy, Winns established the Naval Academy Midshipmen Black Studies Club. As president, he insisted on the club's full diversification, instead of an "all Black" club, and actively recruited all races and ethnicities for inclusion, Lindstrand wrote.

How did the Naval Academy prepare you to lead and serve others?

Winns: The Naval Academy afforded me the opportunity to learn invaluable leadership skills early in my career. As a plebe, I learned about leadership, teamwork, interpersonal skills and the importance of following orders. A good leader must first learn to be a good follower.

My youngster year included lessons on ethical leadership and moral reasoning. Women were admitted to the Naval Academy during my second-class year, and I was chosen as the element leader for our company's first women plebes. While the first year of women at the Naval Academy came with its share of challenges, it marked a pivotal step toward making the Naval Academy a better institution.

I embraced that opportunity and learned much about myself as a leader while in charge of their professional development. During my first-class year, I was company commander and again was given the opportunity to lead from the front. I also learned more about ethical decision-making and the characteristics of a good leader.

As I look back at my leadership development while a midshipman, you could say that I started out leading a few and ended up leading more than 150. In essence, the Naval Academy was directly responsible for preparing me to lead and serve with humility.

What did you learn as a junior officer that had a profound impact on your career/life?

Winns: *Hard Work, Determination and Persistence.* While many would argue determination and persistence are innate qualities,

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VADM Anthony L. Winns '78, USN (Ret.), co-founded the BEYA National STEM Student Mentoring Program, which has reached more than 7,000 high school students.

these attributes certainly were honed as a junior officer and that experience helped prepare me for the many challenges I faced in my Navy career and in business during the years that followed. Hard work and performing well in the aircraft and in my ground job as squadron legal officer propelled me to even greater opportunities during my first tour.

Reliability and Accountability. Fulfilling one's responsibilities is expected of every officer; to do otherwise would constitute dereliction of duty. Every officer understands that it's not enough to simply show up. A leader needs to be present and act in a consistent and ethical manner, not just some of the time, but all the time. Along these lines, I learned that leading by example meant never asking those in your command to do something that you weren't prepared to do yourself. Sailors watch everything their leaders do and don't do. It's your personal example that they follow. Similarly, if you take care of your people they will respect and take care of you. I can't tell you the number of times my people had my back—they never let me down.

Teamwork. No leader, regardless of how capable or competent he or she may be, can complete every important task alone. You will arrive at your first duty station in your brand new, crisp uniform with an impressive bachelor's degree from one of the most prestigious colleges in the world, yet there are Sailors who have more practical knowledge about how the Navy works than you. Don't be a "know it all." Immediately following my squadron legal officer job, I was assigned as the aircraft division officer with responsibility for five branch officers and more than 130 Sailors. It immediately became clear to me that to carry out my division's mission, I needed to earn the respect and then rely on my branch officers, my chief warrant officer, my chief petty officer and all the other enlisted Sailors in my division. Each member of the team had a job to do, and I recognized that we were stronger when we worked together

rather than simply as a group of individual contributors. The idea of teamwork has been a recipe for success since day one as a midshipman.

Life Balance. Military service is very serious business, but I learned that I should never take myself too seriously. I witnessed firsthand the benefits of maintaining balance in one's life and the importance of occasionally taking a little time off to have fun and not get burned out, and to build camaraderie in the process.

How have your connections with fellow alumni influenced your personal and/or professional life?

Winns: Connections with fellow alumni have positively influenced my life starting with my first command. My sponsor at my very first duty station in Patrol Squadron Six (VP-6) was a Naval Academy graduate. He took me under his wing and taught me so much about the aircraft. His professional leadership, dedicated training and friendship helped me in my naval and civilian careers.

The professional network of Naval Academy graduates is unlimited. I owe a great deal of my post-Navy professional career to connections maintained with fellow alumni.

Why is it important to support future generations of midshipmen, young leaders?

Winns: First, by empowering them with skills, knowledge and resources, we help ensure that they are prepared to tackle global issues like technological disruption, climate change, economic inequality and global conflict.

Secondly, in addition to enabling fresh perspectives, investing in young leaders helps cultivate resilience, adaptability and critical thinking, which are essential traits for navigating an uncertain and rapidly changing world. Finally, the Naval Academy is where we develop the leaders of tomorrow, cultivate and nurture our core values of honor, courage and commitment, and sustain the hopes that our nation will continue to live in peace and prosperity.

What advice do you have for the next generation of midshipmen?

Winns: Hold steadfast the idea of mentally, morally and physically fit for life. Embrace curiosity, never stop learning and stay adaptable in the face of change. Lead with integrity, empathy and a clear sense of purpose.

Build diverse teams, listen to different perspectives and value collaboration over competition. Take bold, calculated risks while staying grounded in your values. Always consider the impact of your actions on people.

Communicate clearly and authentically, inspiring trust and confidence. You will undoubtedly face many challenges in life. Know that your training at USNA will help you navigate any rough waters. Remember that your most important attribute is your attitude, and that failure is merely a stepping-stone to growth.

Above all, serve others with humility and a commitment to making the world a better place.

CAPTAIN SUNITA “SUNI” L. WILLIAMS ’87, USN (RET.)



Captain Williams’ extended mission on the International Space Station provided an extraordinary platform for her to further inspire future generations of astronauts.

Williams and fellow astronaut Barry Wilmore launched on the Boeing Starliner on 5 June 2024 for a planned eight-day stay on the space station. That brief mission turned into nine months in space as a thruster malfunction delayed the astronaut duo’s return to Earth until 19 March 2025.

Williams, who became an astronaut in 1998, has made three trips to the space station. She is one of two women to command the space station twice, and one of five U.S. astronauts with more than 500 days in space.

The former helicopter pilot is generous with her time and regularly shares her experiences with midshipmen and has participated in the Naval Academy’s annual Astronaut

Convocation. She created a weekly “Astro Suni Blog” with photos of the space station and details of her work so aspiring astronauts could gain insights of life in space. Williams also spoke with school children around the world during her space tours.

“She is arguably NASA’s No. 1 recruiter nationally, and most certainly at the institution that has produced 55 astronauts, more than any other in the nation,” said classmates Rear Admiral William D. Byrne ’87, USN, and his wife, Amy Byrne ’87, in Williams’ DGA nomination package.

Williams was the featured guest at an underwater robotics competition (SeaPerch) for school-aged children sponsored by the Naval Academy Alumni Association’s Texas Gulf Coast Chapter in 2023. As the third of the Naval Academy’s five women astronauts, Williams has played an instrumental role as mentors for her successors Colonel Nicole Mann ’99, USMC, and Lieutenant Commander Kayla Barron ’10, USN.

“(They) were taught, coached and mentored by Suni throughout the application, selection and training process,” the Byrnes wrote. “More than that, they were inspired by Suni. In Kayla’s words, ‘Suni has been a role model and mentor, so enthusiastic and encouraging throughout. Her positivity,



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CAPT Sunita L. Williams '87, USN (Ret.), is one of two women to command the International Space Station twice. She has spent more than 500 days in space and is a regular participant at the Astronaut Convocation at the Naval Academy.

teamwork, humility, selflessness and leadership made a huge difference in getting me ready for my first mission.”

As a varsity swimmer and cross-country athlete at the Naval Academy, Williams earned six varsity letters. She captained the swim team her first year before commissioning into naval aviation. She flew in operations Desert Shield and Provide Comfort (1990-91) and led an H-46 detachment for post-Hurricane Andrew support (1992). She logged more than 3,000 hours in 30+ aircraft as a test pilot.

On her first space expedition (December 2006–June 2007), Williams spent 197 days in space, setting records for the most spacewalk time by a woman and the longest single spaceflight by a woman. During her second space expedition (July–November 2012), she took command of the space station.

She was the pilot on the first Boeing CST-100 crew flight test to the space station, becoming the first woman to fly a test flight on an orbital spacecraft.

How did the lessons you learned at the Naval Academy prepare you for your time in space?

Williams: Things are unpredictable in the fleet or any military service. You have to be adaptable. Honor. Courage. Commitment. The standard baseline from what we learned at the Naval Academy, how we conduct ourselves and be ready to go with the flow and be okay with that. You make the best of the situation. The foundation I learned from the Academy, as well as playing sports at the Academy teaches you to adapt and be ready to take the situation where it's going to take you.

I struggled academically at the Naval Academy. Sometimes, you need to pivot and make the best of the situation. My career was the same way. There were things I thought I wanted to do or accomplish. The road didn't take me there and I needed to turn and do something else. Unbeknownst to me, that opens a

lot of doors. The lessons learned about being resilient through those types of activities where maybe one would say it's failure. You keep your head up, take a step forward and continue on, you might find new opportunities.

This was the same thing, being on the space station. What a great mission to be on a test flight of the first flight of Starliner. To be on the space station gave us opportunities to talk to a lot of people about tests and how to test the next generation of spacecraft as we leave low-earth orbit. It's a great opportunity if you look at it that way. Just press on. The Naval Academy prepared me to do that.

How did you adapt during your longer-than anticipated space station stay?

Williams: We are prepared one way or the other. We, of course, planned on being a short test flight. A test flight could lead to new discovery so we had an idea it might be a little bit longer than advertised. In the lead up to our flight, we wanted to make sure we were prepared to live on the space station. We brought all of our space walking equipment with us. We made sure we were ready to go for robotics. We made sure we had all of the station systems under our belts.

Preparedness and commitment were the two mainstays of our time up there. As the summer progressed and we understood more about the difficulty of the decision of whether or not we would or would not come home on Starliner, your mind sort of shifts. It's sort of like a deployment where you think you're going to come home and something happens in the world and your ship takes a right turn rather than a left turn to head back home.

You have to have that mindshift and understand that with the skills I have, I prepared as best as I could. I'm ready to ask questions, ready to learn some more and I'm ready to take on this new role as a long-duration crew member on the International Space Station.

It was an honor to become the station commander. I'd been up there before but integrating our crew, which I had not really worked with before, was really a joy and a pleasure. It's the people that make it the best.

What does being a leader and a mentor mean to you, particularly among the Naval Academy astronaut community?

Williams: That's our goal. You want to maintain your career and finish out your career making sure someone is going to fill your shoes and do everything better than you did. That's the main goal. It's super cool to interact with junior officers—Lieutenant Commander Kayla Barron, Colonel Nicole Mann and Commander Jack Hathaway '04, USN. It's really awesome to see them flourish and see them grow. I try to be a good role model.

When I was at the Naval Academy, women weren't in combat at that time but I said, there are still roles for us to play and roles for us to do the best we can. I took that feeling and that idea with me as I went into the fleet. There were only two women in my first helicopter squadron. You're setting the pace

and how everything will be in the future. You have to do the best you can and know others are going to come in behind you.

One of my most precious memories at the Naval Academy was being a summer squad leader. Those plebes were nervous as the Brigade was coming back. I took them on a jog. I asked them, 'Are you going to follow me everywhere?' They said, 'Yes ma'am.' I jumped off the sea wall into the Severn River. They all jumped in after me. You are working for the people who are working with you and for you. That's the most important thing. When I was on my disassociated sea tour, one of the biggest lessons I learned was you really have to pay a little bit more attention to the people who work for you than the people you work for. You have to take care of your troopers, and they'll take care of you.

What got you on your life's trajectory?

Williams: We are shaped by a lot of things. My father immigrated to the United States from India. He had nothing. He met my mother who was working as an X-ray technician in Cleveland. My father had just finished medical school and was doing his residency. I look at what they did as a young couple and leaving their home country. Those are really brave things and what I've done pales in comparison. They were great role models in encouraging me, my brother and sister to take chances—you don't have to stick with the status quo. Get out there and do what you need to do to make yourself successful.

Being a competitive swimmer also shaped me. Swimming is a team sport. You never went out there just to win for yourself. You went out to get points for your team. It taught you work ethic—trying stuff and not being afraid to fail.

JoANNA L. SOHOVICH '93



JoAnna Sohovich's competitive spirit transcended the U.S. Naval Academy's offerings for women in the Class of 1993. Although she was a member of the Academy's varsity cross country, indoor track and outdoor track teams, she and her roommate decided to join the men's boxing team in their final semester because they had only been offered fencing as part of the PE curriculum.

"This says a lot about JoAnna's true grit, spirit and character—as a midshipman, an executive and an alumna," said recently retired Navy Athletic Director Chet Gladchuk in Sohovich's Distinguished Graduate nomination package.

Regardless of the sport, Sohovich is a devoted supporter of Navy athletics. She is an Athletic & Scholarship Programs (A&SP) trustee and serves on the Women for Navy Athletics (WFNA) committee. Sohovich's "corporate expertise and clear vision played a key role in helping to rally women graduates and supporters around the Naval Academy's physical mission, including sports team reunions and nutrition stations around the Yard," Gladchuk said.

Now in its ninth year, the WFNA committee's initiative is designed to support the physical mission at USNA by providing support to key initiatives within the NAAA. They aim to engage and strengthen the connection of women Naval Academy graduates, midshipman student-athletes, families and friends in support of the NAAA's physical mission priorities. The

committee has raised about \$1.5 million in cash since its inception, with total commitments bringing the overall impact to \$2 million.

As a WFNA co-founder, Sohovich was involved in crafting the refueling nutrition station and staffing strategy and sponsored one of the busiest stations, the Sohovich Refueling Station in Lejeune Hall. The station serves as a gathering place on campus for midshipman athletes to receive healthy beverages and snacks throughout the day.

Sohovich, a supply corps officer, was deployed to the Persian Gulf aboard ESSEX, an amphibious assault ship, as one of the first women following the repeal of the combat exclusion policy.

In the private sector, Sohovich held executive leadership positions at global companies such as Chamberlain Group, Stanley Black & Decker and Honeywell. As Chamberlain CEO, she led more than 8,000 employees representing multiple countries and cultures and was responsible for the multi-billion dollar business during its remarkable technology transformation.

She also served as president of Honeywell's security and communications business, where her team pioneered early mobile phone security system applications and video notifications.

In addition to her A&SP and WFNA service, Sohovich also serves on the U.S. Naval Academy Foundation Board of Directors and has been assigned to numerous foundation board and joint alumni association board committees and projects. Specifically, Ron Terwilliger '63 said Sohovich's business experience made her a valuable member on the joint Naval Academy Alumni Association & Foundation's 2030 Strategic Planning committee.

"She made significant contributions to the strategy and helped bridge Alumni Association and Foundation strategies," Terwilliger said in the nomination package. "JoAnna's

volunteerism further extends to the Alumni Association and Foundation's Joint Compensation and HR committee, where her multi-national business experience and public company compensation committee chair experience help shape the CEO's talent management direction. She is a consistent supporter of USNA and represents younger class years, women and minority graduates across her numerous volunteer appointments."

How did the Naval Academy prepare you to lead and serve others?

Sohovich: The Naval Academy taught me leadership in three dimensions: First, as a follower, I observed leadership styles across the Brigade, our officer reps and enlisted reps and experienced real-world scenarios on summer cruise.

Second, through academic study and case studies, such as Naval Leadership 101 and even "The Laws of the Navy."

Third, through experiential learning starting youngster year when I was assigned my first plebe to coach and mentor. This experiential learning process wasn't just fire and forget; the real learning came from being evaluated on my leadership traits and effectiveness as part of the performance review process. All of this is significantly more extensive than what the average college grad gets.

What did you learn as a junior officer that had a profound impact on your career/life?

Sohovich: I learned that my enlisted personnel were trained with a level of expertise that I would never attain, and therefore my job was to lead the division as a whole, protect my people, make the best use of the resources assigned to me and ensure that we supported the overall mission. This helped me later in my career as I was able to hire and then trust my direct reports



JoAnna L. Sohovich '93 was a supply corps officer who deployed to the Persian Gulf as one of the first women following the repeal of the combat exclusion policy. She has held executive leadership positions with the Chamberlain Group, Stanley Black & Decker and Honeywell.

as subject matter experts, allowing me to focus on business strategy, the team and overall performance—arguably a more effective investment for a leader than interfering in or micromanaging their team's duties.

How have your connections with fellow alumni influenced your personal and/or professional life?

Sohovich: Every time I interact with a Naval Academy graduate—and even other service academy graduates, to an extent—I immediately feel the shared experience, philosophies and values. While every grad is not the same, it feels like we have a shared DNA, often accelerating the trust process—either personally or professionally. For example, I treasure a 20+ year friendship with two West Point graduates from early in my Honeywell career, and they will both be at my table for the DGA ceremony!

Why is it important to support future generations of midshipmen, young leaders?

Sohovich: I recall the sheer magnitude of responsibility I shouldered as a JMO and have a ton of respect for current midshipmen and pending JMOs. I want to do whatever I can to help scaffold their success and effectiveness as we rely on them for future leadership in the fleet, government and civilian life.

What advice do you have for the next generation of midshipmen?

Sohovich: I believe that there are three phases to the maturity of a leader: first, leader as boss. This leader thinks that they have to tell everyone what to do and constantly critique and evaluate. It's a common misconception that this is what a leader does.

The second phase is leader as teacher. Many think that they need to add value by instructing their talent on how to do their jobs and view themselves as benevolent leaders compared to the first category.

The third, and most evolved, is the leader as coach ... when assigning a task or project, I try to share the vision for the outcome, rather than my preferred process. I challenge the person to come up with their own best ideas, and then only offer feedback or ask questions as needed. There have been so many times that I was pleasantly surprised by the route chosen by my teammate and was grateful that I didn't color their thinking with my own ideas. This strategy is particularly effective with experienced professionals.

Lastly, trust that you have the training to lead your people. At first I was intimidated when Sailors my father's age came to me for help with marital disputes or financial problems ... but I quickly realized that they didn't have a problem with coming to me for help, so why should I be intimidated by the age or experience gap? In every case, I had the training and ability to resolve these issues. ⚓