

SPIRIT

First Gen

How Texas A&M University is helping first-generation students wear their status as a badge of honor.

Ever Onward



As you have probably heard, we have welcomed a new university president in Dr. Katherine Banks, someone who knows firsthand the power of philanthropy to sustain and improve this institution.

I can personally attest to her reputation as a candid and disciplined leader who has earned the highest accolades in

academia and can successfully accomplish the most difficult tasks. As vice chancellor and dean of the College of Engineering, Dr. Banks consistently held herself and others accountable while establishing a compelling vision for the future, and I look forward to our partnership as she leads Texas A&M.

I would be remiss not to also compliment Dr. Banks' interim predecessor, Dr. John Junkins, for faithfully stewarding Texas A&M and ensuring a smooth transition of leadership. I'm excited about our continued work together in his crucial role leading the Hagler Institute for Advanced Study and its ever-increasing impact.

As Aggieland enters this new era, I want to affirm the Texas A&M Foundation's commitment to building a brighter future for Texas A&M, one relationship at a time. This commitment means more than raising funds for scholarships and campus programs; it means fostering a **culture of philanthropy** where gifts of all sizes and contributions of time and energy are equally integral to Texas A&M's success.

I have learned over the last five years that our uniqueness in higher education is firmly rooted in our values and our belief that our university means so much because it stands for so much. I have also come to express that our desire to excel in all we do never get in the way of our community's character. **We strive to be elite but never elitist.** Humility and hard work are what power Aggies'

efforts. These sentiments reflect the "can-do" spirit that Texas A&M brings to the world and, in this philosophy, we have unique opportunities to move our state, nation and world forward in powerful ways.

To continue the momentum created during the \$4.25 billion *Lead by Example* campaign, we must embrace our history as an institution and dream even bigger about the future. For the Foundation, that means pursuing purposeful initiatives that directly impact Aggies and our generous partners who support them. Namely: further strengthening the university's endowment, which currently sits at \$2.2 billion, and strategically aligning with our academic partners.

Finally, I am pleased to announce that our Board of Trustees unanimously approved the removal of the gift fee for all future endowed and non-endowed contributions to the Foundation, effective July 1, 2021. Since our founding, due to our total lack of state funding, we relied on a gift fee to support operating costs. Thanks to the marked growth of our endowment, coupled with our effective business practices, we now generate sufficient funding to cover our operations. This decision means endowed gifts will earn distributions immediately toward their specific purpose to benefit students, faculty and staff at Texas A&M as soon as the gift is made.

Collectively, these decisions are intended to strengthen the university. That is why our organization exists and why we believe so passionately in what we do. That block A-T-M has long been a symbol for leadership, legacy and community. Today, I look at it and also see a symbol of hope—one we can wear proudly as we step into a brighter future.

Thanks for all you do.

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large 'T' followed by a horizontal line and a small flourish.

Tyson Voelkel '96

PRESIDENT & CEO, TEXAS A&M FOUNDATION

• issue

summer 2021

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TRAILBLAZERS

Architect to the Stars

David Applebaum '80 makes his living drawing up homes for clients from the silver screen. But it is creativity, not celebrity, that drives him to master his craft.

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First Gen

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Read Spirit online at spirit.txamfoundation.com.

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Spirit is published three times per year by the Texas A&M Foundation, which builds a brighter future for Texas A&M University, one relationship at a time. Through compelling stories and photography, Spirit celebrates unique individuals, the joy of giving back and the Aggie can-do spirit from a perspective that spans the entire campus. Please direct inquiries to the Marketing Office, Texas A&M Foundation, 401 George Bush Drive, College Station, TX 77840-2811, call (800) 392-3310 or (979) 845-8161, or email info@txamfoundation.com. Information in this magazine is for educational purposes only and should be examined by independent legal counsel due to possible differences in local laws and individual needs.

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Education Equals Opportunity

Even though my parents didn't attend college, there was no question that I would. Both of them, especially my mom, emphasized education.

It began with books.

As a child, I especially enjoyed *The Berenstain Bears*, the friendly family of grizzlies who concluded every tale with a moral lesson. We had at least 50 of those books, filled with stories of Papa Bear and Mama Bear, a few favorites so weathered that the pages were held together by tape or staples. I could “read” several of the stories before really knowing how to read; after hearing the familiar lines so many times, I had simply memorized the words that accompanied each picture.

Whether or not reading was the trick, by the time I began kindergarten, I enjoyed learning. While my parents never demanded academic success, it was silently understood that education was important and that excelling in school would be a sure ticket to college—and to scholarships that could offset the cost. Thus, in 2011, I arrived in Aggieland as a first-generation student, a population that still comprises almost 25% of Texas A&M University's undergraduate student body.

Our cover feature (page 18) explores how Texas A&M is increasing efforts to welcome and support this important and unique subset of Aggies, undertaking measures to make their college transition smoother and their overall experience more successful. As an initiative that speaks to every individual's fundamental right to education and our university's land-grant mission to improve the lives of citizens statewide, it is one of the most important efforts happening on campus today.

Education is powerful because it is empowering. An equitable and accessible educational system helps all students develop the knowledge and skills they need to seize opportunities and become productive members of society. No one should be denied the chance to learn because of the way they were born or where they come from, but unfortunately, pure circumstance still derails the prospects of too many individuals—and disproportionately so among those who could be the first in their families to attend college.

A student featured in this issue, Juanita Rocha '21, said something that I won't soon forget: As a first-generation student, she knows how to work hard to get where she wants to be. That resonated with me in such a personal and striking way. So many first-generation students are hardworking and eager to learn; they just need someone to believe in them.

If you're on the hunt for something truly worthwhile and rewarding to support at Texas A&M, consider creating a scholarship for a first-generation Aggie. In addition to helping change the trajectory of one life, your gift can change the trajectory of families and communities by helping these students set an inspiring and attainable example.

Plus, you won't find more grateful scholarship recipients; I speak from experience.

Duna Reader

Duna Reader '15

EDITOR, SPIRIT MAGAZINE

letters

Share Your Comments: We always enjoy receiving our readers' reactions to *Spirit*. If the magazine's content moves you to write, please send a note or email us at info@txamfoundation.com.

DUNAE READER '15
Editor

"Whoop! The *Lead by Example* campaign is an incredible testament to our university and Aggie family!"

—ERIC MENDOZA '21, 2020-2021 STUDENT BODY PRESIDENT
College Station, Texas

Campaign Compliments

What an astounding accomplishment! Congratulations to the whole team. The *Lead by Example* campaign is an incredible tale of fundraising in Texas. The discussion of measurable metrics in Tyson's letter was especially informative. Surpassing the goal by a quarter of a billion dollars is as impressive as achieving the goal itself. Well done!

—ALEXIS BREEDING
Manhaca, Texas

Congratulations on the completion of the *Lead by Example* campaign! No small task but so worth the time and effort. All Aggies will benefit.

—PEGGY HADEN NOLAN
Dallas, Texas

Congratulations to the entire team at the Texas A&M Foundation on completing the *Lead by Example* campaign! And thank you to Aggies everywhere who made this happen. "But there's a spirit can ne'er be told. It's the Spirit of Aggieland."

—MARK MATTHEWS '80
Flagstaff, Arizona

Good Bull and truly remarkable! The *Lead by Example* campaign will make a difference in the lives of generations of Aggies to come, and their impact on the world will be immeasurable.

—NATHAN SEAGO '18
Knoxville, Tennessee

It is inspiring to see what can be done when Aggies pull together to make a difference. The *Lead by Example* campaign is yet another wonderful example of Aggies working together to serve the greater good.

—DAVE MARSH
Bryan, Texas

Other Comments ...

Such a wonderful story about a remarkable, multitalented man in Dean Eli Jones. I enjoyed the beautiful photos of him and Fern. Thankful for all he does for Texas A&M!

—DEE CHILDS '22
College Station, Texas

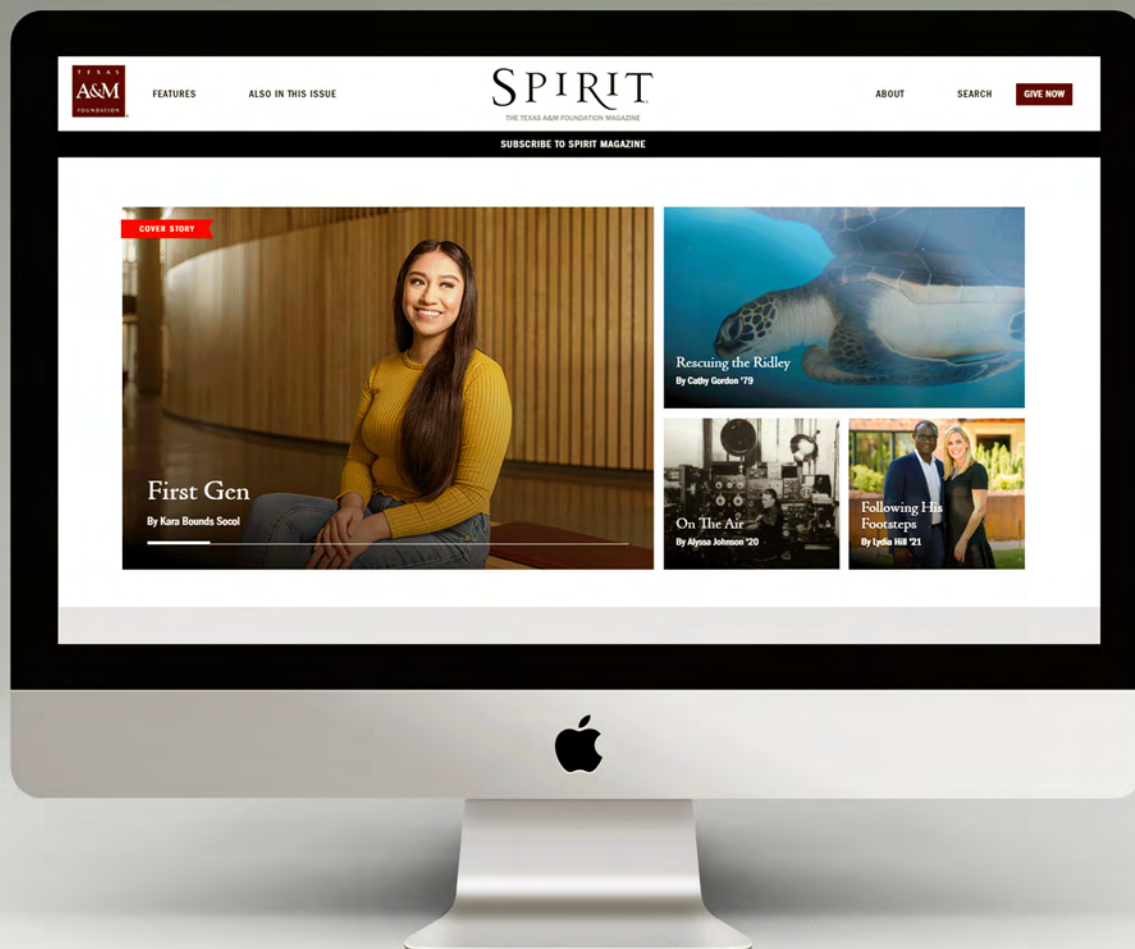
The Knausses' financial commitment to Texas A&M's Veteran Resource and Support Center is an example of selfless generosity to a most worthy cause. Whoop and Gig'em!

—JESSE GALVAN
Los Alamos, New Mexico



Spirit Magazine

a fresh online experience

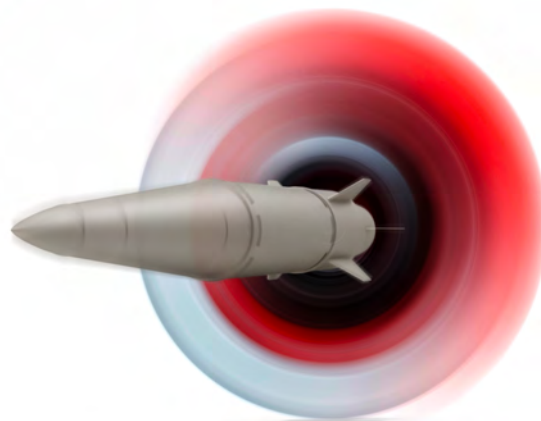


Spirit magazine has a new look online. Our editorial team recently completed a refresh of the Spirit website to improve the reader experience and better align the online edition with our established print brand.

Check it out today at spirit.txamfoundation.com to explore the content you already love and enjoy additional videos, photos and interactive features. You can also easily update your subscription preferences. Spirit is published three times annually in print, but you can choose to receive the e-edition instead or subscribe to both versions. All subscriptions are free, and you can change your preferences at any time.

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Thank you for being part of the Spirit reader community! We are proud to showcase the impact of philanthropy at Texas A&M University and strive to publish stories that reflect and perpetuate Aggieland's unique history, culture and values. Stay tuned for additional editorial enhancements to come in our fall 2021 and spring 2022 issues as we respond to and incorporate feedback from a recent reader survey. We were highly encouraged by the response rate and appreciate all who took the time to share their thoughts about Spirit!



The Texas A&M University System's George H.W. Bush Combat Development Complex will soon feature the nation's largest enclosed hypersonic testing facility as well as an outdoor range for autonomous vehicle trial runs.

Security Innovation Hub

The Texas A&M University System is building two world-class testing ranges for developing innovative approaches to next-generation warfare technology. Designed in consultation with the military and the defense industry, the ranges will be part of the \$200 million George H.W. Bush Combat Development Complex on the RELIS Campus in Bryan.

"There will be no other place like it in the world," said Chancellor John Sharp '72.

The Ballistic, Aero-optics and Materials (BAM) Test Range will be the nation's largest enclosed hypersonic testing range. BAM will be one kilometer long, over two

meters in diameter and contain a hypersonic rail-guided ballistic range; directed energy and laser diagnostics; and the capability to test how protective materials withstand impacts at hypervelocity, which is more than five times the speed of sound.

Construction of the first half-kilometer will be completed by the end of 2022. Phase two will be operational in early 2024.

The second test range, Innovation Proving Ground, will host highly instrumented outdoor experiments. The initial focus will be autonomous aerial, ground and subterranean vehicles and smart, resilient battlefield communication systems. Completion is expected in May 2022.

Hitting the High Notes

Swaram is an a cappella group that fuses South Asian and Western influences.



Aggieland's diverse voice is being heard in the a cappella world thanks to Texas A&M University's Swaram A Cappella. Named after the Sanskrit word for "note" or "voice," the group was founded in 2007 and promotes a cappella music by mixing South Asian and Western cultural elements. "We blend elements from different cultures to unify the distinct aspects of our backgrounds," said Jones Kalarickal '21, the group's president.

Swaram previously performed at All-American Awaaz, the national championship for South Asian A Cappella, where they competed three times and were named two-time national champions. In 2019, the team represented the South Asian a cappella genre to the nation at Howdy Modi, an event celebrating Indian culture that was attended by 50,000 people, including former President Trump and the Indian

prime minister. The group also finished in the top 32 of the 2020 virtual competition UpStagedAID, which received entries from more than 160 teams worldwide.

Since 2010, Swaram has released multiple albums and singles on Spotify and Apple Music, with its most recent, "Defy," featuring songs from its All-American Awaaz performances.

Oscar Muñoz oversees essential resources and enrichment programs brought to border residents through Texas A&M's Colonias Program.



A piece of the Grove lives on in Texas A&M University's Student Services Building. Woodworking company Keystone Millwork created the building's front desk from trees harvested from the former Grove site.

A decades-old bullet was lodged in one of the trees and remains in the table, visible from below.

Caring for the Colonias



Established in 1991, the College of Architecture's Colonias Program improves life for nearly 500,000 Texans along the Texas-Mexico border who live in more than 2,000 unincorporated communities. Known as colonias, these areas lack critical infrastructure such as electricity, potable water, sewage, paved roads or internet. Their remote location and language and cultural barriers prevent many of these residents, who are largely Hispanic, from accessing health care, education, and job training and placement.

The program's 42 resource centers improve residents' quality of life by connecting them to vital services. By partnering with BUILD, a Texas A&M student organization that converts shipping containers into mobile medical clinics, the program recently added a clinic near Laredo where county health employees now support residents. This is the seventh health clinic the program has introduced to the area.

The program also trains members of the colonias to become promotoras, key individuals who connect their neighbors with helpful resources. "By training local residents to navigate different social service systems, we're building up the colonias from within," explained Oscar Muñoz, the program's director.

What is your most cherished family heirloom?

"My grandma's watch. Wearing it makes me feel like she is still with me."

Lora Pippin '19
EDUCATIONAL
CURRICULUM &
INSTRUCTION

"My great-grandmother's English teacups that she brought from Scotland when she immigrated to the United States."

Terry Wilkie '21
COMMUNICATION



"A Bible my family brought from Europe in the 1800s. It has a perfectly intact four-leaf clover inside."

Coleen Savage '21
COMMUNICATION

Catching SoundBytes

Students Ritika Bhattacharjee '22 (below) and Drew DeHaven '22 are giving a voice to the latest College of Engineering stories and opportunities by hosting two podcasts, "Just a SEC" and "The Study Break."

Airing bimonthly, the 15 to 30-minute episodes are part of the Department of Engineering Communications' larger SoundBytes podcast, which also includes

and professionals about personal topics, such as mental and physical health.

"I've gained a new perspective about life," DeHaven said. "We've been fortunate to host candid guests who are honest and vulnerable regarding their personal challenges."

Each episode is produced over a month-long period, during which the co-hosts are responsible

the weekly programs "Ask An Engineer" and "Engineer This!" While these highlight impactful research, Bhattacharjee and DeHaven interview students about professional development, education abroad and internships for "Just a SEC." In the "Study Break," they speak to students

for identifying themes, selecting guests and scheduling interviews. "We hope these series create an impactful platform," Bhattacharjee added. "Each episode is important in showcasing the varying lives of engineering students and their experiences."

A new Department of Multidisciplinary Engineering, the first of its kind in the nation, allows students to explore the intersection of engineering disciplines. The department's flexible degree plans are designed to fulfill a growing demand for engineers who can contribute broadly to the industry and think outside the box.



Texas A&M University's West Campus will soon welcome a new \$15 million dining facility near the HEEP and Kleberg Centers. It will include indoor seating for 390 people, outdoor seating for 80, and student favorites such as Chick-fil-A and Houston Street Subs.



A first-of-its-kind biokinetic sleeve that comfortably fits on a golfer's arm is poised to become a major breakthrough in sports technology.



Swinging on the Green

Golfers can now revolutionize their swing thanks to a new Aggie-designed biokinetic sleeve that analyzes an individual's movements. Designed by Ian Cash '17, the CEO and founder of CTRL, the sleeve syncs with a mobile application

to evaluate the unique aspects of a golfer's swing, including rhythm, club face and club path.

In as few as 30 swings, the sleeve's sensors calculate what an individual's perfect swing looks like and provide real-time training recom-

mendations through the mobile app. The device got its start as a project for Cash's senior design class in mechanical engineering at Texas A&M University and continued to develop through the Engineering Entrepreneurship Program. Cash also

utilized Aggie resources like Engineering Inc. and Startup Aggieland to bring his device to consumers.

"As for being an entrepreneur, I have to give the credit to Texas A&M," he said. "My professors were so influential in starting up the business

and in my own personal journey, as I lean on the wisdom they provided to be a better CEO every day. Without them, my company would not have made it this far."



simple science

Why Does White Noise Help Me Sleep?

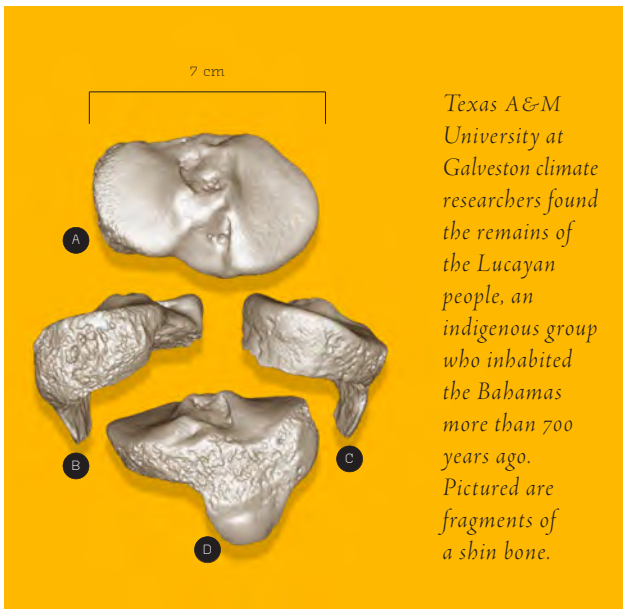
Babbling brooks, crashing ocean waves and falling rain—many people swear sounds like these help them fall asleep, but why?

Dr. Steven Bender, a clinical associate professor and director of the Center for Facial Pain and Sleep Medicine at the Texas A&M University College of Dentistry, said that white noise reduces the contrast between background sounds that you are familiar with, like a ceiling fan, with unfamiliar sounds, like a sudden car alarm.

"Your brain stays engaged with your environment even while sleeping, resulting in microarousals every 20 to 60 seconds," Bender said. "At these points of arousal, the brain determines whether it is still safe to sleep."

Thus, soothing sounds like rain falling or waves crashing on the beach can keep the brain feeling comfortable and at ease during sleep. However, there is no single sound that is comforting to everyone. "What you find calming depends on who you are and how you were brought up," Bender said. "You have to try different things to determine what your brain likes during sleep."

Unearthing the Past



Texas A&M University at Galveston climate researchers found the remains of the Lucayan people, an indigenous group who inhabited the Bahamas more than 700 years ago. Pictured are fragments of a shin bone.

An unexpected discovery of human remains in the Caribbean by Texas A&M University at Galveston faculty and students is providing new information on the Lucayan people, a group who inhabited North America before European colonization occurred in the 15th century.

The remains were discovered by a team of climate change researchers that included Dr. Pete van Hengstum, associate professor in the Department of Marine and Coastal Environ-

mental Science, and Richard Sullivan '21, an oceanography doctoral student. The team was collecting sinkhole sediments to determine long-term changes in rainfall and hurricane activity but discovered the preserved remains in a sediment core sample taken from Great Abaco Island in the Bahamas.

It marks only the second discovery of Lucayan skeletal remains on the island. After combining multiple radiocarbon dating techniques to accurately determine

the age of the remains, Sullivan placed them as belonging to an indigenous person who inhabited the island between A.D. 1290 and 1295, between 100 and 200 years younger than previously thought.

"We're not archeologists, but we felt a sense of responsibility to date the remains," van Hengstum said. "We hope our findings provide archeologists with a more accurate means of calendaring indigenous groups in the Caribbean."

Preparing Veterans

The transition to the civilian workforce can be difficult for veterans, but researchers at Texas A&M University, the University of Florida and the University of Pennsylvania are collaborating to help. Funded by a National Science Foundation grant, the group is conducting research on artificial intelligence to help combat veterans mitigate stress during job interviews.

The Texas A&M team, which consists of professors Theodora Chaspari (computer science), Amir Behzadan (construction science) and Winfred Arthur Jr. (brain and psychological sciences), will partner with the Don & Ellie Knauss Veteran Resource and Support Center to recruit student veterans for job interview studies that measure stress based on vocalizations, visual expressions and physiological reactivity. "We will leverage artificial intelligence, affective computing and data analysis to create personalized models of a veteran's response to job interviews," Chaspari said.



Using the models, veterans can then recognize their triggers and learn how to better cope with stress during an interview. The team hopes the study will help remove implicit bias and misconceptions against veterans during the hiring process and contribute to their career success.

Texas A&M University veterinarians completed a difficult dental operation on Fisher, a North American river otter.

After discovering that what appeared to be a fractured tooth was a more serious problem that could lead to a broken jaw, the team successfully restored Fisher's healthy smile.



A Texas A&M diabetes self-management program improved health outcomes for 8,664 adults with Type 2 diabetes living in South Texas as part of the ongoing Healthy South Texas initiative. Following in-person education from health professionals and follow-up visits over a 12-month period, participants' blood glucose levels were significantly reduced.



From cave-ins to damaging underground utilities, excavator operators face extreme risks. To enhance job safety, a research team that includes Dr. S. Camille Peres from the School of Public Health was awarded a grant from the National Science Foundation to develop a technology interface that can improve excavators' spatial awareness.



On the Air

Texas A&M University's Amateur Radio Club, W5AC, has promoted interest in ham radio in Aggieland since 1912. Following a local storm in April 2020 that damaged the club's headquarters and antenna tower, student leaders committed to creating an endowment to ensure future funds for club operations, facility maintenance and equipment repair.

"W5AC is one of the oldest student organizations at Texas A&M and one of the oldest university radio clubs in existence," said Kevin Glueck '96, the club's advisor. "Its student leaders are passionate about the club's activities and are taking steps

to ensure W5AC has future resources."

As funds become available from former members and fundraising efforts, W5AC will transfer them into the endowment.

"It saddens me that fewer college students have the opportunity to explore ham radio, a hobby that can be of great public service during times of disaster,"

said Connor Farrell '21, W5AC's president. "Creating a permanent funding source that will serve the club's ability to exist long term and succeed gives me an

overwhelming sense of pride and accomplishment."

W5AC is among the oldest university radio clubs in existence.



Following His Footsteps

Since joining the Texas A&M University faculty in 1985, recent Interim President Dr. John Junkins continues to advance Aggieland's reputation for academic excellence. To honor his accomplishments, his daughter and son-in-law, Dr. Kathryn '01 and Benjamin Sarpong, created the Junkins Family Distinguished Lecture Series in the Department of Aerospace Engineering to support an annual lecture from prominent researchers.

The Sarpongs' gift follows Junkins' own example of giving back to Texas A&M. As a university distinguished professor and the founding director of the Hagler Institute for Advanced Study, he and his wife,



Elouise, committed their own planned gift to fund an aerospace engineering chair for a Hagler Institute Faculty Fellow.

"My dad has been a huge advocate of bringing great talent and intellectual forces to Texas A&M," Kathryn explained. "He has helped create an environment of learning and intellectual curiosity, and I hope this gift will add to that."

"This gift is an investment to help develop our most valuable resource—our young people," Junkins added. "I am confident that it will enrich Texas A&M's faculty and students for many decades."

Dr. Kathryn '01 and Benjamin Sarpong

Expanding Horizons

Making the leap from college graduate to professional can be full of challenges, from navigating interviews and landing a job to transitioning to life after college. Thanks to a major gift, Aggie geoscientists will have ample career preparation services and support in a new geosciences career center funded by Traci '11 and the late Curtis Samford '83. As a satellite of the Texas A&M Career Center, it will occupy a renovated space in the Eller O&M Building.

"We are excited for this opportunity to give back to Texas A&M," Curtis said before his passing in February. "To help students take that next step toward suc-

cess after college is gratifying for us."

Assisting with both internship and full-time placement, the center will provide students with the resources to connect the skills and knowledge they gain in geosciences degree programs to their future careers.

"This partnership with the Texas A&M Career Center is a game-changing resource for Aggie geoscientists," said Dr. Debbie Thomas, dean of the College of Geosciences. "Our students will forever associate the Samfords with the promise that their hard work and passion will connect them directly to an intensely rewarding career."

The Traci '11 and Curtis Samford '83 Geosciences Career Center will help Aggie geoscientists identify and land rewarding careers.



Saving on Textbooks

To reduce the financial burden of buying college textbooks, the Class of 2019 created an endowment to benefit the University Libraries' open access textbook initiative. Funds will help the Libraries as they sup-



port the review, creation and adoption of open access textbooks by university instructors, providing significant cost savings for students.

Most students take three to five classes per semester, purchasing new books for each course that result in average expenses of more than \$1,200 per year. Because of these costs, 65% of students decide at some point not to buy a class textbook, risking their grades.

Open access textbooks allow Aggies to obtain a digital, open-licensed textbook to read, download and print for free. When tested on an introductory biology course, open access textbooks saved students \$600,000 collectively. "Studies show that open access textbooks can result in grade improvements because all students have immediate and no-cost access to the text," said David Carlson, dean of the University Libraries. "This format also allows professors to tailor material to course needs. It's a win for the classroom and the pocket-book!"

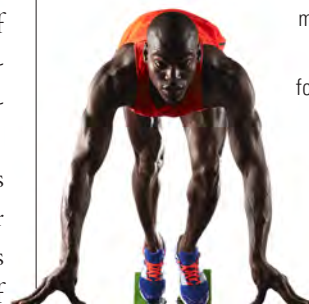
giftwrap-up

Soon after graduating, veteran Walter Hines '19 is already giving back. A former U.S. Marine who majored in chemical engineering, he used matching funds from Marathon Petroleum to **create an endowed scholarship for student veterans in STEM majors.**

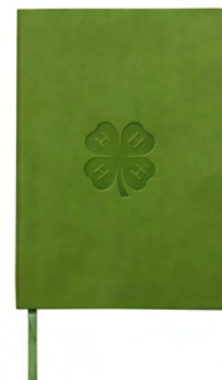


From archery to water skiing, Texas A&M Sport Clubs provides students unique opportunities to develop athletic and leadership abilities in more than 35 sports.

Henry Hulan '53, a former club wrestler, recently committed **\$25,000 to support Aggie teams as they compete at state, regional and national levels.**



To shape the future of Texas 4-H, Dr. Martha Couch **committed a planned gift to support 4-H educators after her lifetime.** A 2012 inductee to the National 4-H Hall of Fame, Couch served as a 4-H educator and leader with the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service for more than 30 years.



Where Dreams Come True

Emma and Christopher Beavers '10 create a gift in their will to support Ivy League graduates enrolling in Mays Business School's MBA program.

BY CLARE FUSSELMAN '21

Emma and Christopher Beavers '10 are wholehearted believers in the magic of Disney. Avid fans, the couple travels to Disney Parks several times annually to experience the atmosphere that is known worldwide as the place “where dreams come true.”

“Disney’s commitment to excellence is what continually draws us back,” Christopher said. “In a way, it reminds me of Texas A&M University. Both places create magic.”

Hailing from Corpus Christi, Texas, Christopher grew up in a diehard Aggie family and experienced the power of the Aggie Spirit by attending football games in Kyle Field. Although he was immersed in Texas A&M’s culture, his path to becoming an Aggie was different than most.

For his undergraduate education, Christopher attended Harvard University to study economics, a decision that can be traced back to his childhood fascination with the stock market and the inner workings of businesses. At Harvard, he earned academic honors and took a number of music courses to foster his love for classical piano, a hobby he continues today.

“Harvard is designed for you to succeed,” Christopher said. “My time there gave me a broad view of the world and of how finance can be directed to social good.”

Back in Aggieland

After four years on the East Coast and with plans to pursue an MBA, Christopher realized just how much he missed his Texas roots. His attention turned to fulfilling his dream of being an Aggie, and he looked to Mays Business School. “Mays had established a legacy as a top-notch business school,” he said. “Coupled with Texas A&M’s core values, I knew Mays would push me.”

His time at Texas A&M did just that and further instilled the core values in his daily life. While his days at Harvard taught him the value of hard work, he admits that without his time in the Mays MBA program, he would not be as well-rounded today.

After earning his MBA, Christopher moved to Fort Worth to begin his financial management career, where he serves as senior vice president and wealth management advisor for the Beavers Wealth Management Group, a Merrill Lynch affiliate. Remarkably, he is the youngest senior vice president in Merrill Lynch history.

“The best part about working in financial management is helping those we serve reach their goals by combining the financial planning and investment management process we have created,” Christopher said. “I get to work with my wife and

A gift from Emma and Christopher Beavers '10 will aid future Ivy League graduates who pursue their MBA at Mays Business School.



an incredible team who show me daily that relationships are at the heart of what we do.”

A testament to his talents, he was recently named to Forbes Magazine’s “Best-in-State Wealth Advisors” for 2020, an honor he attributes to both his Harvard and Texas A&M educations. Outside of work, he and Emma are active members in the Fort Worth community. Christopher continues his passion for piano performance by serving on the executive committee of the Van Cliburn Foundation, while Emma is a five-year veteran of the Dallas Cowboys Cheerleaders and an assistant director with the Texas Christian University Showgirls dance team.

Continuing the Magic

Now, as a member of the Mays Business School Dean’s Advisory Board, Christo-

pher has come to recognize that the success of Mays is measured by the success of its graduates. In hopes of recruiting outstanding students to Aggieland, the Beavers planned a gift in their will to establish an endowed scholarship for Ivy League graduates who pursue their MBA at Mays.

“I feel that Ivy League graduates can benefit from attending Mays,” Christopher said. “Not only is the Aggie Network unparalleled, but the Mays MBA program also develops leaders who are ready to inspire and influence others.”

A charitable bequest is one of the easiest ways to leave a lasting impact on Texas A&M. Bequests can be established as a percentage of your total estate, a specific asset or a set amount from the balance of your estate. With the help of an advisor, you can include language in your trust or will spec-

ifying that a gift be made to the Texas A&M Foundation as part of your estate plan. “Giving a bequest gave us the flexibility to make a bigger impact than we thought possible,” Christopher said. “Our gift is our footprint in Texas A&M’s history.”

The couple hopes their gift enables Mays to extend its tradition of excellence and expand its future influence. “I am proud

to be part of the extraordinary things that the university and Mays have accomplished,” Christopher added. “I hope our scholarship helps ensure that Aggies remain true to the core values and that Texas A&M continues to be a place where students’ dreams come true.” ©

TO DISCUSS HOW A BEQUEST MIGHT BENEFIT YOU, YOUR FAMILY AND THE UNIVERSITY, CONTACT:

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did you know

that MSC Town Hall is working to bring big-name acts back to Aggieland?

For many college students, live music is more than a fun diversion. After a tough week of marathon study sessions, imposing exams and scattered shifts at part-time jobs, the typical weekend concert can act as a break from the day-to-day and provide the kind of experience that gives their hard work meaning.

Since 1951, MSC Town Hall has worked to bring quality music and entertainment to Texas A&M University while giving student performers opportunities to shine. While logistical roadblocks have kept top-tier talent from regularly performing in College Station in recent years, Aggies close to the program have ambitious plans to bring big names back to the Brazos Valley.

Legendary rock band R.E.M. was one of the first alternative rock bands to garner widespread notoriety. The band performed at G. Rollie White Coliseum in 1987 and 1989.



Facing the Music

Headquartered in the Memorial Student Center and operating under the Division of Student Affairs, Town Hall regularly coordinates between 30 and 40 on-campus events each year.

In its 70 years of operation, the program has invited marquee musical acts such as Johnny Cash, Destiny's Child, R.E.M., George Strait, Reba McEntire and Elton

BY BAILEY PAYNE '19

John as well as non-musical performers like Kevin Hart, Steve Martin and Chris Rock. You can read more about some of these notable performances on page 42.

Since the dawn of online piracy and digital music sales, however, artists have relied more on concert revenues and less on album sales to make a profit, spiking concert costs. "The cost of a concert is just so different now," said Kendall Walker, Town Hall's advisor. "It's a different production landscape, and the logistical costs limit our possibilities on campus."

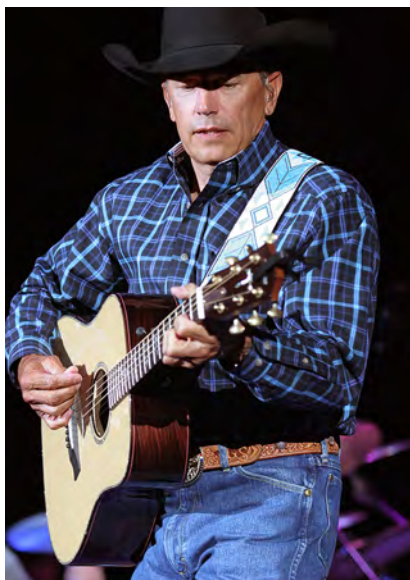
As booking fees soared and securing blockbuster shows meant taking on greater financial risk, Town Hall has more recently focused on featuring up-and-coming student performers.

Tales from Backstage

Town Hall's current student chair, Travis Neill '21, got involved with the program after attending a show from its Coffeehouse series, which features student artists across genres in a casual, small-venue environment. "After I spent some time with Town Hall, I learned Robert Earl Keen '78 and Lyle Lovett '79 both played at Coffeehouse during their time as students," Neill said.

Except for Walker, Town Hall is completely student-run with approximately 100 Aggies managing the program any given year. "This is many students' primary extracurricular activity at Texas A&M," Walker said, "and the experience they get with leadership management, communication and other transferable skills through Town Hall is incredible."

In addition to gaining hands-on practice with show business, students can find themselves in amazing circumstances work-



Country music star George Strait (left) performed at Texas A&M in 1990. The Christian rock band NEEDTOBREATHE (below) played to rapt Rudder Auditorium crowds in 2012 and 2019.

ing behind the scenes. “Some of the students who worked the One America Appeal concert at Reed Arena in 2017 met the former U.S. presidents,” said MSC Director Luke Altendorf, “and others personally escorted Lady Gaga on stage.”

The Show Must Go On

After the COVID-19 pandemic canceled live music events across the globe, Town Hall slowed down but never stopped. “The students have hosted a number of virtual events, including virtual bingo nights with guests like Cullen Gillaspia ’18, the former 12th Man,” Walker said. The fall 2020 semester also saw Town Hall organize outdoor performances with socially-distanced crowds in Rudder Plaza. “They did a great job of maintaining music and art at Texas A&M.”

If anything, the recent absence of large concerts has made Aggies’ hearts grow even fonder for the thrill and community that such events elicit. Before the pandemic, Town Hall was already developing plans to continue their support of local artists while creating a new space for stars to shine.

“The big project right now is the 12th Jam Music Festival,” Walker said. The first annual 12th Jam, a festival featuring performers across genres with local and student talent billed as openers, takes place outside Kyle Field on August 28. It will feature country singer Cam, indie sensation Dayglow and Australian singer-songwriter Morgan Evans, among others. Neill added, “We want this to be a yearly reputable event.”

Together in Spirit

Town Hall students have the experience and enthusiasm required to fulfill that vision, but funding remains an obstacle. Corporate sponsorships would almost certainly supplant the cost of operating the event, while private giving would allow greater leverage for booking talent. In addition to kickstarting 12th Jam, Town Hall hopes to collaborate with the athletics department in utilizing Reed Arena and Kyle Field as grand venues for other performances.

For Walker, bringing exciting shows to town means fostering camaraderie in a university that has historically been defined by its community. “Music brings people together,” she said. “When you’re sitting

next to someone at a concert who you’ve never met and you’re singing along to your favorite song, it creates a bond that you don’t get from any other type of experience. And there’s something amazing about having that on campus. That’s what Town Hall has the opportunity to provide.” ©

TO LEARN HOW YOU CAN HELP MSC TOWN HALL BRING EXHILARATING MUSIC AND ENTERTAINMENT TO AGGIELAND, CONTACT:

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If anything, the recent absence of large concerts has made Aggies’ hearts grow even fonder for the thrill and community that such events elicit.



Under the Radar

One hundred and fifty feet above the hustle and bustle of students, the Aggie Doppler Radar sits atop the highest point on Texas A&M University's campus. Its 16-foot-diameter dish was built in 1962 and re-located to the roof of the Eller Oceanography and Meteorology (O&M) Building in 1973, where it has since been continually updated to keep pace with technological advances.

Dr. Don Conlee '94, an atmospheric sciences professor in the College of Geosciences, helps supervise a program that allows undergraduate and graduate meteorology students to operate the weather radar firsthand.

"We train students to monitor the radar in severe or interesting weather situations," Conlee said. "That's an irreplaceable experience that most students around the country, even those at institutions specializing in radar, don't get to do." Though the instrument's technical specifications are closer to what national researchers used in the 1990s than the cutting edge, Conlee considers it the most capable weather radar dedicated to education in the country.

Because of its prime real estate in central Texas, the National Weather Service still routinely calls upon its data to track and assess severe weather across the state. When a deadly tornado tore through the East Texas town of Onalaska on April 23, 2020, the radar was in the best position to record the tornado's formation and help deliver timely warnings to the community.

The College of Geosciences seeks a \$2 million endowment to provide for the continued maintenance of the radar as a unique educational tool, forecasting aid and historical icon of the Texas A&M atmospheric sciences program. To learn more about this unique giving opportunity, contact David Bacot '90, senior director of development, at dbacot@txamfoundation.com or (979) 862-4944.



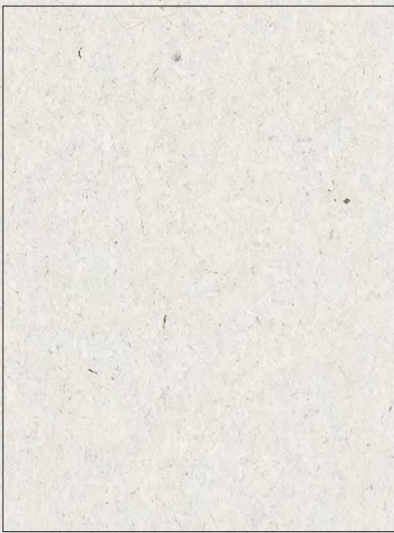
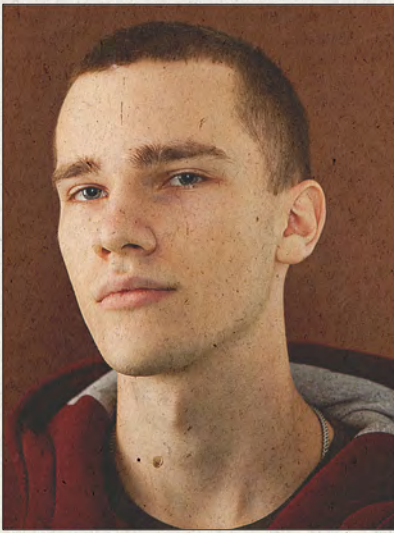
Noisy Nooks

In addition to the Aggie Doppler Radar, many Aggies recognize the O&M Building for its hidden auditory phenomenon. On each side of the building's exterior, 11-story-tall grooves form between its concrete pillars. If you stand at the base of one of these grooves and clap, you will hear the sound waves shoot up the building and back in just tenths of a second, creating a wild echo effect!

How Texas A&M University is helping first-generation students wear their status as a badge of honor.

first

Generation



walk

by Victor Castillo's office and you're likely to find a gaggle of Texas A&M University freshmen hanging out there. Castillo '13 (right) is an academic advisor for the College of Science's Regents' Scholars and Science Leadership Scholars programs. But to these first-generation Aggies from low-income families, he's also a mentor with whom they can identify, a guide to academic success and a lifeline for the daily challenges that threaten to thwart their college aspirations.

A decade ago, the Bryan native was himself struggling to make it through school. A scholarship was his ticket into Texas A&M, but he was unprepared for difficulties that awaited him—and initially unwilling to seek assistance.

"First-generation students like me are very stubborn, and we're used to doing things on our own," Castillo said.

College, of course, can be daunting for any freshman—especially when that college boasts more than 65,000 students. But while about 76% of the more than 53,000 undergraduates at Texas A&M's main campus can turn to their college-educated parents for advice, encouragement and experience, the remaining quarter of the university's undergraduate population doesn't have that luxury. As a result, the retention rate of first-generation students has traditionally lagged behind that of those with college-educated parents.

Texas A&M has recently intensified its efforts to not only make the university affordable for first-generation students but to also address their specific barriers to graduation. The result is a multi-pronged endeavor designed to make their college transition smoother and their overall Texas A&M experience more successful and enjoyable.

Castillo is in the crux of this effort. He sees his role as building the community these students need to thrive at such a large university and serving as the college guide that he lacked. "Having no one to pave that path for me was hard," Castillo said of his own college experience. "But now, I feel like I've paved that path for my first-generation students."

First-Gen Demands and Expectations

When the federal government gave Texas a land grant with a mandate to teach agriculture, engineering and military sciences, virtually all of Texas A&M's students were the first in their families to go to college.

Not anymore. As of fall 2020, only 24% of the undergraduates enrolled at Texas A&M's main campus were first-generation college students (approximately 12,500 students).

Dr. Tim Scott '89, Texas A&M's associate provost for academic affairs and student success, noted that in many ways, the hardships often faced by



Juanita Rocha '21



It took two years for recent graduate Juanita Rocha '21 to admit to her parents how much she had struggled as a college freshman.

Her family's immense pride that she was at Texas A&M meant that failure was not an option. Seeking help, however, was tantamount to admitting defeat.

If she performed as poorly her second semester as she had her first, Rocha would lose her Regents' and Brownsville scholarships. Without that assistance, her one shot to attain a Texas A&M education would disappear.

Today, Rocha can't stress enough the importance of the support she received at this critical juncture from her Aggie Collegiates Ready to Explore the World (ACREW) learning community (now part of the Gen1 Learning Community).

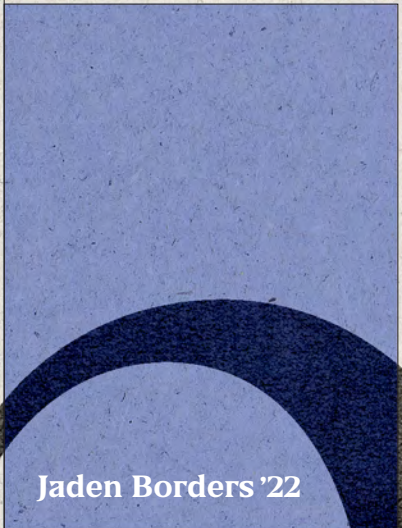
"All of us in the ACREW community are first-generation, low-income students," she explained. "Our similarities really helped us bond. We all struggled, and although we didn't say that out loud, we all knew."

As she continued to wrestle with her circumstances, others intervened. Her ACREW peer mentor, Raquel Sapon '20, gave her the support she needed. Mike Hernandez III '83, whose gift founded the Brownsville Scholars Program in 2016, showed her what a Brownsville native could accomplish. And Dr. Leticia Palomin, her learning community coordinator, encouraged her to share her story.

By the end of her sophomore year, Rocha was a survivor who finally felt like a full-fledged Aggie.

Like Hernandez, Rocha hopes to use her life to help Rio Grande Valley residents. She plans to follow her bachelor's degree in public health with both master's and doctoral degrees, equipping her to pursue a career in health policy.

As a peer mentor herself, Rocha also assisted freshmen who were in the same place she was three years earlier. Instead of hiding from her background, however, she proudly embraced it. "Yes, I am a first-generation, low-income student," she said. "But because of that, I know how to work hard to get where I want to be." ❖



Jaden Borders '22





Jaden Borders '22 was a high-achiever at Prairiland High School in the small Northeast Texas town of Pattonville. His involvements included the National FFA Organization, the Beta Club and the robotics team. He ultimately graduated as salutatorian of his 54-member class.

Borders also loved to play sports, particularly baseball and basketball. His senior year, though, he dropped his athletic pursuits to make time for a more pressing need: finding the scholarships crucial to attend college.

"I knew going in that paying for college would be on my shoulders," he said.

A full-ride scholarship offered by a nearby university looked to be Borders' ticket to a college education. But then Texas A&M came through with a Regents' Scholarship and a Science Leadership Scholarship, adding to an FFA scholarship he had already received.

While he originally planned to be an optometrist, a lecture in Dr. Jerome Menet's biology class on brain neurons his sophomore year—combined with memories of his younger sister's struggle with epilepsy—induced Borders to change his major to neuroscience. Even though he initially found himself academically behind many of his peers who had graduated from large high schools, Borders, now a junior, has managed to maintain a 4.0 grade point average. Medical school is part of his future plans.

Borders points to the Science Leadership Scholars Program as his main source of support at Texas A&M, even in matters beyond academics. There, he has received advice on a wide range of subjects, from college study skills and budgeting scholarship funds to choosing a meal plan.

"They helped me set up a plan for things like buying groceries for one person," said Borders, who has six siblings from two combined families. "I've been lucky that I haven't faced any huge disaster so far, but I know if I do, anyone in the Science Leadership Scholars Program can help me figure it out." ❖



these first-generation students automatically puts them at a disadvantage when compared to their peers. Because of this disparity, the university is determined to provide them the tools to succeed.

In addition to the difficulties faced by most incoming freshmen, Scott cited additional challenges confronting first-generation students.

Some of these students graduated from high schools that were underfunded and under-resourced, he noted. Furthermore, a family emergency or an unexpected expense as seemingly minor as a broken computer can sideline their college aspirations. And when their classmates go out on the weekends, they may not have the spending money to join them.

Then there's the matter of expectations. With the pride of their families and communities resting squarely on their shoulders, Scott said, the pressure to succeed can overwhelm first-generation students, leading them to believe that if they're struggling, they're failing.

"It's no wonder that first-generation students often feel like they don't fit in at Texas A&M," Scott said.

First-Gen Support

The plight of first-generation students has long been on the radar of Texas A&M administrators.

Dr. Carol Fierke, former provost and executive vice president, launched the Student Success Initiative in 2018 to increase the university's first-year retention rate and its four- and six-year graduation rates. The effort also aims to decrease achievement disparities in the student body, including the gap between first-generation students and those whose parents attended college.

With these goals in mind, Texas A&M opened the doors in 2019 to its Office for Student Success (OSS). Charged with "supporting initiatives focused on student persistence, achievement and timely graduation," the OSS devotes considerable attention to the needs of Texas A&M's first-generation college students.

Among the first to financially support the new OSS are Stephanie '93 and Todd Routh '86 of Austin. Through a \$2.6 million commitment to the Texas A&M Foundation, the couple is bolstering the mission of the newly renamed Routh First-Generation Center, housed within the OSS. The center hosts the Gen1 Learning Community, provides cohesive oversight of the many first-generation endeavors on campus, ensures the availability of professional development opportunities, and offers activities to boost community and mentorship.

"Texas A&M not only teaches academics but also life skills," Stephanie said. "First-generation students have drive and ambition. They can take what they learn back to their families, communities and careers, and share their education."

Castillo added that supporting this particular group is ultimately a path to bettering the entire university.

"If we do a good job of helping our first-generation students, we help the campus achieve overall student success," he said, "and the different perspectives of first-generation students will improve the education of all students."

First-Gen Programs

Texas A&M's multifaceted approach to supporting its first-generation college students focuses primarily on community, finances and academic achievement. The following are among the many ways Texas A&M strives to fulfill its commitment to these students.

LEARNING COMMUNITIES:

Gen1 Learning Community

The Gen1 Learning Community is the Routh First-Generation Center's academic success program for first-generation students. By bringing together these students whose scholarship affiliation formerly grouped them into separate communities, the OSS is encouraging them to celebrate their common first-generation identity.

Like other learning communities before it, the Gen1 Learning Community still offers such perks as peer mentorship, first-year seminars, and social and academic events. But it is also poised to encourage participation in high-impact practices geared toward preparing students for internships and the workplace.

"First-generation Aggies are an integral part of the fabric of Texas A&M," explained Dr. Leticia Palomin '12, program coordinator for the Gen1 Learning Community. "Learning communities help students transition into the college environment build community, and thrive academically and socially to be retained and graduate."

SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAMS:

Science Leadership Scholars

For the past five years, Texas A&M's College of Science has invited roughly two dozen of the highest-performing incoming freshmen to join the Science Leadership Scholars (SLS) Program. Geared specifically for first-generation students from low-income families, the four-year program financially and academically supports them through workshops, weekly meetings and even their own study lounge. But Sara Thigpin '08, College of Science program manager for student success, said that it is mentors like Castillo who make the biggest impact.

"Before Victor became advisor, 65.2% of our SLS students remained in the College of Science after their first year," she said. "But when he became advisor, his first class of SLS students had a 90.47% retention rate."

FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE COURSES:

College of Architecture

In 2019, Texas A&M introduced its "Hullabaloo U" courses to ease the college transition. Required for all freshmen, the courses are tailored for different majors and student populations but are all designed with community, academic and personal success in mind.

When it came to developing its own Hullabaloo U course, Texas A&M's College of Architecture was ahead of the curve. The college had previously developed a first-year experience course for its Regents' Scholars to help with their college transition and to introduce them to the many campus resources at their disposal. Most of all, though, it built a sense of belonging.

"Our goal was to get these students plugged in, encourage them to develop a community and feel a part of the College of Architecture," said Dr. David Wentling '13, director of the college's Office of Student Services.

Now a Hullabaloo U course, that mission remains. "The purpose is to develop independent self-learners who have the confidence to advocate for the things they need and the ability to identify the resources available on campus to meet those needs," Wentling said. "By the end of the course, we want them to be able to do these things on their own." ©

first-gen
funding

To actively recruit and retain high-caliber, first-generation students, the Texas A&M Foundation maintains two primary scholarship endowments.

The Regents' Scholars Program

Each year, approximately 750 freshmen join the Regents' Scholars Program. Historically, eligibility requires that neither of the student's parents earned a bachelor's degree and that the family's annual adjusted gross income is under \$40,000.

Roughly one-third of Texas A&M's full-time, first-generation students hold Regents' Scholarships, providing \$6,000 per year for up to four years. The Regents' Scholars Program is an academic success community that requires freshmen to live on campus and attend program-related events. These scholars typically develop a close-knit social and support community.

A \$150,000 gift creates a Regents' Scholarship endowment to support first-generation students in perpetuity, while a gift of \$24,000 funds a one-time, four-year scholarship for one first-generation student.

The Foundation Excellence Award Program

Many first-generation students are from historically disadvantaged groups often underrepresented at Texas A&M. These groups include minorities and those from economically and educationally disadvantaged backgrounds. In 1999, donors to the Texas A&M Foundation endeavored to make Texas A&M's student body better reflect the diversity of the state. Today, the Foundation Excellence Award (FEA) Program continues to support these students based on their academic qualifications, extracurricular activities and financial need.

A \$50,000 gift permanently endows an FEA scholarship that provides recipients annual \$2,500 stipends for up to four years, while a gift of \$10,000 funds a one-time, four-year award for one student. ❖

FIRST-GENERATION STUDENTS
BENEFIT FROM THE GENEROSITY OF
DONORS IN A HOST OF WAYS. TO
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Texas A&M University sophomore Lizzett Tapia's parents know firsthand how tough life can be without an education. Hailing from Mexico, neither attended school beyond the elementary level. When they immigrated to Texas, they were determined to do whatever it took to ensure their children seized the educational opportunities they were denied.

"Going to college was something I always knew I would do," Tapia '23 explained. "There was no other option. My parents came here to give me a better life, which meant that I should take advantage of every educational opportunity possible. I wanted to make them proud."

For high school, Tapia's parents enrolled her in the Rosie Sorrells School of Education and Social Services, part of the Townview Magnet Center complex in Dallas' East Oak Cliff neighborhood. Her high school experience included a two-year internship, where she assisted a first-grade math teacher.

When touring Texas A&M, Tapia felt an instant connection. "I saw myself studying at the Memorial Student Center and going to events," she said. "I felt like I belonged."

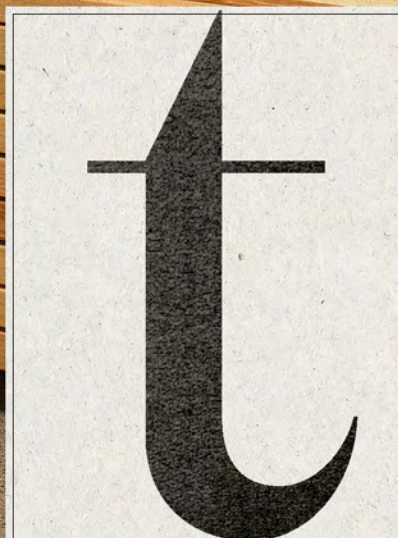
But at the end of the day, she knew that her decision came down to financial aid. The offer of both a Regents' Scholarship and a Century Scholarship ultimately made her choice an easy one.

At the time she made her college decision, Tapia, a mathematics major, could not have anticipated the critical support that the Regents' Scholars Program would play. Beyond financial assistance, she said, her fellow Regents' Scholars and the program's staff members have made her college experience much easier. "During my freshman year, I struggled to find solutions to problems on my own since I couldn't ask my parents," she said. "My peer mentor and Regents' Scholar advisor truly helped."

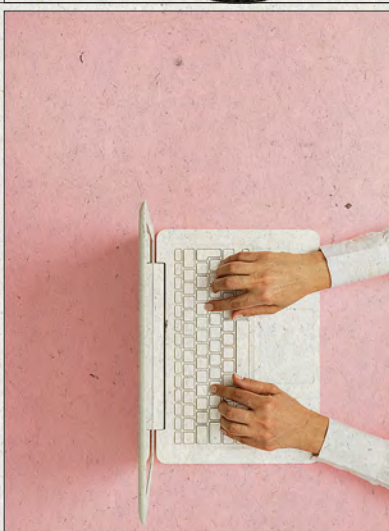
This year, Tapia is giving back by serving as a peer mentor herself.

As for her parents, Tapia said they're delighted that she's attending such a "big, prestigious university."

"They are really, really proud of me," she said with a smile. ❖

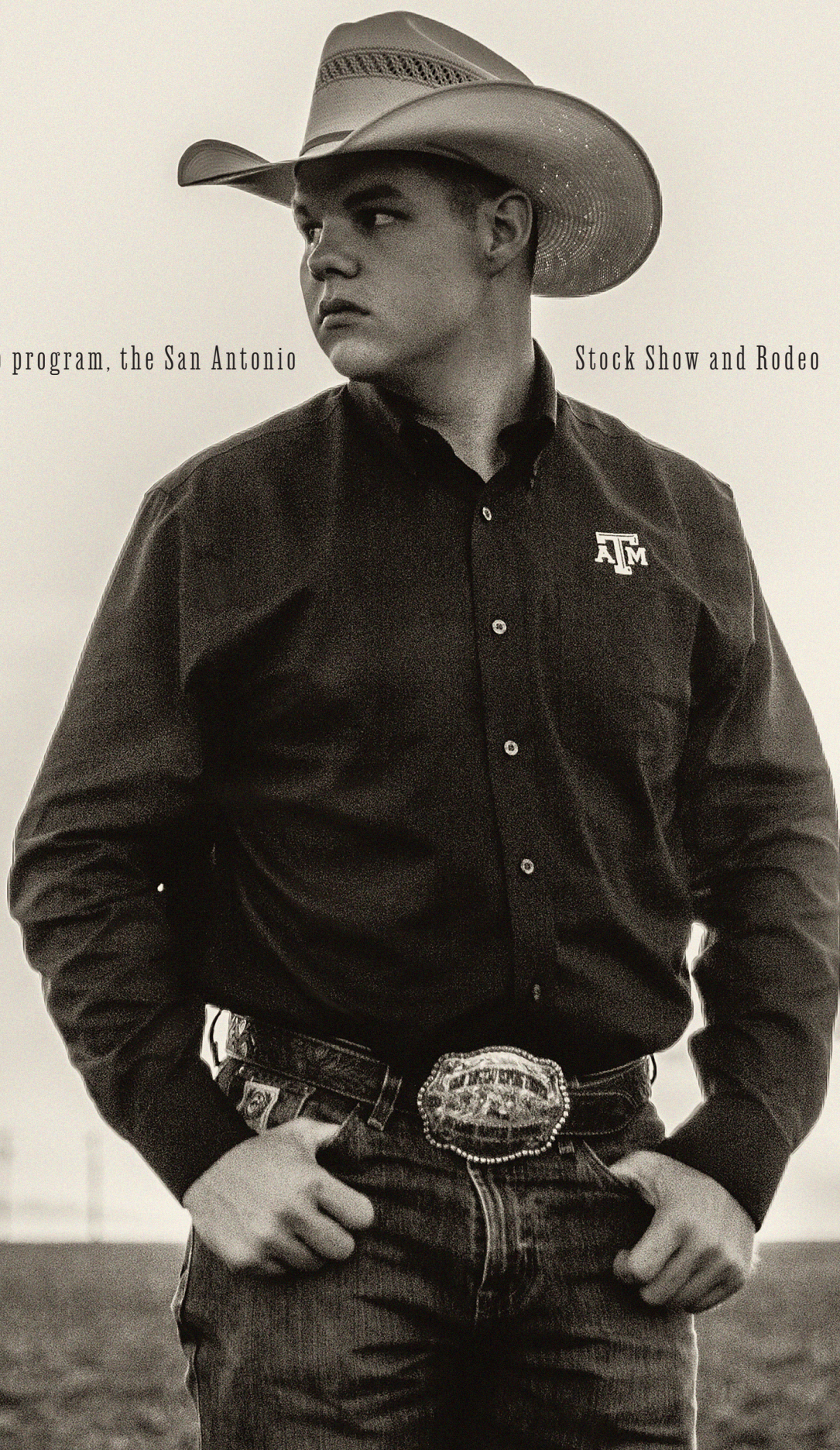


Lizzett Tapia '23



Through its robust scholarship program, the San Antonio

Stock Show and Rodeo



Saddle Up



BY CRYSTAL HOUSTON

prepares students to shape the future of Texas agriculture.

As the young cowboy backs his chestnut steed into the box, the announcer's voice calls over the loudspeaker: "Up next, Cullen Eppright, from Gonzales, Texas." His head is eclipsed by a wide brimmed hat, while his small frame is clad in denim pants and a pearl snap shirt. Horse and rider are tense with excitement, poised and ready for action; both have trained for this moment through days of practice. The boy calls for a calf, and the thrill begins.





he chute opens, and a brown calf runs wildly across the arena. After a few seconds' head start, the barrier drops, and horse and rider rocket out of the box. Eppright swings his lasso, releasing the rope at just the right moment to circle the calf's neck, stopping it in its tracks. He pulls the horse to a halt, hops down in one fluid motion and runs over to straddle the calf, grabbing its flailing legs and securing them tightly with a loop of rope.

He throws his hands in the air to stop the clock, adrenaline rushing through his veins like a cattle stampede. The crowd whoops and hollers as the cowboy dusts off his pant legs and checks his time. There are many variables, but a good time for this event is 10 seconds. Eppright's personal best in 12 years of competitive calf roping is 7.6 seconds.

While he no longer participates in the sport, Eppright said the lessons of rodeo will always be with him. "You can go from champ to chump in one second," said the Aggie junior, a member of the Class of 2022. "Some days are good, and some aren't. You build character during all of those practices when you want to give up, but you don't."

Eppright's dedication to the sport earned him a scholarship through the San Antonio Stock Show and Rodeo (also known as the San Antonio Livestock Exposition, or SALE) via the Texas High School Rodeo Association. Today, the former president of the National High School Rodeo Association is working toward a dual degree at Texas A&M University, including a bachelor's in agribusiness and a Master of Financial Management through Mays Business School's Commercial Banking Program. On top of his busy study schedule, he is a member of the Corps of Cadets and the Parsons Mounted Cavalry Half Section Mule Team and also serves as the vice president for finance of the College of Agriculture & Life Sciences' student council.

A fourth-generation Aggie with a long family history of Texas cattle ranching, Eppright's passion lies in helping farmers and ranchers succeed financially. When he graduates in December 2022, he will pursue a career in agriculture lending and finance. Rooted in the past and equipped with skills for the future, Eppright is ready to meet the challenges of a changing marketplace in Texas agriculture.

FROM THE ROOTS UP

It can be hard to make a living off the land. Market fluctuations, supply chain disruptions and weather extremes mean that Texas producers are working harder than ever, often for less. Fewer young people are drawn to professions in agriculture, placing family farms at risk.

The future success of the Texas agriculture economy depends on the brightest minds—young people from all academic disciplines and walks of life who can couple their skills with a passion for stewarding the land and growing the food an expanding population requires.

Texas agriculture has a rich and storied history. "It's important to maintain our roots," said Cody Davenport '98, executive director and CEO of SALE. "San Antonio is so culturally diverse and historically significant. From cattle drives of the past to the sport of rodeo as we know it today, a lot of the Western lifestyle started here." As more people leave rural settings and move into the state's expanding cities, there are increasing challenges in educating young people on the value of agriculture and Texas heritage.

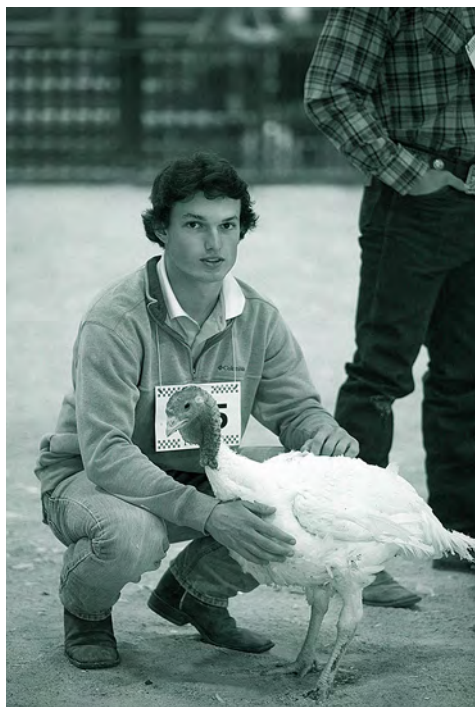
"Students today are less likely to be involved in agriculture at home, so there is a greater need for agriculture education in other ways," Davenport said. "We want young people to understand the importance of the agriculture economy as a whole. The San Antonio Stock Show and Rodeo is a window into agriculture for these kids." Through participation with SALE, students develop hard work, perseverance and a healthy competitive spirit. "Youth are allowed to compete in a fair and balanced space and are rewarded for doing well. These experiences make them better humans."

At its core, SALE is not about what happens in the arena. It is about the hard work and preparation that students pour into their event, whether they are showing goats or building robots. The effort builds their character as well as their knowledge and skills. "What we're doing is raising good citizens through agricultural education," Davenport added. Since 1984, SALE has raised \$223 million for that purpose, funding 21,275 youth scholarships at colleges and universities in Texas. Of those scholarships, 2,000 have been awarded to Aggies, totaling \$17.8 million. Originally, SALE scholarships were reserved for those majoring in agriculture, but today, they can be applied to any degree.

"Agriculture has evolved," explained Davenport. "Now it encompasses every area of academic pursuit, from finance and engineering

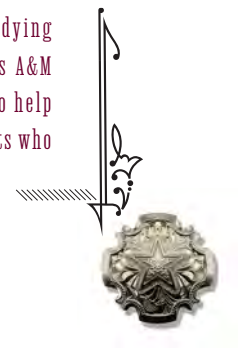


The San Antonio Livestock Exposition has awarded more than \$17 million in scholarships to Aggies over the years, recently surpassing 2,000 awardees—approximately 300 of whom are currently enrolled.





San Antonio native Rebecca De La Pena '21 is studying agriculture leadership and development at Texas A&M through a generous SALE scholarship. She wants to help remove entry barriers for underrepresented students who are considering college.



“Texas agriculture

has a rich and storied history. It’s important to maintain our roots. —Cody Davenport ’98

to education.” The agriculture sector needs a workforce with diverse skills and training. SALE scholarship recipients could become producers and politicians or CEOs and soil scientists, each with the potential to impact their chosen industry.

A network of 6,500 volunteers manages the SALE event each year. The two-week expo and rodeo with 20,000 contest entries is “a 24/7 logistical jigsaw puzzle,” said BJ Hendler ’00, a vice president of SALE. It’s a lot of work balancing his volunteer efforts with SALE and his full-time job as the chief operating officer of American Lumber, but Hendler said it is all worth it when he experiences the moving moment of presenting a scholarship to a deserving recipient.

“We need young people to advance technology and be involved in the legal climate to advance professions in agriculture. There’s an array of career options. We know that every student, no matter what they’re studying, has a role to play,” he added. “What we as volunteers hope is that they will give back and make agriculture better.”

Sarah Franklin ’11 is doing just that. Franklin majored in agricultural economics at Texas A&M, supported by a SALE scholarship. Today, she is the branch manager of Texas Farm Credit in Pleasanton and serves as a board member and chair of the livestock committee for SALE. “Why I’m doing what I’m doing is really to say thank you,” she said. “I learned responsibility, hard work and dedication growing up through the SALE program. Those values are part of our Texas culture. We want to keep this heritage alive.”

THE NEXT CROP

A TV commercial inspired Rebecca De La Pena ’21 to pursue a profession in agriculture. As a sixth grader, the San Antonio native saw an ad for Texas A&M’s College of Veterinary Medicine & Biomedical Sciences. Though she had little experience with animals, De La Pena was determined to attend Texas A&M and study animal science.

That dream pushed her to enroll at an agriscience magnet high school, where she became involved with FFA. She discovered a talent for public speaking, which led to competition in team and individual events. During her senior year, she earned a bronze medal at the national FFA competition for a speech on issues facing agriculture. Her involvement with FFA secured her a generous scholarship from SALE.

Participating in these events opened a whole new world to De La Pena, but it didn’t change her mind about where she would attend college. “Texas A&M was the only place I applied,” she said, not-

ing that her interest shifted from animal science to agriculture leadership and development. It’s been a great fit for De La Pena, whose pursuits are varied. “What am I not passionate about?” she joked. “Agriculture impacts everything; I am thankful for the opportunity to learn about all of it.”

De La Pena’s focus is on agriculture as it pertains to international, community and youth development. She traveled to Mexico to learn farm techniques, Greece to explore leadership in agriculture, and Costa Rica to dive into natural resource management and sustainability. Through these experiences, Texas A&M connected her with others who share similar interests in various locations, providing her with a global professional network.

De La Pena plans to merge her passions for youth and agriculture education by earning a master’s degree in community development. She is interested in removing entry barriers for young people considering college. “I want to make a difference for those who are under-represented,” she said, recounting the obstacles she overcame as a first-generation college student. She now serves as a mentor in the Student Leaders of Tomorrow program at Texas A&M, helping other first-generation students navigate their college experience.

Her influence in this area started closer to home. De La Pena’s mother was so inspired by her daughter’s success during her freshman year that she enrolled as well, earning a bachelor’s degree in business online. While her mother didn’t receive a SALE scholarship, her academic success is inextricably linked to the generosity of those that made it possible for her daughter to attend college.

“I could not have attended Texas A&M without the SALE scholarship. It was a direct result,” De La Pena said.

She’s looking ahead to a bright future for Texas agriculture. “It’s a growing industry,” she said. “Who’s going to step up?”

Across many majors at Texas A&M, students like De La Pena and Eppright are climbing into the saddle and backing into the box. When they graduate, they’ll be ready for any rodeo. ☺

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by Dorian Martin '06

Book Smart

DR. KAY WIJEKUMAR'S WEB-BASED APPROACH TO TEACHING READING HELPS STRUGGLING K-12 STUDENTS CHANGE THEIR ACADEMIC TRAJECTORY.

JORGE, A SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENT at Thomas W. Keller Elementary, often instigated fights with classmates. "He just wasn't interested in school," said his third-grade teacher, Sandra Hotcaveg. "He was only interested in doing whatever it took to agitate me and his fellow students."

But his swagger hid a deep secret: The young boy struggled to read. He could only read five words per minute when he entered third grade, and his reading comprehension consisted of three words: "and," "the" and "on."

Unfortunately, Jorge's story is all too common in the nation's classrooms—and stories like his can have far-reaching repercussions. Low literacy levels can dramatically damage academic self-concept and, if not addressed, Jorge's inability to understand words and sentences threatened to seriously undermine his life.

A foundational part of many careers, reading is critical to maintaining health, becoming financially literate and being a well-informed citizen. It is also a fundamental skill that prepares students for academic success in other reading-intensive subjects such as science and social studies. Yet many K-12 teachers struggle to help students understand written text, especially those who come from low-

income households, have a learning disability or speak a language other than English.

That dynamic is now changing, thanks to an innovative research-based approach called Intelligent Tutoring for the Structure Strategy (ITSS) created by Dr. Kay Wijekumar, a professor in the Department of Teaching, Learning and Culture in Texas A&M University's College of Education and Human Development. Her work focuses on improving reading literacy in K-12 schools. "My goal is to ensure every child in our global society has an outstanding opportunity to succeed by providing them evidence-based instruction in all their subjects," she said.

Reading the Signs

Wijekumar struggled with reading as a child. She excelled at math—regularly earning perfect marks—but would score 75–80 on reading tests. "I was always tripped up by the language. The same logic that I applied in math never worked in reading," she said. "I would read something and see all the possible answers. I'd think, 'That sounds right' and then, 'This also sounds right.' I'd get so confused that I'd pick the wrong one, always."





In college, she studied engineering and computer science before pursuing a doctorate in educational psychology. “I wanted to concentrate my Ph.D. on what people were thinking when they were using computers,” she said, “but then I started understanding how important reading is.” Her unconventional background underscores her unique approach to reading. “I enjoy the logical part of math,” she said, “and I decided to apply that same kind of logic to reading.”

ITSS, a software program supported by administrator and faculty professional development, offers a different paradigm to assist elementary students in understanding what they read in content areas such as science, social studies and current events. “We applied a text structure to learning so that when we teach children how to generate main ideas and summaries, we show that there’s a logical relationship among ideas you read,” Wijekumar explained. “This is a more powerful way of generating main ideas, summaries and inferences than the old-fashion way of reading it again and again and again.”

This approach—which emphasizes several different text structures, including comparison, problem and solution, cause and effect, and sequence and description—is especially important for students in fourth grade, who often experience a significant decline in reading comprehension because they struggle to process, understand and remember text in content areas. These texts, which don’t rely on plots or characters, differ drastically from the stories they typically read in earlier grades.

Wijekumar and her team currently work with 100 schools across the nation to systematically implement the software program. Teachers and campus administrators attend professional development trainings on how to implement its instructional strategies, while the software provides frequent updates on student progress so that teachers can identify areas where reinforcement is needed.

A Recipe for Success

One of the software’s foremost successes came in Brownsville ISD in South Texas. Wijekumar and her team began working with some of the district’s schools on a reading comprehension improvement plan in 2015. One of those schools was Keller Elementary, which enrolls 550 students in Pre-K through fifth grade. Approximately 83% of these students are bilingual. The neighborhood campus, which is in an economically disadvantaged area of Brownsville, also serves large populations of English as a second language students and special education students.

“We applied a text structure

to learning so that when we teach children how to generate main ideas and summaries, we show that there’s a logical relationship among ideas you read.”

—DR. KAY WIJEKUMAR

Professor, College of Education and Human Development



The school regularly hovered in the high 70s on the state's annual accountability scores, but Javier Garza '93, the school's principal, was driven to see those scores improve. "The performance for Keller was good, but it was just under the radar," he said.

Keller initially implemented the ITSS system at the fourth- and fifth-grade levels, totally changing the school's method of teaching reading. During the first year of implementation, the school's administrators and teachers received a programmatic overview as well as professional development on the ITSS model. "Dr. Kay and her team were available to us at any time and participated in our collaborations," Garza said. "They were responsive to questions that my dean, my teachers or I had in terms of the program and software we were using."

Keller began to fully implement the ITSS model during the 2016–17 school year and quickly saw a difference. "That first year of implementation, we soared with our outcomes," Garza said. "In all of the tested grades, we jumped 10 points, going from a 79 to an 89 overall. We transferred the ITSS instructional approach into science, social studies and writing so it became a campus-wide expectation."

The following school year, Keller extended the ITSS model to the third-grade level and saw its Texas accountability rating jump to an A. "Teachers who use the format that Dr. Kay has created find that their students can really grasp it," Hotcaveg said. "Reading comprehension becomes more concrete and less abstract. That concreteness is so beneficial to lower achievers, but it also benefits higher achievers who get the gist of it and zoom on above."

Keller's success in implementing ITSS is having ripple effects across the district. The principal at Keller's feeder middle school quickly noticed the difference in incoming sixth-grade students' preparedness. "He's asked, 'What's going on over there?'" Garza said, adding that the middle school's reading scores have also climbed since Keller started implementing the ITSS model.

Turning a New Page

Wijekumar's work is supported by the College of Education and Human Development's long-standing philanthropic partner, Houston Endowment Inc. The nonprofit, which invests strategically to assist school systems in effectively educating all students, has funded the Houston Endowment Inc. Endowed Chair in Urban Education that Wijekumar currently holds and created another endowment to support the college's Center for Urban School Partnerships, which Wijekumar leads.

Her work has proven so meaningful that she will have a major role in the college's new Literacy Initiative, which will expand the work of its Reading Clinic. "This clinic brings very customized instruction for children who otherwise would not pass elementary school," she said. "We'll be providing a series of training programs for schools across Texas."

The initiative will further extend her work in supporting children with autism while also providing more statewide teacher resources to support reading and writing literacy. Additionally, the ITSS software will expand to offer more pure science resources, so that every grade level will have science content that meets the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) test as well as the necessary support to help students read and understand science.

Wijekumar's commitment to helping children learn to read is rooted in her concern about illiteracy's far-reaching consequences for students like Jorge. Fortunately, the ITSS software changed his academic trajectory. As his reading comprehension increased, those around him noticed a profound change in his demeanor. "His entire attitude improved," said Hotcaveg. "He was no longer slouching at his desk and complaining, but instead sitting up and ready to work."

Jorge's improvement soon caught his family's attention. "His mom asked me what I was doing to make him want to come to school," the longtime teacher said. "She also stated that he was doing homework, which she had never seen him do."

By the end of the year, Jorge could read approximately 25 to 30 words per minute and also understood what he was reading. "He achieved a masters level on his STAAR test, outperforming most of my other students," Hotcaveg said proudly.

Both Garza and Hotcaveg credit Wijekumar and her team with playing a critical role in helping Jorge and other Keller students experience this type of academic success. "Dr. Kay has a servant heart and is passionate about what she does," Garza said. "She just wants to do what's best for kids and wants our students to be successful in life." ☺

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Reading IOI

Texas A&M University's College of Education and Human Development launched a major reading initiative in spring 2021. This initiative is designed to deepen the work that the college already undertakes with striving elementary readers and writers, current teachers, preservice teachers and communities. Endowed gifts of \$25,000 or more can support the following initial priorities:

1) Elementary Striving Readers

(\$1 MILLION)

This priority will prepare Aggie education majors to use the ITSS system to support striving readers and writers. At the heart of this effort is a reading clinic that will serve Bryan-College Station children. The clinic will be staffed by 50 juniors and seniors, who will serve as long-term tutors, mentors and coaches for striving readers and writers over a two-year period.

2) Aggie STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Math) Literacy Camp

(\$1.5 MILLION)

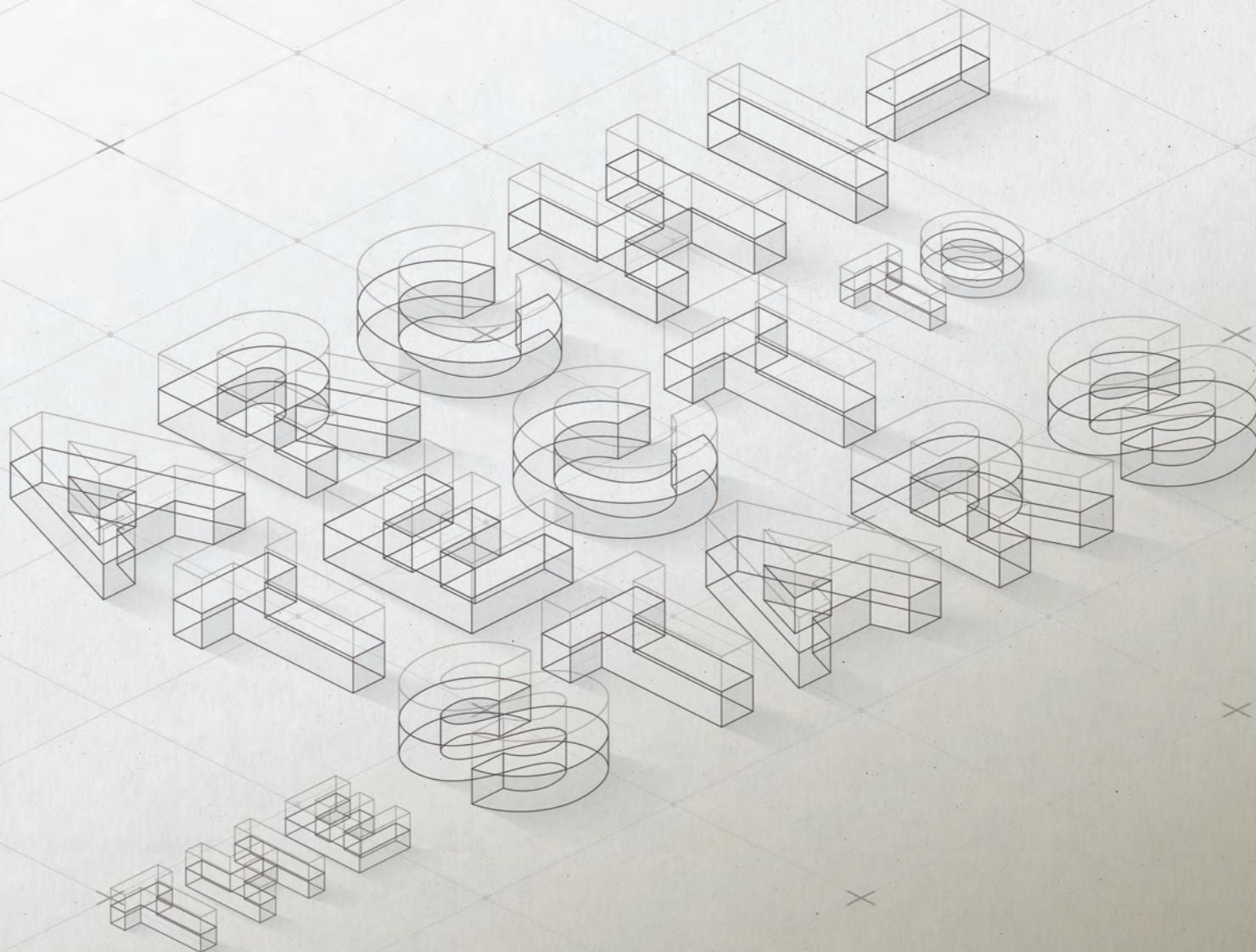
This summer camp will serve as intensive practice-based development for current teachers to enhance their effectiveness in teaching reading and writing. The sessions, initially offered in Brazos County and the Houston area, will help participants engage with striving readers and writers, who will also attend these camps. Additionally, preservice Aggie teachers will monitor and evaluate students' current reading and writing abilities and create engaging content for advanced students.

3) Family and Community Outreach

(APPROXIMATELY \$2 MILLION)

This priority will engage parents, guardians, families and communities in literacy efforts through the use of radio, social media, a podcast and a specially created app in English and Spanish. As part of this priority, no-nonsense applicable strategies and evidenced-based activities will be developed that parents and guardians can use at home with their children. This approach will benefit adults and children in Brazos County and bring the Aggie Spirit worldwide.





David Applebaum '80

✕ makes his living designing homes for clients from the silver screen. ✕
But it is creativity, not celebrity, that drives him to master his craft.

✕ BY BAILEY PAYNE '19 ✕

D

avid Applebaum '80 was lost. A year removed from receiving his bachelor's degree in environmental design from Texas A&M University in 1980, Applebaum relocated to the Golden State to earn his master's degree in architecture from the University of California-Los Angeles. Shortly before classes started, friends invited him to see a movie at the brand-new Beverly Center mall. There was only one problem: Neither Applebaum nor his friends could find it. With Applebaum behind the wheel, the group circled iconic shops, but no one could remember the directions clearly enough to find their destination. Finally, Applebaum rolled down the window to flag down a middle-aged couple holding hands and strolling down the sidewalk. "Excuse me?" he said. To his surprise, the couple turned around, revealing themselves to be none other than Gene Wilder and Gilda Radner—two stars who, unbeknownst to Applebaum, were dating.

Wilder recognized the starstruck gaze in Applebaum's eyes and smiled as he approached the passenger door. "Are you lost?" Wilder said. Applebaum stammered but managed to admit that he and his friends could not find the Beverly Center. Wilder and Radner promptly keeled over laughing. "We're not laughing at you," Wilder explained. They too had once mistaken Beverly Drive for Beverly Boulevard—a parallel street just 200 feet away—and gotten lost the same way. The "Willy Wonka" and "Saturday Night Live" stars redirected the lost Texas kid to his destination, and

Applebaum drove away feeling simultaneously enthralled and embarrassed.

Years later, Applebaum was working on a high-end home in Bel Air that required extensive groundwork—so extensive that he needed to secure consent from the neighbors. One house at a time, he went through the neighborhood until he approached a beautiful estate. He rang the doorbell and, lo and behold, Gene Wilder appeared at the door. "Still can't find the Beverly Center?" he asked, smiling.

Designing Experiences

Applebaum founded his architecture firm in 1988 and has made a career of designing bespoke homes and spaces for celebrities like Cuba Gooding Jr., Bob Hope, Seth Green, Diane Keaton and Rupert Murdoch. Rather than subscribe to a specific architectural style, his designs focus on meeting his clients' everyday needs. He works primarily in Los Angeles but has opened an office in Texas and is currently tackling three jobs in the state, one in Houston and two near Austin.

"When people think of architecture, they tend to think it is all about drawing a pretty façade for the walls in front of the house," Applebaum said. "But nobody lives in that. We live and work in spaces that those walls create." When Applebaum designs for a couple with a 2-year-old daughter, he designs the layout of the house not only to meet the family's current needs but also the needs they will have when the daughter is 16 and wants more space for herself.

Even though much of his job involves working with big names in Hollywood, he appreciates working with clients he can explore ideas with to create the best design, no matter how famous. His end goal with every project, he said, is a home that brings his clients' personalities into physical space. "I don't want people to walk into a house I designed and say to the owner, 'Oh! You have a David Applebaum!'" he explained. "I want them to say, 'This is so you.'"

Off the Beaten Path

Growing up in Houston, Applebaum did not know what he wanted to do for a living, but he knew he had options. In high school, he excelled at art and math and felt

at ease working with others. Architecture emerged as a career path that challenged Applebaum to use his creative, technical and social skills to their fullest potential. During his senior year of high school, he considered following in his father's footsteps at Rice University but was blown away while attending an open house at Texas A&M's College of Architecture.

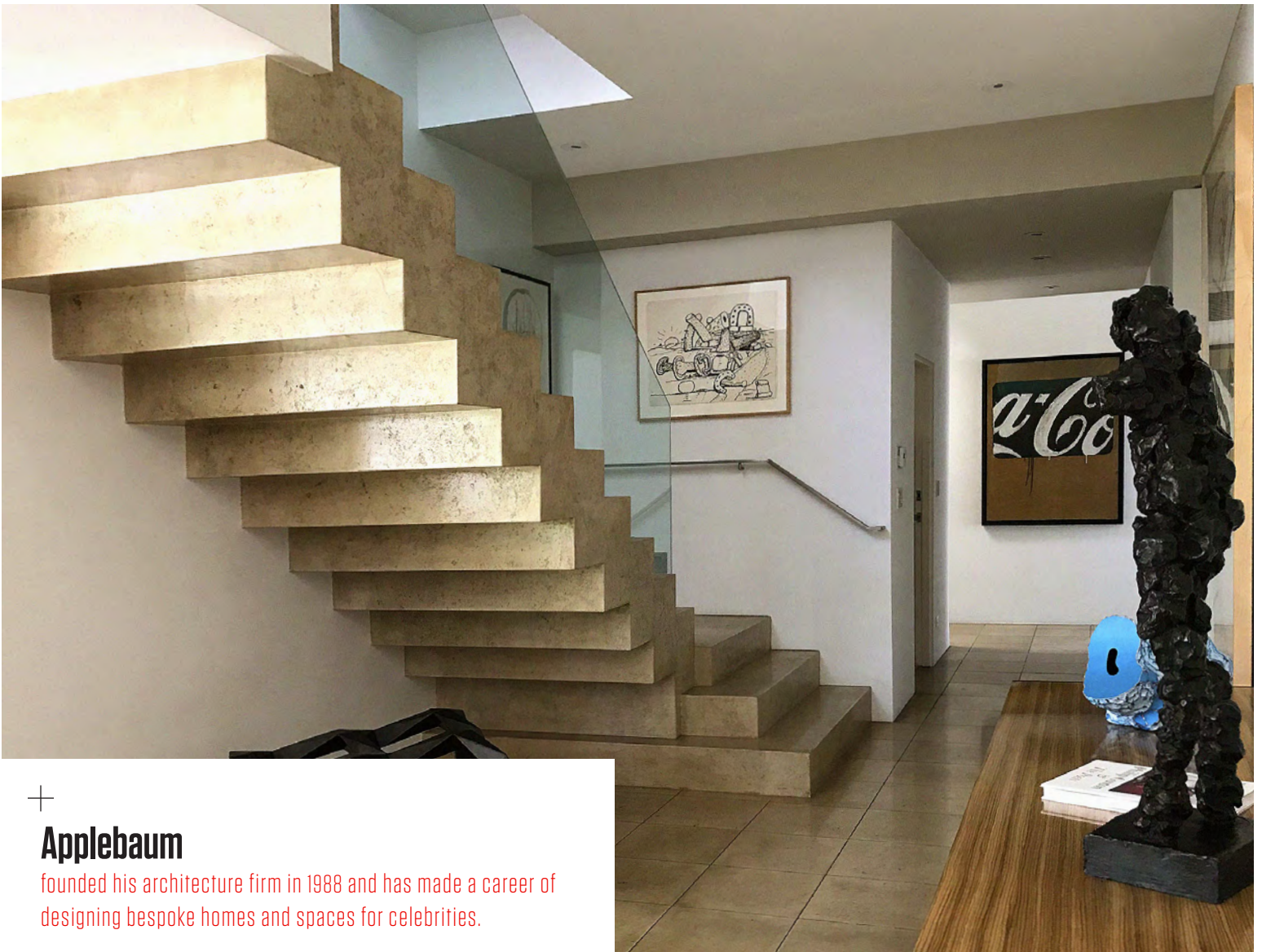
"As soon as I walked in, it was clear that the quality of work was stronger than anything I had seen at other colleges, and it was stronger than anything I saw afterward," Applebaum said. He considered his options carefully, but the craftsmanship he saw displayed within the Langford Building compelled him to hone his talents in College Station.

Applebaum's first design course at Texas A&M was taught by Dr. Rodney Hill, a veritable legend among faculty members, especially in the College of Architecture. "He helped each student understand that their future was what they made it," Applebaum said. Where average instructors taught students how to recreate certain styles and techniques, Hill proselytized designing with raw creativity and human use in mind. His lectures were about more than architecture; they centered on teaching students how to draft a blueprint for their lives. One such lecture sticks out in Applebaum's mind 40 years later.

The Mystery Drink

On a day like any other, students in Hill's class were working on projects when their professor abruptly told them to stop. "Forget everything you are doing!" Hill said. "My friend just invented an energy drink, and he needs a design for a container to enjoy this drink in." He explained that this mystery drink was aromatic, simultaneously sweet and savory, could be enjoyed hot or cold and gave users a jolt of energy to boot. Applebaum and other students dutifully took to the odd assignment, drawing wild designs that brought out the drink's unique characteristics.

Three weeks later, Hill walked into his classroom and found his students quietly waiting. "Everybody looks bored," he said. "Let's have some fun and design coffee mugs." Again, Applebaum and his classmates fol-



+

Applebaum

founded his architecture firm in 1988 and has made a career of designing bespoke homes and spaces for celebrities.

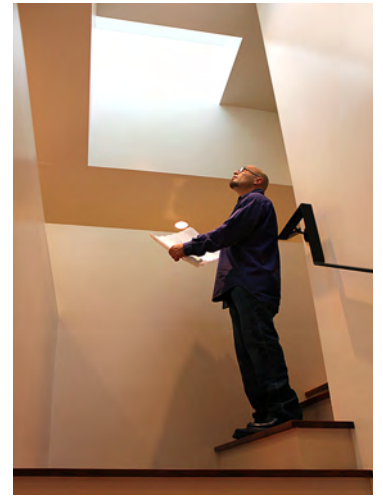


One of Southern California's preeminent architects, Applebaum has proven himself equally adept at executing both historical and modern designs. Each residential commission is a uniquely choreographed fusion of the setting, the client's aspirations and his own insights.





Applebaum works hand in hand with his clients. In the early stages of each project, he ascertains the client's wants, needs and personality to create the perfect space in terms of form and function.



Architecture

is not solely visual; it is experiential. Applebaum believes that good design is the foundation upon which all great things are built.

lowed Hill's orders. They drew mugs that varied slightly in color and shape but ultimately did not deviate from traditional coffee receptacles. When they finished, Hill pinned each coffee mug drawing on the wall...right next to the mystery drink designs the students had made weeks prior.

"Students, what is the difference between an aromatic drink that is sweet and savory, can be enjoyed hot or cold and gives users a jolt of energy, versus regular old coffee?" Hill asked. "Look at how wonderful and innovative these first designs were. Then look at how each coffee mug you designed is square or round and has a handle. When you limit yourself to what everyone else is doing based on the title alone, you will never get the most out of your project."

Applebaum was speechless. He felt his creative perspective shift within him that day. Even now, he rarely approaches a project without his mind wandering back to the mystery drink, the mugs, and the wide gulf between creativity and complacency.

In the City of Angels

After receiving his degree from Texas A&M, Applebaum enrolled in UCLA's graduate program both for a change of pace and a return to familiarity. Where Texas A&M taught him solid creative fundamentals, UCLA challenged him to explore his inner esoteric. Meanwhile, Los Angeles' warm climate and bustling environment reminded Applebaum of Houston. The Beverly Center incident notwithstanding, he took to Hollywood like a fish to water.

Upon earning his master's degree from UCLA in 1983, Applebaum joined respected firms that entrusted him with special commercial and residential projects. At D'Urso Designs, he designed and managed the construction of fashion retailer Esprit's flagship store as well as their showrooms in New York City, Los Angeles and Washington, DC. In 1986, he took a position at architect Edward Grenzbach's firm. Under Grenzbach's wing, Applebaum spent his 20s learning the ins and outs of Southern California's luxury residential design industry firsthand.

One day, Grenzbach approached Applebaum with a striking question: "Do you get starstruck easily?" He explained that there was a small renovation project that

fit Applebaum's skillset, but he would only give Applebaum the job if he could remain calm while working with its clients: Barbara and Frank Sinatra. "It does not get much bigger than that when it comes to star clientele!" Applebaum said, laughing.

He took the project and miraculously kept his composure throughout. In the following years, he took on two more jobs for the Sinatras, and each interaction with Frank proved him to be exactly the man portrayed in popular media. "Some people are just larger than life," Applebaum said.

Friends from Back Home

Now that Applebaum splits his time between Texas and California, he is happy to be closer not only to his childhood home, but also his chosen home: Texas A&M. Though it has been decades since his time in Aggieland, he still connects with a large group of Aggie friends every other week over video calls. For Applebaum, each call is a reminder of the university's power to build real human connections.

"These people are important to me," he said. "These relationships have stayed with me for about 40 years, and they are foundational parts of my life."

In addition to keeping up with Aggies from his time on campus, Applebaum occasionally touches base with professors who shaped him, especially Dr. Hill. "He has touched tens of thousands of lives," Applebaum said. "Every day, his former students put his lessons into practice without thinking about it." Indeed, Applebaum never forgot those lessons or where they came from; his homes are a testament to what Dr. Hill taught him all those years ago.

Pure Imagination

While working on another Bel Air home, Applebaum discovered his site was located next door to—who else?—Gene Wilder. Snake-bit by their first encounter and rendered wiser by the intervening years since their last meeting, Applebaum avoided Wilder's house as much as he could, determined not to embarrass himself in front of the comedic legend again. Near the project's end, he had just gotten in his car and started driving away from the site when he spotted Wilder at the end of the driveway.

Applebaum considered pretending not to recognize Wilder and driving away, but it was too late: Wilder waved and signaled him to stop. Applebaum rolled down the window and did his best to save face. "I hoped I'd see you again," Wilder said. "Remember the time you stopped by to get my signature for that permit?" How could Applebaum forget? He told Wilder as much and received an answer he never expected.

"You wouldn't have known this then," Wilder said, "but Gilda was very sick. She passed away a week after you came to the door. After you left that day, I made her a cup of tea. I must have still been giggling over our encounter because she asked who was at the door. I asked her, 'Remember that guy who couldn't find the Beverly Center when we were walking on Santa Monica?' She smiled and nodded. I told her it was you and that you were a big-shot architect designing the house across the street. She laughed as we reminisced. That was one of the last times she laughed before she left us, and I wanted to thank you."

Holding back tears, Applebaum acknowledged Wilder and offered his condolences. A few moments later, he bid the actor farewell and drove away, but only made it a block before pulling over to the side of the road. He had learned from years of working with celebrities that, when the cameras went away, they were people with problems like anyone else. But he never realized what a difference he had made just by being at the right time and place to bring cheer where needed most. Maybe Wilder spoke a deeper truth as Willy Wonka when he sang, "Want to change the world? There's nothing to it." ☺

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“Hello Aggieland, I’m Johnny Cash”

Remembering the most unbelievable and enduring musical performances in Bryan-College Station history.

BY BAILEY PAYNE '19

“Texas A&M is not known for music; yet historically speaking, you might be surprised.” So Robert Earl Keen '78 writes in the forward for the 2017 book, “Live from Aggieland: Legendary Performances in the Brazos Valley,” a celebration and exploration of some of the most striking performances to grace Bryan-College Station published by the Texas A&M University Press.

Author Rob Clark '95 covered the music beat for The Eagle, a local newspaper, for years before a deep dive into Cushing Memorial Library and Archives inspired him to write the book. “I stumbled across clippings from The Eagle and The Battalion about a Johnny Cash concert in 1965,” Clark recalled. “I was fascinated because I had no idea it had happened.”

Clark’s book and local media coverage help community members remember the melodic moments that brought them together.

View a list of other notable performances at give.am/TAMUMusic.

1955

The King Before His Reign

Elvis Presley at G. Rollie White Coliseum

A year before he appeared on The Ed Sullivan Show and broke into the national mainstream, Elvis Presley was a flamboyant rockabilly up-and-comer from northern Mississippi. He had made some buzz on the Louisiana Hayride radio program by the time he played in Aggieland in 1955, but he was still far from pop royalty.

Arriving at the newly-christened G. Rollie White Coliseum in a white Cadillac and flamingo pink jacket, Presley awed students with a signature hip-gyrating performance. At one point, the singer spit his gum onto the stage floor and reportedly angered some of the cadets. The soon-to-be King of Rock and Roll promptly apologized before finishing his set and bidding Aggieland good night.



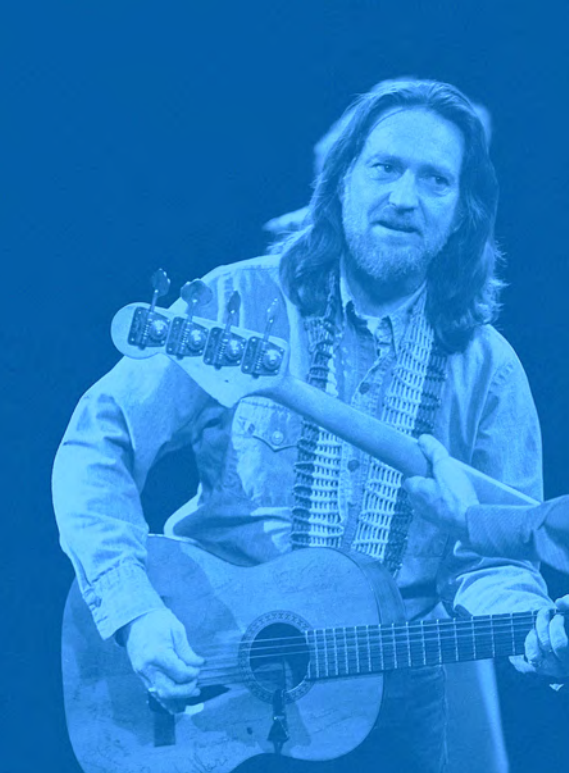
1965

The Man in Black

Johnny Cash at Lakeview Amusement Club

Gen. James Earl Rudder '32 put his foot down: Johnny Cash was not playing on campus. MSC Town Hall, a student organization that planned concerts, had invited The Man in Black to play the night of Bonfire at the height of his career. But after police officers arrested Cash on drug charges, Rudder’s administration barred the show from campus.

While many understood the administration’s position, an independent student task force readily moved the show to the nearby Lakeview Amusement Club in Bryan, where Cash played to a raucous crowd of 1,000. Though he didn’t mention the controversy, he dedicated the song “Dirty Old Egg-Sucking Dog” to “the man who changed our location.”



1974

In the Willie Way

Willie Nelson at Texas World Speedway

A storm encroached upon College Station unlike any it had seen before, as hippies and country folk alike descended on the outskirts of town for Willie Nelson's second annual Fourth of July Picnic at Texas World Speedway.

The three-day festival's lineup was stacked with acts like Leon Russell, Waylon Jennings and Nelson himself. The picnic went off mostly without incident, except on the first day when a parking lot fire engulfed more than a dozen cars, including one owned by a teenaged Robert Earl Keen '78.



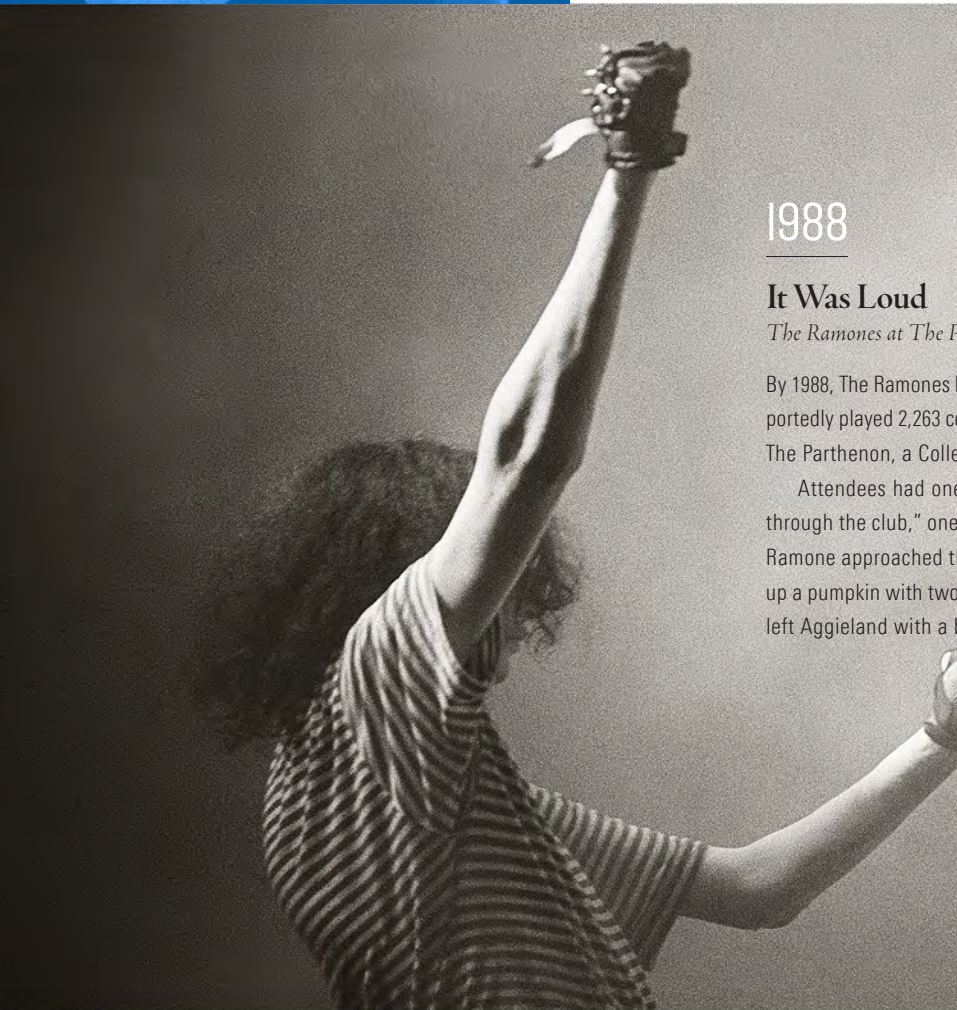
1998

He Showed Up in Boots

Garth Brooks at Reed Arena

Garth Brooks was perhaps the biggest name in music in 1998, so he shocked the Aggie community when he picked newly-opened Reed Arena as the last stop on his world tour. Fans lined up around the block at the Reed box office and bought out tickets for all three shows in hours.

In Clark's show review for *The Eagle*, he describes the energy in the arena as the crowd recognized "Friends in Low Places," Brooks' biggest hit. "The simple four-note beginning sparked the loudest local roar since the Aggie football team beat Nebraska" earlier that year, he wrote.



1988

It Was Loud

The Ramones at The Parthenon

By 1988, The Ramones had seen and done it all. From 1974 to 1996, the New York punk icons reportedly played 2,263 concerts, averaging nearly 103 shows per year. One of those took place at The Parthenon, a College Station venue that current residents now know as The Tap.

Attendees had one word to describe the event: loud. "It was like a locomotive coming through the club," one concertgoer said. After the adrenaline-pumping set, bassist Dee Dee Ramone approached the show's promoter, Bill Allen, backstage and asked for help blowing up a pumpkin with two M-80 firecrackers outside. Allen gleefully accepted, and The Ramones left Aggieland with a bang.

It was already a historic night before Lady Gaga showed up. In the aftermath of Hurricanes Harvey, Irma and Maria, all five living former U.S. presidents at the time—Jimmy Carter, George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush and Barack Obama—had formed the nonprofit One America Appeal and planned a concert at Reed Arena to raise funds for recovery efforts.

The concert featured performances from Alabama, Sam Moore, Yolanda Adams, Lyle Lovett and Robert Earl Keen '78. Rumors of Lady Gaga's surprise appearance swirled around town beforehand, and cheers erupted as the 11-time Grammy winner emerged to play an austere set of ballads on a white Steinway piano. The world-famous pop provocateur sang to heal as much as she did to entertain, and Aggies left the arena overwhelmed in the best sense of the word.

2017

One Night, Five Presidents and a Million Reasons

Lady Gaga at Reed Arena



The new sea turtle facility (below) will be approximately 24,000 square feet. Equipped to treat ill and injured sea turtles, it will also educate visitors about turtle conservation programs.

Rescuing the Ridley

A new hospital and educational center planned for Texas A&M University at Galveston hopes to change the tide for the Kemp's ridley, the world's most endangered sea turtle.

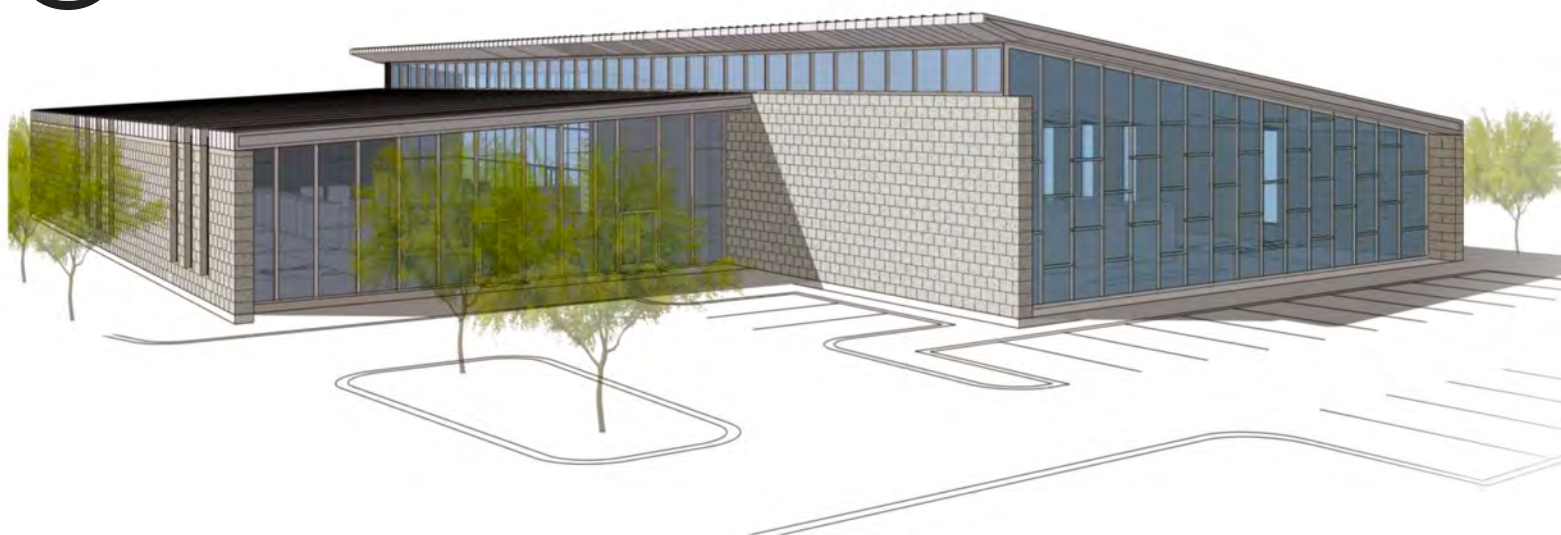
BY CATHY GORDON '79

The egg-bearing Kemp's ridley lumbers up the beach, a mariner on a mission. Hind flippers dig like a backhoe, carving a pit for 100 or so eggs the size of ping-pong balls. They drop, glistening like precious white baubles against the sand. Rocking vigorously side to side, the sea turtle tamps down earth to seal her buried treasure.

Ideally, an army of hatchlings would emerge in 50 to 60 days, tiny flippers flapping. But odds are against them hatching, much less making it to water, due to a host

of onshore threats. Those that make it face a slew of natural and manmade dangers.

"The Kemp's ridley is the most critically endangered sea turtle in the world," explained Dr. Christopher Marshall, a Texas A&M University at Galveston marine biology professor. "It nearly went extinct in the 1980s when biologists thought that only 700 nests were laid throughout the entire Gulf. For perspective, footage taken in Mexico in the 1940s documented 40,000 ridley turtles nesting in one day."





A concerted effort during the last 40 years has pulled this species from the brink of extinction, but conservation efforts to save this turtle are more important than ever.

All Hands on Deck

In answer, an ongoing capital campaign seeks to raise \$40,000 to start the design phase of the Upper Texas Coast Sea Turtle Hospital & Educational Outreach Center at Texas A&M-Galveston to be opened in two to three years. Once the design phase is complete, the Galveston Campus will pursue additional support from individuals, corporations and foundations toward construction of the center.

The proposed 24,000-square-foot facility will provide medical help to ill and injured turtles with a separate ward for turtles with FP, a tumor disease. With seven million tourists flocking to Galveston annually, the center's open-to-the-public educational outreach component will generate revenue for the hospital and turtle conservation programs, allowing it to be self-sustaining. Visitors will observe turtles through viewing galleries as they're examined by veterinarians, students and interns.

"It will be rewarding to bring that educational outreach opportunity to campus," Marshall said.

Need for such a facility became even more pressing due to the planned closing of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Galveston laboratory that previously tended to the turtles. In the meantime, Texas A&M-Galveston has converted a campus wetlands facility into a short-term hospital to tend to the turtles and partners with the Houston Zoo for veterinary services.

Dangers to the Kemp's

"Kemp's ridley sea turtles encounter trouble at every stage of life," said Marshall, who in 2019 founded the Gulf Center for Sea Turtle Research, a consortium to coordinate research and conservation efforts in the Upper Texas Coast.

An adult Kemp's ridley, weighing 100 pounds, is the smallest of the world's sea turtles. Other sea turtles in the Gulf of Mexico include the loggerhead, green, leatherback and hawksbill. Approximately 250 turtles are stranded on Galveston beaches each year—emaciated, injured or dead.

"We had a sea turtle wash up once with a trash can and lid entangled around his flipper," said marine biologist Theresa Morris '10 '13, who oversees Texas A&M-Galveston's short-term hospital and will later manage the planned hospital. "Only one in 1,000 eggs survive to adulthood. They are at risk to ants, fungus, armadillos, racoons and coyotes. If they hatch, they fall prey to birds and snakes. People walk and drive on them. They also face challenges due to sea level rise and beach erosion."

When hatchlings make it to sea, they float on mats of sargassum seaweed, hiding and dining on other small sea creatures. They ingest small plastics there, too, mistaking it for food. As they grow, the dangers range from discarded fishing nets and boat strikes to natural marine predators and rapid drops in temperature.

Marine biologist Kari Howard '07, coordinator for the sea turtle hotline, data management and volunteer response team of the Texas Sea Turtle Stranding and Salvage Network for the Upper Texas Coast, said assessing each stranded turtle helps craft a message to the community. "It helps

change behavior. If we see high incidences of monofilament fishing line, for example, where turtles are tangled in it or ingest it, we can let the community know. People love sea turtles and, with more education, everyone can play a role in protecting them."

These measures, combined with the future hospital, are a monumental step in rebuilding the state's sea turtle population and saving the Kemp's ridley, whose ancestors survived the extinction of the dinosaurs. "They are the models of perseverance and resilience," Marshall said. "If people become fascinated with sea turtles, they might become fascinated with oceans and start taking care of our marine environment. That's good for everybody." ☉

TO LEARN HOW YOU CAN SUPPORT THE UPPER TEXAS COAST SEA TURTLE HOSPITAL & EDUCATIONAL OUTREACH CENTER, CONTACT:

RICK KLINE '99
ASSISTANT VICE PRESIDENT
FOR DEVELOPMENT
TEXAS A&M FOUNDATION
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RKLINE@TXAMFOUNDATION.COM

Ways to Help

You can give to the hospital fund at give.am/SeaTurtleFacility or to support sea turtle research at give.am/TurtleResearch. To support conservation efforts, the Texas Department of Motor Vehicles offers specialty sea turtle license plates at give.am/TurtlePlates with proceeds benefiting the Gulf Center for Sea Turtle Research's capture and tagging program. You can also purchase merchandise benefiting the center at give.am/TurtleMerchandise.

The Kemp's ridley is a federally-protected species. Members of the public should call the Stranding-Rehabilitation hotline at 1-866-887-8535 if a stranded or nesting turtle is encountered.

Adolfo Castro had never set foot on a college campus until he was 18. No one in his family had pursued a degree, and growing up in San Augustine, Texas, a small town near the Louisiana border, he didn't have the benefit of a local community college or university to inspire interest in higher education.

But during his senior year, he and 11 classmates toured Stephen F. Austin State University, 30 minutes away in Nacogdoches, Texas, and viewed its culinary program's kitchens. It was as if a light switched on. "I could picture myself there, cooking and studying," Castro said. A year later, he is enrolled at Tyler Junior College, with plans to transfer to Stephen F. Austin as a junior to finish a culinary arts degree. One day, he hopes to own his own café.

Castro's bus tour was made possible by an innovative pilot program that is impacting students in Texas' most isolated or impoverished rural counties. Launched in 2018, the Rural Student Success Initiative (RSSI) is currently working with 17 rural school districts to build a college-going culture in their communities as the first step toward its goal of increasing the number of rural students who successfully complete a college certificate or degree program.

The program is built around the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service's unique network of county agents, who are part of The Texas A&M University System. County agents, particularly those serving in rural counties, are credible local leaders. Leveraging community knowledge, these county extension agents help unite schools, civic leaders and the RSSI program to ensure that resources reach rural school district leaders, teachers, guidance counselors, students and parents.

"This very much reflects the mission of AgriLife Extension," said Dr. Maria Luna-Torres '96, RSSI's project director. "AgriLife has a renewed commitment to improve the lives of every Texan."

Texas A&M University System Chancellor John Sharp '72 shares this thinking. "We continue to see new and innovative ways to use AgriLife Extension's one-of-a-kind statewide network to address critical needs for Texas' rural populations," Sharp said. "Expanding access and resources for our state's rural students and parents will encourage and motivate continued education after high school."

The program—which has much broader goals than recruiting students to Texas A&M—is still in its demonstration phase, helped along by major

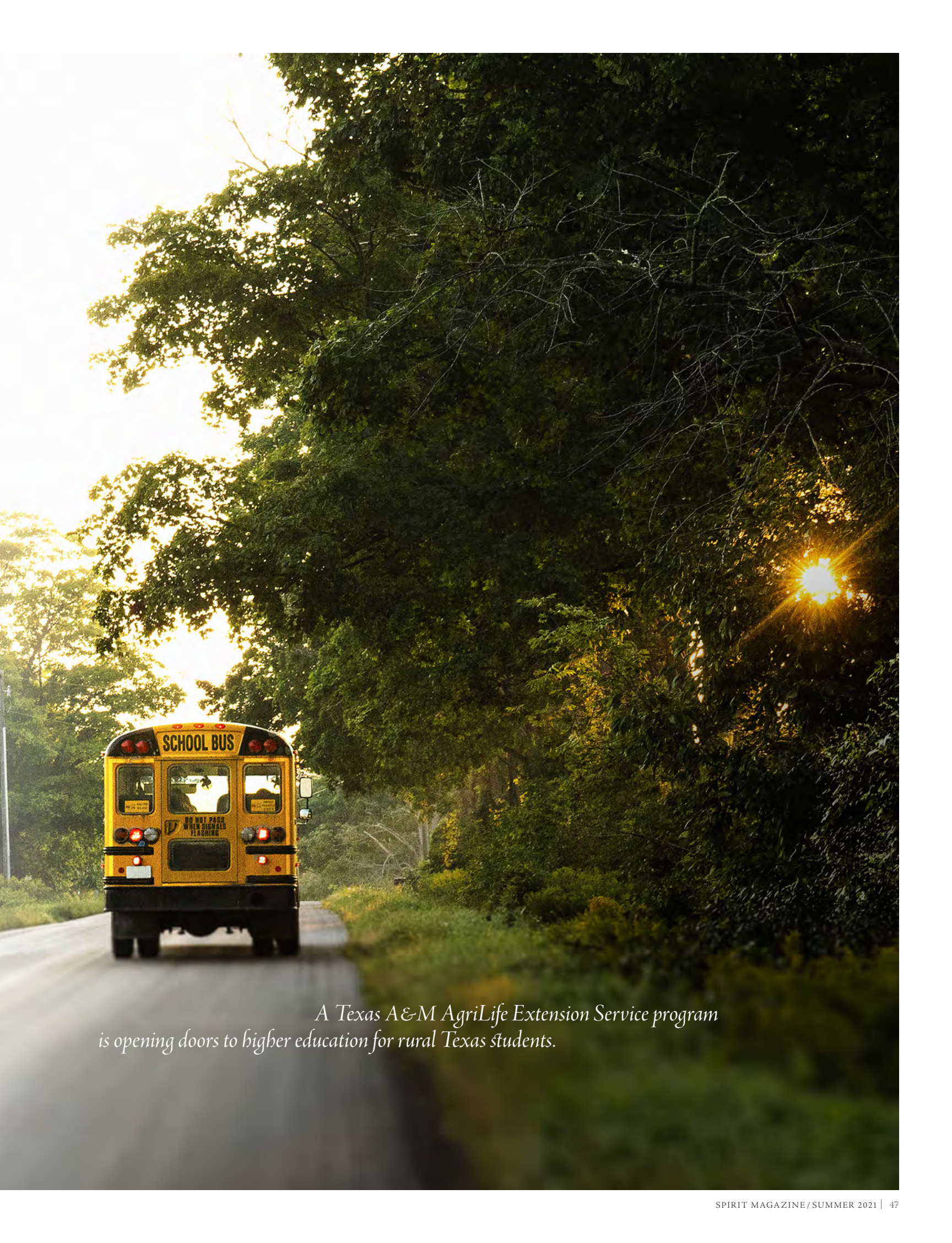
contributions from the Greater Texas Foundation, The Meadows Foundation, the Trellis Foundation and the T.L.L. Temple Foundation. If the program achieves the desired results, RSSI will explore long-term funding strategies to expand its reach into additional rural communities.

"I feel like we're making a difference; college applications have already increased," said Sandy Jenkins, an AgriLife extension agent in San Augustine County. But her goals are even bigger. "We have generational poverty here. I want to show families that they can change that."

THE SEED OF THE IDEA

Educators and civic leaders have long been concerned that rural students—up to 900,000 statewide—aren't receiving the same opportunities for postsecondary education as youth in more densely populated areas. In Texas, which has the largest population of rural students in the country, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board has developed a 60x30 strategic plan, a goal to ensure that 60% of Texans ages 25 to 34 have degrees or certificates by 2030. Statistics show that while rural students graduate high school at a higher rate than the state average, they are less likely than their

Paving a Path



*A Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service program
is opening doors to higher education for rural Texas students.*

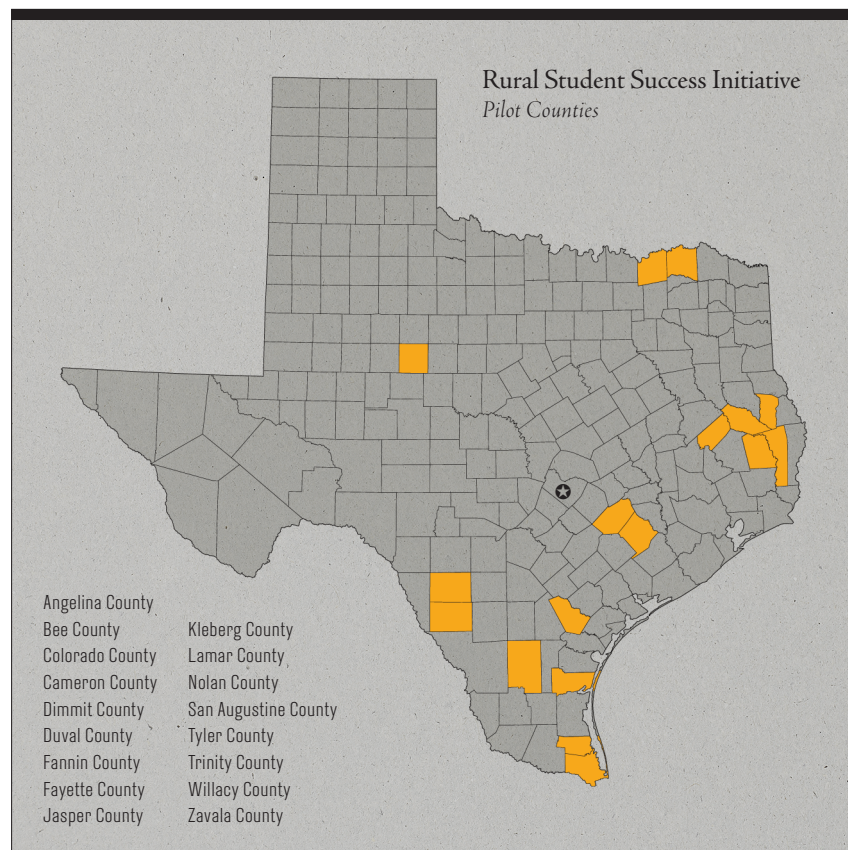
peers to enroll in college. Nationally, approximately 42% of people ages 18 to 24 are enrolled in a college or university, but within rural communities, the participation rate is 29%.

“This program seeks to level the playing field and equip rural schools, communities and families with tools, programs, resources and support for success,” said Dr. Susan Ballabina, deputy vice chancellor for agriculture and life sciences at Texas A&M and an early proponent of the program. “It is an important initiative with the potential to transform communities.”

Despite the deep involvement of The Texas A&M University System, RSSI is not focused on getting students to Aggieland but on broadly boosting postsecondary access and success. Whether for a technical certificate or associate degree from a community college, or a baccalaureate degree from a Texas flagship or regional university, RSSI’s goal is to help students and parents make decisions about a college certificate or degree program that best matches their interests and personal aspirations.

A significant amount of funding from a group of philanthropies has backed RSSI thus far, including a \$3.2 million grant from the Greater Texas Foundation. “As a foundation focused on improving postsecondary outcomes for Texas students, we are proud to invest in the innovative Rural Student Success Initiative to help make college a reality for more of our state’s rural students,” said Sue McMillin, president and CEO of the foundation.

Another \$500,000 came from the T.L.L. Temple Foundation. “Rural communities are diverse and resilient. Through RSSI, we have an opportunity to use a solid rural platform to solve a new challenge,” said Dr. Wynn Rosser ’90, the foundation’s president and CEO. “If we can get this right, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service’s statewide reach has the potential to signifi-



cantly increase the number of rural students who earn a high-value postsecondary degree or credential. Building on our rural past may be part of the solution for a better future for Texas students and communities.”

Kristin Boyer, executive director of the Trellis Foundation, which provided a \$100,000 grant, is also enthusiastic. “It’s a potent message for students to see their ISDs, extension offices and educational institutions all investing in their success.”

In 2018, AgriLife Extension recruited Luna-Torres to implement the program. The first year focused on strengthening school districts’ subject matter expertise and knowledge base in partnership with College Forward and the National College Attainment Network, two prominent student success nonprofits.

In year two, RSSI expanded school districts’ network of resources and regional partners. For instance, the program facilitated a grant from the Texas Workforce Commission to Huntington ISD for equipment to help train students in the medical field. Luna-Torres and her staff also increased efforts to enlarge postsecondary know-how among students and families and developed a regional plan using a network of leadership coaches—people from

the region who work part-time as guides for schools.

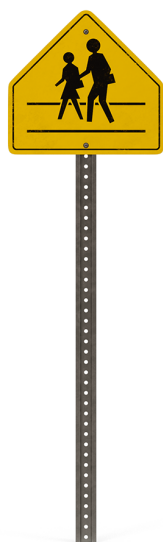
At the center of RSSI’s efforts are the extension agents, who are critical to making community connections. At first, Luna-Torres faced a bit of resistance, as some extension agents and educators viewed RSSI as one more thing to fit into their already heavy workload.

Sandi Russell, the counselor at San Augustine High School, reports that she was initially reluctant to work with RSSI because of time constraints. Now, however, she believes the program has made her job easier. “There’s so much we couldn’t have done without RSSI’s help,” Russell said.

OPENING EYES

“If you’re a first-generation student, you don’t know what you don’t know,” said Sarah Ahrend, a recruiter for Texas A&M University–Commerce, “but that’s why we have so many resources on campus to help you be successful.” Ahrend was one of 16 college representatives speaking at a virtual college fair in November 2020 for approximately 100 students at San Augustine High School.

The virtual event was arranged by Sandy Jenkins as well as Derek Nido ’11, a



With 172 rural and 82 urban counties, Texas has the largest number of rural students in the country. 38% of all schools in the state are located in rural areas.

*Texas Education Agency
2015-16 Report

38%

Percentage of all K-12 students considered economically disadvantaged

**Texas Education Agency 2017-18 Report*

58.8%

recruiter for Texas A&M, who rounded up counterparts from other schools, some from out of state, to participate. "I was impressed with the number of schools we got," Jenkins said. "You could tell the recruiters were focused on what is best for the students, rather than trying to get them to their specific school."

Besides making events like this college fair possible, RSSI college access specialists design curricula and offer incentives to students and their parents to participate in events. For example, to encourage San Augustine High School students to complete the Apply Texas college application, RSSI offered prize drawings; to get parents and

RSSI's results along a range of success indicators such as raising confidence among rural students and parents regarding college access and success, and increasing their financial aid and college-going knowledge.

Performance metrics are also being analyzed in five key areas in participating school districts: applications to postsecondary institutions; completion of the FAFSA application for financial aid; postsecondary matriculation rates; retention rates between the first and second year of college or training; and graduation rates.

Results so far have been encouraging. From 2019 to 2020, 10 of the first cohort of 11 rural school districts saw an increase in

applicants to college and postsecondary training. Of the 10 districts that experienced an increase, eight had a boost of five percentage points or greater. Data also shows that RSSI interventions enlarged the share of students

finishing the FAFSA by approximately five percentage points from 2019 to 2020.

Financial concerns are one of the main obstacles preventing students from exploring postsecondary study or training. Many first-generation, low-income college-bound students and their families lack critical information about how need-based financial aid programs can substantially reduce the cost of attendance at a Texas institution. RSSI college access specialists work closely with school guidance counselors to provide students and families with accurate financial aid information to help them overcome these concerns.

A lack of money is also an issue for families when it comes to touring colleges, which makes RSSI-sponsored campus visits powerful experiences for rural students.

Luna-Torres agrees with observations from RSSI's preliminary evaluation report that states, "These tours help students visualize themselves as college students. One counselor reported that in the two weeks after taking her junior class to visit two universities, nine students approached her and said, 'I think I can go to college now.' These were kids who did not plan to attend before."

THE AGGIE BOOST

So, why are The Texas A&M University System and AgriLife Extension sponsoring RSSI? Consistent with their roles as prominent public institutions, both the System and Extension have significant statewide land-grant obligations to advance the prosperity of Texas and Texans. Plus, the Aggie call to service makes support natural.

"Access to higher education is fundamental to who we are," Ballabina said.

The program is funded through August 2021, while obtaining philanthropic support for the next two years is among its next steps. The idea is to build on the foundation Luna-Torres and her staff have established, continue to gather proof of the program's impact and, if warranted, seek support for a sustainable funding stream to scale its impact.

But no matter what happens, Aggies can be proud that the university system and the AgriLife network have been doing their best for the state and students like Adolfo Castro. "It's good to know that someone's there to help if you have a problem," Castro said, "and that someone has your back." ◎

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT RSSI, CONTACT:

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eighth grade students to attend an important information session, RSSI paid for food and a new iPad as a door prize.

"It's a step in the right direction to start having conversations around higher education earlier, with eighth graders," said Russell. Indeed, some of this will happen freely as more students go to college or technical school. Adolfo Castro is already advising his younger sister on classes to take to prepare her for college.

MEASURING SUCCESS

In the end, what will determine if RSSI makes it past the experimental stage and into a fully realized state initiative is proof of its sustainability and effectiveness. To gauge impact, independent program evaluation teams have been retained to assess

Outward and Upward

A look at ongoing and upcoming renovation and construction projects across campus.

BY ALYSSA JOHNSON '20

As Texas A&M University continues to grow, these renovation and construction projects will provide state-of-the-art facilities on and off the College Station flagship campus to improve learning experiences, attract future generations to Aggieland and take the Texas A&M brand to new heights.

For more information about supporting any of these projects, email info@txamfoundation.com.

1

Innovation Plaza: The university's Engineering Medicine (EnMed) program is expanding to Houston's Texas Medical Center with a 5-acre complex called Innovation Plaza. The renovated 18-story Discovery Building contains classrooms, a makerspace for enhanced research and a virtual reality instruction lab for EnMed students, while two future buildings will be dedicated to student housing, office spaces and retail areas.





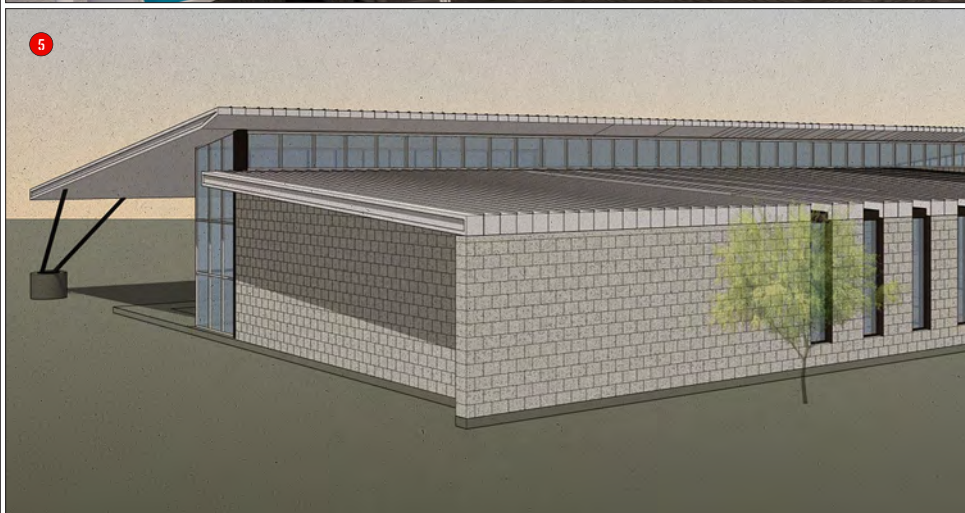
② **Aggie Park:** The Aggie Park project will transform 20 acres outside of Kyle Field into an “outdoor Memorial Student Center.” The revamped green space will include a lake, exercise trails, an amphitheater and a new events facility to give students and visitors room for study, recreation and tailgating.



③ **Allen Building:** For the first time in its history, the Bush School of Government and Public Service is now the only academic entity in the Allen Building. A renovation campaign is ongoing to transform the building into tomorrow’s learning environment for the best public servants. Plans include providing two new student learning centers, a redesigned atrium and lobby, additional graduate student workspaces, and rebranding to better tell the story of the school and its namesake.



④ **Business Education Complex:** By 2024, Mays Business School proposes an expansion and renovation of the Wehner Building to a new Business Education Complex that will further establish Texas A&M as a world leader in business education. Plans include leading-edge technology, a grand atrium, café, learning studios, and team spaces to spur connectivity, creativity and collaboration.



⑤ **Upper Texas Coast Sea Turtle Hospital and Educational Outreach Center:** This proposed 24,000-square-foot facility at Texas A&M University at Galveston will shelter and aid stranded, ill and injured sea turtles as part of ongoing conservation efforts to protect these endangered creatures. It will be equipped with two hospital wards, a veterinary clinic, caretaker overnight facilities, resident turtle tanks and numerous exhibits for visitors. Learn more on page 44.

Construction projects not shown

The Gardens Phase II: Designs for the next 20 acres of The Gardens on West Campus are underway to further its evolution into a prime outdoor space for teaching, research and community involvement. Plans include a children’s garden, rose garden, learning center, and a resurrection of the Grove amphitheater for outdoor movies and events.

Small Animal Hospital: A campaign is ongoing to update and expand the College of Veterinary Medicine & Biomedical Sciences’ existing Small Animal Hospital, which was designed in 1981 when educational methods were less collaborative and specialization in veterinary medicine was in its infancy.



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Setting New Sails

The Texas A&M Maritime Academy will be one of five recipients of a new National Security Multi-Mission Vessel. Named the Lone Star State, the \$390 million ship is expected to dock in Galveston in 2025 and will replace the academy's current training ship, the T.S. General Rudder.

The creation of the state-of-the-art training vessels is part of a congressional initiative to supplant aging ships at state maritime academies. The new ship will provide a

much larger training platform for maritime academy cadets at Texas A&M University at Galveston to learn seafaring skills while they live and work with other cadets during three required summer sea terms. In addition to fulfilling academic needs, the 525-foot vessel will also serve as a disaster response and relief vessel along the Gulf Coast.

Founded in 1962, the Texas A&M Maritime Academy is one of only six maritime academies in the United States.

"Having the ability to live, learn and train together as a single unit is essential to meeting our mission to educate the next generation of merchant mariners," said Col. Michael Fossum '80, vice president of Texas A&M University, chief operating officer of the Galveston Campus and superintendent of the Texas A&M Maritime Academy. "We're excited to serve cadets in just a few years on a vessel that is the pinnacle of industry standard."

