

Bill Soltis is an entrepreneur, an excellent businessman and, with his wife Wanda, the donor of the Texas A&M Soltis Center for Research and Education in San Isidro de Peñas Blancas, Costa Rica. In 2005, Soltis



approached Texas A&M University about the possibility of donating land adjacent to the Monteverde rainforest and building new facilities to promote research and education at his own expense.

The vision for the Soltis Center described by Soltis was three-fold. First, he hoped that familiarity with the needs of emerging nations like Costa Rica might stimulate “some fine young Aggie mind” to do research that would “help other people.” He spoke of the possibilities of students “finding a cure for cancer or other diseases by studying the plants and insects of the rainforest,” “inventing new methods to harness solar, hydro-electric and wind energy,” and “making the world a better place.” Second, Soltis expressed a desire for Aggies to have an international experience that would introduce them to other cultures. A first-generation American and world traveler, he joked that when he graduated from A&M the sum of his travels was a senior trip to Galveston. Soltis said he believed that an international experience would give Aggies an understanding of the richness of other ways of lives as well as an appreciation for what it means to be an American citizen. Finally, Bill and Wanda Soltis initiated the Soltis Center for Research and Education to raise awareness about the need to preserve and protect the world’s diminishing rain forests. The Soltises are also actively engaged in reforestation projects in the San Isidro de Peñas Blancas area and would like to see

Texas A&M promote sustainable agricultural methods that would provide an economical alternative to clear-cutting forests.

Originally from Houston, Texas, Soltis was the recipient of the first ever Houston Aggie Mother’s Club Academic Scholarship, providing a way for him to get an education. After graduating in 1955 with a degree in mechanical engineering, he began a long life of commitment to ethics and giving back.

Following his military service, Soltis retired from the Army Reserve in 1957 having achieved the rank of Captain and began a long and well-accomplished career, first in commercial heating and air conditioning with the Carrier Corporation and then in air-filtration technologies and clean room construction. An entrepreneur, Soltis owned and operated three companies in the course of his business life: Envirco in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and Filterlab and Lepco in Houston, Texas. All three of his companies serviced international markets in Europe, Asia and North, Central and South America and it was a project in San Jose that first brought Soltis to Costa Rica in 1997. Today, he is the President and Managing Partner of Soltis Enterprises in Houston.

Soltis is a true innovator in the design and construction of cleanroom facilities for use in industry and medicine. As a pioneer in the design of cleanrooms, he holds nine patents, and his state-of-the-art developments include a prototype space sterilization room for NASA at the University of Minnesota, the patented Membrane Diffusion laminar air distribution system, and an air filtration system for a 40,000 square-foot semiconductor facility at Texas Instruments in Dallas. In 1991 he received the Cleanroom Hall of Fame

Award and was inducted into the Texas A&M Department of Mechanical Engineering Academy of Distinguished Graduates in 1994 for his pioneering work in the field of cleanroom design.

From the earliest stages of his career, Soltis has maintained active involvement in organizations that promote free enterprise and equal opportunity for all citizens. He is the youngest person ever to be elected director of the Albuquerque Chamber of Commerce and worked diligently to promote industry in Albuquerque during his tenure there.

Throughout his postgraduate life, Soltis has remained in touch and supportive of Texas A&M. Texas A&M President's Endowed Scholarship, was established by his children in 1998 and named for him and his wife, Wanda Soltis. Soltis, along with his wife, served on the inaugural Advisory Council of the Texas A&M School of Medicine, and, for the past twelve years, Soltis has been a guest lecturer in the Mechanical Engineering Department and the Graduate Program of the School of Architecture at Texas A &M.

A member of the Texas A&M Century Club, Soltis is an honorary Colonel of the Texas Aggie Corps of Cadets Association, a member of the Houston A&M Club, an honorary member of the Costa Rica Aggie Club, and has served as President of the Albuquerque A&M Club. He has spent numerous hours mentoring and providing financial support for Texas A&M students to achieve their goals.

In a letter to The Association of Former Students, John Hickox ('79), Senior Partner of KPMG described his relationship with Soltis, "I ...have been mentored by him for over 32 years. Mentored to practice ethics to an extreme, mentored to achieve

success by always picking yourself up when you stumble and try again, mentored to treat family as a treasure, mentored to manage employees with compassion and care, and mentored to share your monetary rewards in life to give back and make the world better".

It is evident that these lessons are not simply knowledge that Soltis passes on to others, but that they represent the way he and his wife Wanda live their lives. After falling in love with Costa Rica years ago, they purchased rainforest acreage adjacent to the ecologically important Monteverde Preserve and Children's Rainforest with preservation as the initial intent. Not long afterward, Soltis was struck by the possibilities of students having access to the untouched wilderness and the idea of building a research facility and donating it to Texas A&M was born.

Additional acreage that had been used for years as a farm and grazing land for cattle was purchased, reforestation initiated and after approval of the gift by the TAMU Board of Regents, a campus was built. Soltis encouraged graduate students in the College of Architecture to create individual designs and blueprints for the new Soltis Center facilities and many of their ideas were incorporated into the final plans. For these students and all those that will follow, the hands-on experience and international exposure they gained in Costa Rica are valuable parts of their education as a result of the Soltis family's vision and generosity.

