



Mary Ann Elliott
1943- , McLean

Mary Ann Elliott was born of humble beginnings in rural Robeson County, North Carolina. She was the only child of Mary Caroline McKenzie and William Austin Edwards. As a child, she worked in the tobacco fields, until the Edwards family moved to Virginia, eventually settling in Newport News. There Mary Ann helped her father operate a roadside stand where he taught her the basics of business. Soon thereafter her father suffered a debilitating stroke, leaving Mary Ann and her mother to care for him.

Mary Ann dropped out of the eighth grade at Newport News High School to marry James Ray Elliott. She had her first child, J.R., in 1957, just before she turned 15. She had two more children, but returned to school to get her GED, and began selling World Book encyclopedias part-time. However, her life changed dramatically when, in 1975, James Elliott died in a car crash. Elliott realized she would have to work full-time to support her three children.

Mary Ann faced serious challenges in her attempt to find a job. She was rejected for three jobs at Motorola because she was a woman. After receiving her third rejection, Mary Ann wrote to the chairman of the board. Her persistence paid off when Motorola finally hired her as their first female employee in terrestrial wireless communications. Over the years, she developed her marketing skills and knowledge of the telecommunications industry. In 1991, after working for a number of companies, Elliott decided to start her own business. She named her company Arrowhead Space and Telecommunications, Inc. as a tribute to her father's Tuscarora and Lumbee Indian heritage, and located it in McLean, Virginia.

Mary Ann Elliott's energy and perseverance have made her one of the most successful businesspeople in Northern Virginia. In 1999, *Defense Daily* named her among the "40 Most Influential Players in Global Defense, Aerospace, and National Security," and she won the Department of Transportation's Woman-Owned Business of the Year award in both 2000 and 2001. By 2002, Arrowhead Space and Telecommunications had revenues of more than \$35 million. Despite her busy schedule as president and CEO of Arrowhead, Mary Ann Elliott has devoted considerable time and energy to supporting opportunities for women and Native-Americans. She is affiliated with a variety of organizations, including Women in Aerospace, Women in Technology, the Native-American Business Association, and the Tuscarora tribal office.

She has established an academic scholarship in her mother's name at the University of North Carolina, Pembroke. She currently resides in Northern Virginia. Mary Ann Elliott is a dramatic example of the power of strength, energy, and persistence.