

# David Hart

## A DIFFERENT POINT OF VIEW

School of Law alumnus Emmett D. “David” Hart, Jr. always thought he would go into his family-owned business, Mountville Mills, in LaGrange, Georgia.

However, it was not until after earning a degree in political science from Columbus State University that Hart decided to explore the idea of law school. “We had a very small family friendly business that I planned on going into but with it being such a small business, I thought I’d better have a Plan B,” he said.

At only 20 years old, Hart enrolled in the UGA School of Law. Though he was one of the youngest in his class, he embraced the challenge and graduated in the fall quarter of 1979.

Reflecting back on his time in Athens, Hart said that at times he found it difficult, but he knew he had made the right decision.

“Going through law school gives you a certain level of confidence that you wouldn’t ordinarily have,” Hart said. “Taking on the legal language helps, as well as understanding tax issues, family planning and just understanding that you’re making a good business decision. If you don’t know the legal ramifications, it’s hard to know if it’s a good business decision.”

Hart joined his father at Mountville Mills immediately after graduating. Back then, there were just 14 employees at the business, which manufactures floor mats. Today, the company has more than 1,000 staff and occupies 640,000 square feet of building space.

As the present-day chief executive officer, Hart coordinates functions between several divisions of the company, considers mergers and acquisitions on a regular basis and helps to maintain the corporate culture.



“People can copy products, but copying culture and execution is not something people can easily do,” he said. “The reality is that I am in a position where I have a tremendous influence over so many people. Setting a standard that drives back to the culture is essential.”

Hart said his company’s primary mantras are: Do the right thing. Do what’s best for the customer. Drive improvements and innovation.

He enjoys working alongside his family members and continuing to build the Mountville Mills business.

“I was very thankful to be able to work with my dad for over 20 years before he passed away. I have had the fortune to work with my sisters, one of my sons and my niece. Having that honor of working with your family is something most people do not have the opportunity to do, and it comes with a lot of blessings. We’ve been very thankful to be able to do that,” he said.

With the help of his law degree, Hart leads his company with a different perspective. “I see the opposite side of the coin. Most people just see the heads or the tails, but I am looking at the other side too,” he said. “That’s just something in my DNA, but partly due to the law school way of thinking. I often measure the downside and what could go wrong, while trying to balance that with the upside.”

In his spare time, Hart can be found traveling, playing golf and relaxing when he can.

—Claire Taylor

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# David and Susie Bell

## A FAMILY OF LAWYERS

For 1977 alumnus David B. Bell Sr. becoming a lawyer was almost preordained.

It all started in 1934 when his father graduated high school in Augusta, Georgia, and decided to go to law school. During the height of the depression money was scarce, so David's grandmother sold her diamond wedding ring to help his father pay for law school, thus becoming the first lawyer in the family.

Since then, the Bell family has sent 10 additional members to the UGA School of Law, including two of David's sons. "I think I might have paid more law school tuition than anyone in the history of our state," he joked.

David and his wife, Susie, who earned her undergraduate degree from UGA, met in Washington, D.C., while working for Sen. Herman E. Talmadge (LL.B.'36) one summer. The two then moved back to Athens in 1974 and lived in family housing while David earned his law degree. "We were dead broke and had no heat," David said. "But I always wanted to be a lawyer, and I loved every day of it."

David stayed busy and focused on law school. He kept a strict schedule, which allowed him to balance his school and personal lives. "I treated law school like a profession – I would get there at 8 a.m. and leave at 5 p.m., exercise and eat, and then get back to the law school and read from 7 p.m. to 10 p.m., then go home and sleep and was back at it again the next day," he said.

As David earned his law degree, Susie worked in the university's comparative literature department. "I didn't make much money, but it was a lot of fun," Susie said. "I could walk up to the law school and have lunch with my husband and see what was going on with him, then go back to work. It was quite the set up."

After graduating with his Juris Doctor, David served as a judicial clerk for Judge Walter McMillan in Atlanta and then spent six years working for a law firm in Augusta, while Susie taught high school English and raised their four children.

David later decided to open up his own practice, the David Bell Law Firm, and has been there ever since. "I created my own practice in 1988, and then was joined by my son David Jr. (J.D.'12) in 2018, which is just about the most rewarding thing," David said.



On a day-to-day basis, David runs his plaintiff's practice and represents people who have been hurt. "I like helping people and solving their problems – making their lives a little better. When I'm able to do that it's very rewarding," he said.

Though the Bells stay very busy, they still manage to spend time with their loved ones and keep active. The two enjoy planning excursions with their friends, teaching Sunday School and visiting with their family. "We have two young granddaughters who we just adore," Susie said and then added, "Don't worry, we've already talked to them about law school."

For the Bell family, the idea of working hard is greatly valued. "I'm proud of the fact that our children go to law school and that they see that I enjoy [the practice of law]," David said. "I'm just so grateful to the UGA School of Law. A law degree is a very valuable asset. It has to be protected and nurtured. [We have to] continue our education and we have to work hard to keep it, but it has opened up so many doors and so many opportunities. I'm thankful for it every day."

*Bell family School of Law graduates include: John C. Bell (LL.B.'38), John C. Bell Jr. (J.D.'72), David B. Bell Sr. (J.D.'77), Ansley M. Threlkeld (J.D.'01), Paul H. Threlkeld (J.D.'01), John B. Manly (J.D.'08), Megan R. Manly (J.D.'08), David B. Bell Jr. (J.D.'12), Thomas P. "Peyton" Bell (J.D.'15), Katherine "Kate" Bell (J.D.'15) and Jordan T. Bell (J.D.'15).*

—Claire Taylor

"I like helping people and solving their problems – making their lives a little better."

—David Bell (J.D.'77)

# Pope Langdale

## GIVING BACK TO THE COMMUNITY NEAR AND FAR

Alumnus William P. “Pope” Langdale III knew he had big shoes to fill when he began his legal career. His father, William P. “Bill” Langdale Jr. had already established himself in South Georgia as a successful attorney at the firm Langdale Vallotton. However, since his graduation in 1992, Pope has become one of the most recognized litigators in South Georgia.

Born and raised in Valdosta, Pope earned his bachelor’s degree in economics at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill with intentions to attend law school after. “I always had a feeling that I would want to practice law with my father,” Pope said. Knowing that he wanted to return to Georgia, he eventually decided to enroll at the UGA School of Law.

“To me, the School of Law was, and is, the best law school in the state of Georgia and offered the best opportunity for me to get a quality education while also making a number of important contacts with my fellow classmates,” he said.

While in studying in Athens, Pope was an active member of the *Georgia Law Review* and made lifelong friendships with his classmates. “I had some very close friends at school and I’ve maintained those friendships to this day,” he said.

One of the most beneficial aspects of Pope’s law school experience was his torts law class. “I still look back on those days with fondness, even the challenging classes, because it is a lot of what I do today,” he said.

After earning his law degree and graduating *cum laude*, Pope practiced litigation law in Atlanta for three-and-one-half years before moving back to Valdosta to practice with his father. When he started at Langdale Vallotton, it primarily specialized in real estate and transaction law. With no personal real estate or transaction experience, Pope helped create the litigation arm of the firm, which has really grown.

“My favorite part about the type of litigation I do is being able to put our [clients’ lives] back together and get them the justice they deserve,” he said.

Currently, Pope works as a partner at the firm and is actively involved in the State Bar of Georgia. Plus, he was recently appointed to serve on the Judicial Qualifications Committee. He is also the past president of the Georgia Trial Lawyers Association, and a board member and district representative of the General Practice and Trial Section of the state bar. Additionally, he has been selected by the federal judges of the Middle District of Georgia to serve on the Advisory Rules Committee for the district.



“My father, Bill, instilled in me at a very young age the value of a strong work ethic and that nothing meaningful can be gained without an equivalent amount of sacrifice ... .”

Pope said he strives to follow in the footsteps of family members who influenced him professionally and personally.

“My grandfather, Billy Langdale, taught me through example how important it is to care about the community in which you live, to get involved in your community, to give back to your community and to always do so within the ultimate goal of helping others, not yourself,” he said.

“My father, Bill, instilled in me at a very young age the value of a strong work ethic and that nothing meaningful can be gained without an equivalent amount of sacrifice, and in the legal profession, that sacrifice is time – time spent representing your clients to the fullest extent possible.”

Because of these influences, Pope is a strong believer in connecting with his local community. He is

the creator and sponsor of a local scholarship that is awarded every year to a graduating senior from each of the two local high schools in Valdosta.

“I want to influence the high school students in my community to reach out and go to law school, and then come back to Valdosta and help our community with what they’ve learned,” Pope said. “We need our young people to come home and bring their knowledge. It makes it a better place to live and, if anything, I try to encourage kids to do that,” he said.

—Claire Taylor

# Siva and Shiyami Subramaniam

## A HOME OF THEIR OWN

School of Law alumnus Aravinth I. “Siva” Subramaniam (LL.M.’88) and alumna Shiyami M. Subramaniam (LL.M.’89) never imagined they would fall in love with America and Athens, Georgia. But, after they both earned their Master of Laws degrees from the UGA School of Law, they decided to stay in the United States for good.

The two are originally from Sri Lanka, where they met in law school for the first time. “My first day, [Shiyami] came to haze me – that’s how we met, and she enjoyed it so much she decided to do it for the rest of her life,” Siva joked.

In Sri Lanka, students must decide their future careers during high school. Siva and Shiyami initially chose to study engineering and medicine, respectively. However, they both quickly changed their minds and transferred to the pre-law track. After completing high school, the Subramaniam family earned their law degrees in their home island nation, which was experiencing ethnic unrest. It was then that Siva decided to earn a law degree from a different country.

“I decided I needed some type of qualification from outside of the country so that if things got even worse I could get out,” Siva said. “That is what prompted me to leave as soon as I graduated [law school] and go seek my first LL.M. degree at the University of Brussels in Belgium.”

During his time in Brussels, Siva met the late Kirbo Chair in International Law Gabriel M. Wilner, who was a visiting professor from the UGA School of Law. “Professor Wilner actually said to me in May of 1987, ‘Mr. Siva, you shouldn’t be going back to Sri Lanka with everything going on in that country. To me, it seems like you are going to be a great tax lawyer wherever you are. I think the best thing for you to do is come to the States, enroll in the University of Georgia and get your LL.M. degree there,’” Siva said.

Siva had reservations about life in the United States and at UGA and planned to return to Sri Lanka after earning his degree in Athens. However, it did not take long for him to realize that he wanted to stay for good. “I felt like I actually had a country to call my home,” Siva said. “I owe that in a large part to the law school community in particular. I thought that if I could stay here and practice law in any form, that would be my first choice.”

Weeks after arriving in the Classic City, Siva made a call to Shiyami back in Sri Lanka and suggested she come and get her LL.M. from UGA as well.



“I felt like I actually had a country to call my home. I owe that in a large part to the law school community in particular.”

—Siva Subramaniam (LL.M.’88)

“I found the professors were really friendly and you could approach them for anything,” Shiyami said. “The LL.M. class I was with was very nice for us because it was all people with an international flavor. With that said, I found the law school students very intense, and it was nice for me to see because they knew that they wanted to be in law school.”

After graduating, the couple moved to New York City where Siva worked in international taxation for PricewaterhouseCoopers and Shiyami practiced with an immigration law firm.

Currently, the Subramaniam family live in Summit, New Jersey, where Siva still works for PwC and also serves as an adjunct professor at the New York University School of Law, while Shiyami spends her time with their two children and spearheading charitable activities.

One of Shiyami’s favorite philanthropic endeavors has been a program called “Keys to Success,” which allows underprivileged children in the community to learn an instrument at a young age. “It’s very rewarding to see these kids who have absolutely no background in music and how they take to it. It’s a lovely thing,” Shiyami said.

In their spare time, Siva and Shiyami enjoy spending time together and, of course, cheering on the Dawgs. “I’m an avid Georgia Bulldog fan. I rarely miss a game on a Saturday, and I have the ultimate accessory,” Siva said. “Our English Bulldog named Humphrey always sits and watches TV with me, so when I’m watching the games I have a bulldog by my side.”

—Claire Taylor