

SPIRIT

THE BEST SHOW IN TOWN

From Broadway to ballet,
OPAS has been hosting
top performances in
Aggieland for 50 seasons.

70 Years of Building a Brighter Future



Seventy years! The year 2023 marks 70 years since a group of 21 passionate former students and Texas A&M University System Regents met and formed the organization that would become the Texas A&M Foundation. Several individuals in this group—Wofford Cain '13, Sterling Evans '21 and Herman Heep '20, to name a few—had already crafted

their own legacies as “founding fathers” of Texas A&M University as we know it today. When they formed what was then called the Texas A&M College Development Foundation in 1953, however, they did so as a team, pooling their brainpower and unique experiences to form a bold and singular vision for the humble agricultural and mechanical college they called home.

That vision relied on private giving, which they recognized as essential in growing Texas A&M in both size and scope to better serve the state, nation and world. At the time, there were 6,198 students on campus, all men in the Corps of Cadets. At its onset, the Foundation held \$100 in assets. Since then, it has grown exponentially alongside the university and community it serves, managing nearly \$2.6 billion in assets and distributing more than \$137 million in fiscal year 2022 to support students, faculty and staff.

Our Foundation owes its existence to the visionaries who brought it to life, and it owes its ongoing success to the unbeliev-

able generosity of Aggies and philanthropic partners who believe in Texas A&M's mission, values and community. Donations of all types and sizes from all types of givers comprise nearly 10,000 accounts that benefit the university. This issue of Spirit contains inspiring stories of some of those givers—stories of service and success you may have grown used to in recent years. Many Aggies, especially younger generations, are increasingly accustomed to our university's reputation as a world-class institution of higher learning with more than 74,000 current students, half a million former students and research initiatives spanning the globe.

It is worth remembering, though, that no one imagined Texas A&M would become what it is now. Those chosen few who formed our Foundation seven decades ago could never have predicted what this university would accomplish, but they invested their time and effort with enthusiasm regardless. As you read through this issue, think about the passion, effort and ambition of those who paved the way for Texas A&M to exceed all expectations. There's no telling what Aggieland will look like in the next 70 years, but as long as the Foundation stands, we will proudly help others invest in this place, its people and the brighter future we continuously build together.

Thanks for all you do.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tyson Voelkel '96'. The signature is stylized and fluid.

Tyson Voelkel '96

PRESIDENT & CEO, TEXAS A&M FOUNDATION

Ready to get started on your legacy in Aggieland? Download our free Giving Guide using this QR code or learn how you can support the campus initiatives in this issue of Spirit at give.am/Spring2023.



Good Bull

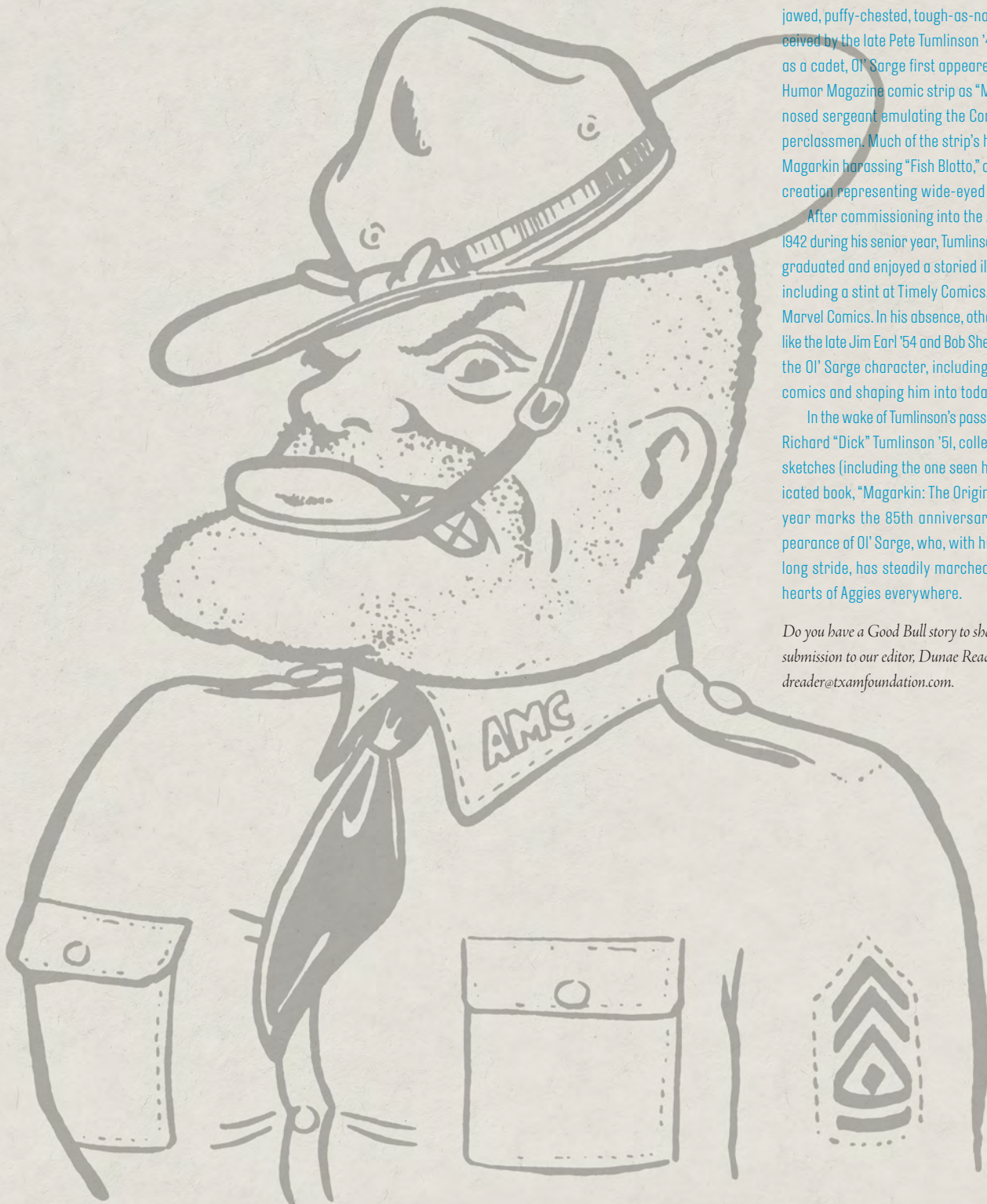


Among Reveille, the Aggie ring and the classic Block T, Texas A&M University has its fair share of iconic symbols. But there's one figure in particular who harkens back to "Old Army" in all its grit and glory: the strong-jawed, puffy-chested, tough-as-nails Ol' Sarge. Conceived by the late Pete Tumlinson '42 during his time as a cadet, Ol' Sarge first appeared in the Battalion Humor Magazine comic strip as "Magarkin," a hard-nosed sergeant emulating the Corps of Cadets' upperclassmen. Much of the strip's humor came from Magarkin harassing "Fish Blotto," another Tumlinson creation representing wide-eyed freshmen.

After commissioning into the Army Air Corps in 1942 during his senior year, Tumlinson returned home, graduated and enjoyed a storied illustration career, including a stint at Timely Comics, the precursor to Marvel Comics. In his absence, other talented cadets like the late Jim Earl '54 and Bob Shemwell '82 adopted the Ol' Sarge character, including him in their own comics and shaping him into today's campus icon.

In the wake of Tumlinson's passing, Pete's brother, Richard "Dick" Tumlinson '51, collected his archived sketches (including the one seen here) into the dedicated book, "Magarkin: The Original Ol' Sarge." This year marks the 85th anniversary of the first appearance of Ol' Sarge, who, with his thick scowl and long stride, has steadily marched his way into the hearts of Aggies everywhere.

Do you have a Good Bull story to share? Send your submission to our editor, Dunae Reader '15, at dreader@txamfoundation.com.



Issue

spring 2023

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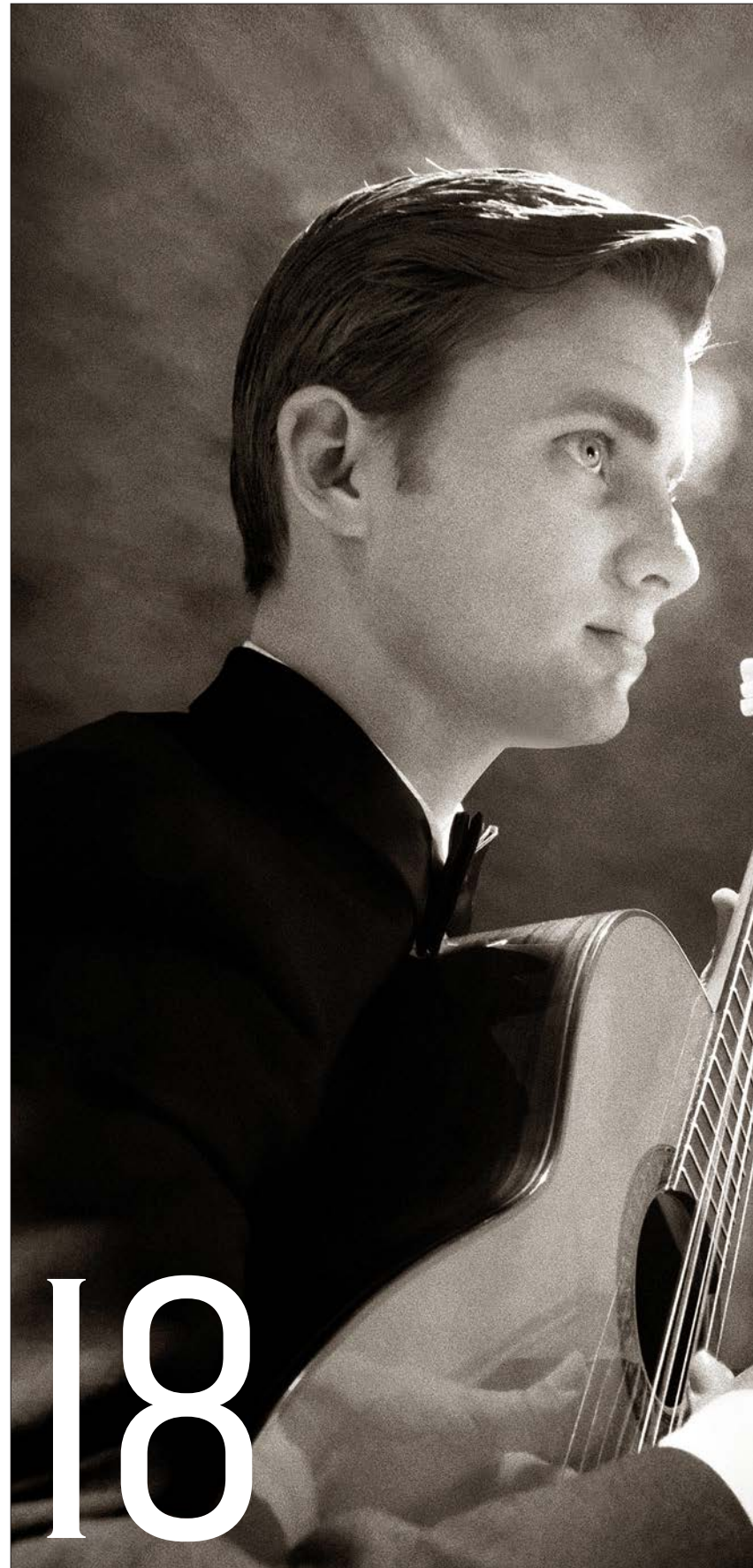
For more than 75 years, Aggieland's train depot welcomed countless students who walked across its platform on the way to greatness.

Read online at spirit.txamfoundation.com.

COVER FEATURE

The Best Show in Town

From Broadway to ballet, OPAS has been hosting top performances in Aggieland for 50 seasons.



ON THE COVER

Featured in OPAS' season 50 lineup, "My Fair Lady" tells the story of Eliza Doolittle, a young Cockney flower seller, and Henry Higgins, a linguistics professor determined to transform her into a proper lady. Joan Marcus, an award-winning theatrical photographer, shot this photo.

On Nov. 3, 1973, classical guitarist Christopher Parkening played at the recently opened Rudder Theater Complex and christened a new era of world-class performances at Texas A&M University.



TRAILBLAZERS

All the Right Ingredients

Behind Bolner's Fiesta Brand and its quest for superior seasoning lies a family history that informs the company and its Aggie leaders to this day.



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How Will Next-Gen Vehicles Drive Our Future?

Engineering researchers discuss prevailing technological and societal trends in electric, hybrid and driverless vehicles.

DR. SRIKANTH SARIPALLI

*J. Mike Walker '66 Professor
in Mechanical Engineering*



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Howdy, Jada Greenidge '26

A unique matching program provides scholarship support to deserving Aggies.



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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. 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.

Mailbox



Do you have a fond memory of the old Texas A&M Creamery?

Share your answer with our editor, Danae Reader '15, at dreader@txamfoundation.com.

Readers write in:

Where was your favorite local or campus hangout as a student?

Read more responses online at give.am/MailboxSpring23.

Back in the 1960s, there were only three or four late-night places to go at Texas A&M and 50 or so women enrolled at the university. You weren't going to see any out at night, but if you wanted to take a break from studies, grab a burger and have a few laughs with other Ags, **the Hut** at Northgate next to the theater was the easiest to reach. It had a great Seeburg jukebox and decent food if you were starved. The other favorite was **Shipley's** in Bryan. Surprisingly, donuts were not the only food served. Burgers or patty melts with fries were the most popular items. It looked more like a restaurant than a donut shop. It would all seem like something from the Stone Age to Aggies today.

—JERRY DEUTSCH '70
Seabrook, Texas

Everybody loved Graham Central Station on Thursday night and the Dixie Chicken on Friday and Saturday nights (or any time for that matter), but the best places were the **Los Nortenos and Dos Hermanos restaurants** in old Bryan on Sun-

day mornings. We always had a bunch of guys (and whoever they brought with them) who got together for Sunday brunch to discuss the past week's achievements and plan for the coming week. The food was plentiful and cheap and the atmosphere was laid back, which didn't bother anybody with a leftover headache from the several preceding days. Man, those were good days!

—DARREN BARFIELD '89
Winton, California



Ralph's Pizza at Northgate after cruising A&W Root Beer Drive-In on Texas Avenue to meet up with other Aggies!

—ELLA ROBERTS '71
Bryan, Texas



In the '70s, **Sparky's** was a fun dive east of campus, popular with members of the Corps and the young ladies that swooned over guys in uniform. They served pitchers of lukewarm Old Milwaukee and Pabst beer with questionable pizza. The four pool tables were rickety coin-operated things and not level, so the balls mostly gave in to gravity rather than geometry. The walls of the tiny dance room were black and painted over with hundreds of patrons' names in fluorescent paint. The jukebox blared Johnny Russell's "Rednecks, White Socks and Blue Ribbon Beer," Jim Ed Brown's "Pop a Top," and the Eagles' "Lyn' Eyes." On Aug. 25, 1978, I met the love of my life there, and my boot-chasin' days ended. Forty-four years later, we are still going strong. Sadly, I can't say the same for Sparky's.

—GAIL JOLLY GREEN '80
Garland, Texas

My girlfriend and I would meet for lunch in **Rudder Tower** during our years on campus from 1983-87. We also hung out on the polo fields until we realized we were in the path of the driving range. That girlfriend is now my wife of 34 years, Amy Critz Gartlan '88.

—DONALD GARTLAN JR. '86
Gig Harbor, Washington

The Dixie Chicken was a great place to enjoy drinks, music, snacks, games and conversation!

—MARY SPIVEY HOVDEN '78
Mesa, Arizona

It's not exactly a "hangout," but I always loved walking across **campus late at night** in late spring and early summer. The huge bushes around the Academic Building were night-blooming jasmine. Around 10 p.m., they released great waves of a beautiful scent that the breeze wafted across campus. It was lovely and very peaceful.

—SUANNE GROSSKOPF '75
Antioch, Tennessee

The **study room in the computer center building**. I spent many an hour there with fellow Air Force officers and one civilian student while earning my Master of Computing Sciences degree.

—GERALD "GERRY" LEFCHIK '68
Lititz, Pennsylvania

East Gate Lounge. It was the perfect place for cold beer and camaraderie.

—TERRY CRENWELGE '72
College Station, Texas

Sterling Evans Library. I always enjoyed the quiet time away from everyone to concentrate and study.

—WAYNE SMITH '84
Maryland Heights, Missouri



The **Memorial Student Center**. It was the center of campus and had a post office, coffee and spots to hang out with friends or tutor each other between classes. I was on campus from 1958 until January 1961 and then from September 1967 through May 1970. Coming back was quite a culture shock to see how things had changed!

—THOMAS WILEY III '62
Cameron, Texas

Hands down, **the Flag Room** at the MSC! It was a great respite between classes, and it was soothing when a fellow student would play an enchanting piece on the piano or a few Singing Cadets would break out in beautiful melody.

—SHERILYN MERCER '81
Georgetown, Texas



Campus

A new 63,500-square-foot campus facility provides a multitude of recreational options on south campus.



More Space To Be Fit

With the opening of the Southside Recreation Center in fall 2022, staying in shape has never been easier for students on south campus. Just feet away from the Commons, Quad and Southside residence halls, the 63,500-square-foot facility provides a multitude of recreational options right where students study and live.

The new center's amenities include strength and conditioning areas, a climbing wall, locker rooms, and volleyball and basketball courts. The facility also features a 15,000-square-foot outdoor space with sand volleyball courts and a turf area with exercise equipment.

"This state-of-the-art facility moves Texas A&M University Rec Sports closer to our vision of being the nation's leader in collegiate recreation and inspiring a lifelong pursuit of health and wellness," said Rick Hall, director of Rec Sports. Plans for expanding recreational opportunities across campus began in 2018, when students voted to increase the student Rec Sports fee through the "Vote Rec" campaign to fund more facilities.

With the opening, Texas A&M now offers more than 500,000 combined square feet of indoor recreation opportunities and almost 50 acres of outdoor recreational campus space.

What type of events do you create designs for?

We serve as floral designers for multiple university events, primarily for those the president, Board of Regents or chancellor hosts. The chancellor's suite in Kyle Field is one of my favorite spaces to design for.

What makes a striking floral design?

Though organization and structure are important, the design must tell a story. A sympathy arrangement is much different than a "just because" arrangement, and strong floral designers make people feel something through their designs.

What interested you in floral design?

When I was younger, I picked flowers outside my house and put them in a jar of water or let them dry out to save. In high school, I took a floral design class and found it was a great outlet to relax and feel centered.

Do you have a favorite flower?

I love the double stargazer lily. It's my mom's favorite, so I always try to incorporate it into my designs.

What is the most rewarding aspect of this organization?

Seeing our members find confidence and creativity by creating art with flowers is always fulfilling. Some students join the organization unsure of their abilities but leave making some of the most beautiful pieces.

WITH EMILY MALDONADO '24

Student Org Spotlight: Student American Institute of Floral Designers

"We hope current and former students and fans alike will be proud to show their Aggie Spirit on the road with the First Lady of Aggieland."



Kyle Pope '08, Texas A&M University director of collegiate licensing and brand development, unveiled a new specialty license plate featuring Reveille. Offered exclusively through My Plates, the plate can be personalized and starts at \$35 per year when purchased for a five-year term. Additionally, a portion of the plate sales will support Texas A&M and fund scholarships. To create your plate, visit aggieplates.tamu.edu.

Sustainable Stewards

Aggie Eco-Representatives, a student-run Residence Life organization, is on a mission to make sustainability the newest Aggie tradition. Through educational opportunities and sustainable programming, the organization aims to make Texas A&M University greener for future generations.



classnotes

The Department of Disability Resources translated more than 2,300 pages of mathematics material to Braille after lecturer Vanessa Coffelt realized barriers a legally blind student in her class faced. Staff and student employees worked together to create Braille textbooks, lecture notes, exams and group assignments that will also help future Aggies with visual impairments.



A team in the Zachry Department of Civil & Environmental Engineering is researching the 3D printing of buildings using a sustainable material called hempcrete, which could make houses eco-friendlier and more affordable. As part of the project, researchers will create 3D-printable building designs that achieve structural resilience and energy efficiency.



The Texas A&M University Small Animal Teaching Hospital installed a "BTHO Cancer" bell in its lobby to celebrate the completion of chemotherapy or radiation treatments for its clients. With oncology as the second busiest service at the hospital, the bell rings about once a week as patients reach this treatment milestone.



Of many choice programs, its monthly Sustainable Swap Shop events have become a student favorite. In line with thrifting trends, Aggies bring used items, such as clothes and knick-knacks, and trade for items of similar value to minimize waste.

The organization also hosts a biweekly campus cleanup where students gather to remove litter across the university. "The magic of Eco-Reps is that we serve and

learn alongside each other," shared Mary Katherine "MK" Futrell '23, Aggie Eco-Reps president. "Everything we do is with the goal of creating a culture of sustainability."

The group's impact is growing and gaining recognition on campus. In 2021, Aggie Eco-Reps was the first student organization to receive a sustainability certification from the Aggie Sustainability Alliance, earning the highest rating of "champion."

WhyGive

Conversation

Vicki Brown-Sobecki '78—one of the first women to receive an athletic scholarship at Texas A&M University and the first female swimmer inducted into the Texas A&M Athletics Hall of Fame—and her husband, Dan, created an endowment to raise awareness for women's history and the university library system.



How will this gift shape women's history at Texas A&M? *I've always had an interest in tracking women's history. I've kept scrapbooks related to Texas A&M women's athletics. But when I visited Cushing Memorial Library and Archives to see what resources were available, there were very few historical archives on women. Our History of Women at Texas A&M University Endowment is the first gift made to the University Libraries to specifically commemorate and educate others about women who have made an impact in Aggieland. Our gift will help recognize women who contribute in many ways: athletics, the Corps of Cadets, leadership, academics and more.*

Why is the library system the right place for this endowment?

The university's library system is vital. We want to help people hold history in their hands. The libraries are where people can learn from what women have achieved and recognize the opportunity to make history themselves. Our gift can help fund materials acquisitions, exhibitions, lectures and the preservation of artifacts related to women's history at Texas A&M.

How has your experience as a trailblazing woman influenced your decision to give back? *I never set out to be the first, whether with this gift or my swimming career at Texas A&M, but I've learned that it's just what I'm meant to do. Women's history matters, and I'm happy to play a role in the movement to tell women's stories.*

Because Texas A&M provided my mother with the opportunities to achieve her dreams.

Betty Crocker LeMay moved to College Station in the early 1980s and, like her mother had done years earlier in her hometown of McGregor, Texas, went to work as a dispatcher for the local police department. Betty felt she could do more, however; she wanted to become a licensed peace officer. She got the chance to serve when Texas A&M University Police Chief Bob Wiatt offered her the opportunity to attend the police academy.

Within a few years, LeMay became an integral and well-known face of the campus's crime prevention and safety efforts. She developed preventative programming within departments and spent many hours off the clock speaking to organizations like Fish Camp and Aggie Moms' Clubs. In 1999, she received the President's Meritorious Service Award, a testament to her service to Aggieland.

"My mother was always determined to succeed despite the challenges she faced," said Ronnie Crocker '85, who created the Sgt. Betty C. LeMay Endowed Opportunity Award Scholarship to honor his mother and support first-generation students. "Texas A&M has always been a place for hard-working people to thrive. Her legacy of overcoming odds will continue through the students who receive this scholarship."





Because the Appelt Aggieland Visitor Center is where the Aggie story begins.

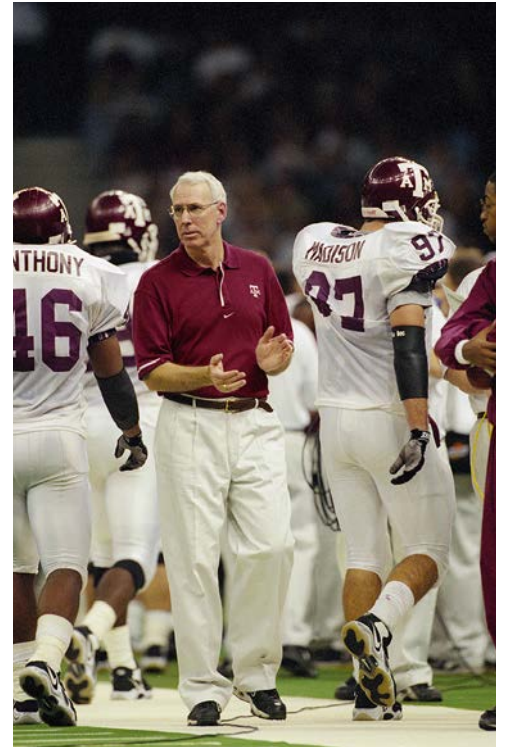
In her application essay to work as a tour guide at the Appelt Aggieland Visitor Center as a student, Kristin Cooper King '03 '05 wrote about what it meant to be an Aggie. Connecting Aggie qualities with different campus landmarks, King's words were a precursor to her children's book, "The Heart of Aggieland."

The book honors King's late husband, **Chris Cooper '97**, who passed suddenly in a car accident in 2009. "Chris and I met while we were working at the visitor center," King shared. "After he passed, I wanted to write a book that he would have read with our daughter, Colleen, on his lap. It only made sense to write about the qualities of an Aggie and the campus landmarks that started our story at the visitor center."

The book's proceeds benefit the Chris Cooper '97 Heart of Aggieland Endowment, which King started to support the center's operations and programming. "The visitor center is where prospective students first experience the deeper meaning of Aggieland," King explained. "The book does the same. When parents read it to their children, I hope they feel the Texas A&M Chris and I knew."

King's book is available for purchase at heartofaggieland.com.

In his 13 years of coaching, **R.C. Slocum** won more games than any other Texas A&M head football coach and participated in many Coach's Nights with the Dallas A&M Club. This connection and his coaching legacy inspired the club to create the R.C. Slocum Future Coaches Endowed Scholarship in the School of Education and Human Development for students pursuing a certificate in coaching.



"R.C. Slocum was more than a coach to his athletes. Coaches like him are role models and positive influences who often serve as a second set of parents."

—JOSEPH BROWN II '11
DALLAS A&M CLUB PRESIDENT

3,335 gifts totaling
\$2.4 M

were given to the Texas A&M Foundation during fiscal year 2022 in memory or honor of a special loved one or pet. Memorial or honorary gifts like those given by **Ronnie Crocker '85** and **Kristin Cooper King '03 '05** can be customized to reflect the interests and values of the honoree, creating an impactful way to remember a loved one while also benefiting Aggieland. Learn more by scanning the QR code below.



Marching Forward

Brig. Gen. Patrick Michaelis '93 brings a wealth of experience as Commandant of the Corps of Cadets.

Brig. Gen. Patrick Michaelis '93 became the 46th Commandant of Texas A&M University's Corps of Cadets on Oct. 1, 2022. He aims to continue strengthening the Corps' ability to develop leaders of character and bring to fruition a new March to 3,000 initiative to expand cadet enrollment.

"I'm exceedingly excited and humbled to help shape the future of the Corps and its relationship to the university, state and nation," he said. "I am inspired by how passionate, committed, inquisitive and smart our cadets are and how integrated they are in the fabric of the university. They value being the Keepers of the Spirit."

How did the Corps of Cadets position you for a long and successful military career?

My experience in the Corps gave me a bedrock of values, work ethic, discipline and leadership skills that allowed me to make an immediate impact as a U.S. military officer.

What made you decide to accept this position?

Even as a young cadet, I viewed the role of Commandant with reverence and awe. This opportunity only comes open once in a generation, so I had a long conversation with my wife, my family and a few of my mentors in the Army. This

role will allow me to give back in a way that is fulfilling, exciting and in line with what I consider my strengths.

What are you most excited about regarding this role?

I'm an Army brat—the son of an Army officer and the grandson of a World War II Air Corpsman. Both served full careers in the military. I've moved not only as a youth but also as a military officer 29 times in 51 years. The longest I ever lived somewhere was my four years spent here at Texas A&M as an undergrad. To me, it's like coming home after serving the country, and as the Commandant, I get to continue to serve in a capacity that affects the future of our state and nation.

What makes you uniquely suited for this position?

I have 30 years experience at the tactical, operational and strategic levels. I've also seen and been part of leading large organizations through change, whether on the battlefield or in the United States. I've been an assistant professor at West Point, where I taught young cadets the mechanics of leadership and a capstone management course on leading organizations through change.

My most recent assignment was serving as the commanding general at Fort Jackson, which trains

Rapid Fire

Favorite Aggie tradition:

"Howdy," because it breaks down barriers and opens relationships.

Historical interests:

I have a vast interest in military history. Currently, I'm rather interested in the birth of our country and how that came to be.

Currently reading:

"Washington: A Life" by Ron Chernow; "Lone Star: A History of Texas and the Texans" by T.R. Fehrenbach; and "Breaking Away: How the Texas A&M University System Changed the Game" by Tim Gregg.

Favorite military movie:

"Patton" (1970)

Favorite music:

Classic rock





60% of citizens entering the armed forces, so I understand youth today and how to guide them through a transformational journey.

What are your impressions of where the Corps is now and where it needs to go?

As I do an assessment, I'm committed first to cadets' academics and education. We've come so far during the last 10 years under my predecessor in having a higher GPA than the collective university.

The second thing I'm committed to is the Corps experience, which uses a military cultural model to create leaders for the state and nation in every sector. We need to ensure that the Corps experience matches today's and tomorrow's military models.

The third commitment is to the Corps being a student-led organization. Giving cadets opportunities to execute the complexities of leadership and the space to make decisions is something that—if we do it right—becomes a demand signal for businesses and industries looking for talent.

Why is the March to 3,000 initiative a priority, and how will it bolster the Corps?

The nation demands the product we produce—and they need more of it. The need for the skills cadets

gain through the Corps is a great driver for moving to 3,000 enrolled cadets.

March to 3,000 is also a vehicle to reexamine where we need to be. You can look at it through the lens of branding, marketing, recruiting and retention, but also in terms of facilities, human capital and resources. If we're going to grow the Corps to 3,000 members, we need to do so in a methodical, thoughtful way. To reach a sustainable number over time, you must have the right structure, resources and talent in place.

How important are donors and private philanthropy to the Corps' present and future?

There's no doubt that those who give to the university and the Corps have had a direct impact on where we are today. I want to provide a compelling vision for how these gifts directly impact cadets' lives today and their role as future leaders. We create tomorrow's potential today—and donors' gifts invest in that potential. ©

Legacy

By LORI FERGUSON

Bonnie and Dr. Terry Alfriend provide out-of-this-world opportunities to aerospace faculty and students through a generous mixed-use gift.

On Oct. 4, 1957, the USSR sent a basketball-size satellite called Sputnik into orbit, capturing imaginations around the world, including that of then-high school senior Terry Alfriend. “Together with my experiences in physics class, that launch made science interesting for me,” he recalled.

Alfriend’s curiosity persisted, leading him to obtain a doctorate in engineering mechanics and embark upon an eminent career in the aerospace business that has spanned six decades and encompassed the private sector, government and academia.

Today, Alfriend is a member of the National Academy of Engineering and a University Distinguished Professor who holds the Jack E. and Frances Brown Chair II in Texas A&M University’s Department of Aerospace Engineering. An honorary fellow of the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics, he also received its prestigious Goddard Astronautics Award in 2022 for his extraordinary contributions in the fields of orbital mechanics and space situational awareness.

Alfriend recognizes the deep impact an education can have from firsthand experience. “I grew up in a cotton mill town. Before I went to college, I had never even met an engineer,” he explained.

Following 30 years in roles supporting the Department of Defense and the intelligence community in space, Alfriend initially joined the Texas A&M faculty as head of the aerospace engineering department in 1997 and has been an integral part of the program’s continuing success. During his tenure, he has seen student enrollment rise exponentially, department scholarships grow from zero to more than 50, and the department climb into the nation’s top 10 aerospace programs.

He and his wife, Bonnie, recently contributed to the department in yet another way by creating a generous current and planned gift to support future generations of aerospace engineers. The couple has pledged after-lifetime funds to create an associate professorship and faculty fellowship for early- to mid-career faculty and an endowed scholarship that presently benefits students.

“We decided to introduce the scholarship now because we had the money available, and it’s nice to give back while I’m still part of the department,” Alfriend noted. Bonnie added, “We also wanted the ability to see the impact of our gift now. Terry is a great mentor, and we enjoy creating bonds with students.”

Current department head Dr. Ivett Leyva lauded the former department head’s numerous ac-

complishments and praised the foresight reflected in the couple’s gift. “Dr. Alfriend, though widely recognized for his expertise in spacecraft guidance, navigation and control, is also a gifted mentor of graduate students who are now leaders in government, industry and academia,” she said. “I am enormously grateful for the couple’s vision to support students and focus their faculty gifts on rewarding early- and mid-career professors, as there are already programs in place to attract highly accomplished full professors.”

The Alfriends are delighted to make a difference. “We’re committed to education and helping anyone we can,” Bonnie concluded. “We’ve experienced the difference education makes: It changes lives, and it changes history.” ☺

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“We’re committed to education and helping anyone we can because we’ve experienced the difference education makes: It changes lives, and it changes history.”

—BONNIE & DR. TERRY ALFRIEND

did you know

the Texas A&M University meat science program is planning a state-of-the-art center that will build on its legacy?

When Dr. Jeffrey Savell '75 took his first meat science class in 1973 in the 1932-built Meat Laboratory located in the basement of the Animal Industries Building, the idea of having a campus facility dedicated solely to meat science seemed preposterous. A few years later, however, he was directly involved as a young faculty member in designing what became the Rosenthal Meat Science and Technology Center (RMSTC).

Since its doors opened in 1983, Savell has witnessed the center's leaders drive the meat industry forward in research, teaching and extension efforts. Today, as vice chancellor and dean of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, he is once again involved with the creation of a new center that has the potential to further cement Texas A&M University as a pioneer in the meat industry. "When we transitioned into the Rosenthal Center 40 years ago, it propelled the meat science program from good to great," he shared. "This new center can take the program from great to best."

The new facility, expected to open in the next five years on the RELLIS Campus in Bryan, will have updated meat coolers and laboratories and provide students with even more hands-on learning experiences by bringing carcasses, saws and grinders into the classroom. It will also house a state-of-the-art processing floor with more areas to view meat processing through glass enclosures.

With more than 75,000 square feet in the new facility, Texas A&M will have greater opportunities to host seminars and extension efforts like its popular Barbecue Summer Camp, Camp Brisket and Beef 101 programs, as well as more 4-H, FFA and other youth events. "If we can fund our vision, there will be no comparable campus meat science facility in the U.S.," said Ray Riley '79 '81, who manages the RMSTC.

With big changes on the horizon for the meat science program,

Dr. Jeffrey Savell '75, vice chancellor and dean of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences



the legacy of the center's namesake, Manny Rosenthal '42, remains the heart and inspiration behind the new facility. Rosenthal, whose father founded Standard Meat Co., established the first endowed meat sciences chair in the nation at Texas A&M. "Our grandfather was involved in building the first center," explained Ben Rosenthal and Ashli Rosenthal Blumenfeld, who run the family business now. "That building is an extension of him in many ways. There is a culture and spirit in the center, and we know it will continue at the new facility. Our grandfather would be proud to see where the program is today. It's time to take it to the next level." ©

To learn how you can support the new facility and the future of meat science at Texas A&M, contact:

SCOTT JARVIS '00
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1

160,000 pounds of beef, lamb and pork are processed annually at the Rosenthal Center.

6

The renowned Fightin' Texas Aggie Meat Judging Program trains at the Rosenthal Center. The team **has won 16 national championships in its history.**

②

The Rosenthal Center has produced its famous **Texas Aggie Brand Beef Jerky** since the 1980s. The popular snack has achieved national recognition in The New York Times and on “CBS Sunday Morning,” ESPN, and the SEC Network’s “Marty & McGee.”

③

Research from Texas A&M’s meat science program has **impacted more than 70% of beef, sheep and pork consumers** in the U.S.

④

Faculty in the meat science department have collaborated with more than 14 universities, 35 U.S. food companies, three federal government agencies and experts in at least 10 countries.

⑤

Since the Rosenthal Center was completed in 1983, **more than 12,000 Aggies have taken Animal Science 307: Meats.**



THE ROSENTHAL MEAT SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY CENTER

AGGIE  PRIME

⑦

Since 1984, the Rosenthal Center has created environmentally stable meat products for **NASA’s space shuttle missions and the International Space Station.**

⑧

The Rosenthal Retail Center sells 100,000 pounds of meat each year. For just \$5.25, students can get a sausage wrap and a soda—the “Aggie Special”—between classes.

⑨

With more than 14 meat science faculty members, Texas A&M has **the largest meat science program in the country.**

⑩

The first Farm Meats course was **taught at Texas A&M in 1926.**

Viewpoint



By MAMIE HERTEL '24

A Floral Fantasy Submerged

An Aggie florist and photographer create breathtaking underwater scenes.

At first glance, this euphoric underwater floral scene could be mistaken for a painting, but this dreamy art came from two Aggies whose love for creating beautiful photos in freshwater matches their passion for keeping that water beautiful.

Florida residents Ashley Rodriguez '06 and Kimber Greenwood '10 started with a desire to find the next wild, creative idea for an ethereal experience. With more than 600 stems of fresh flowers, weeks of planning and \$20,000 worth of camera equipment, the florist-photographer duo brought

this underwater floral photo fantasy to life.

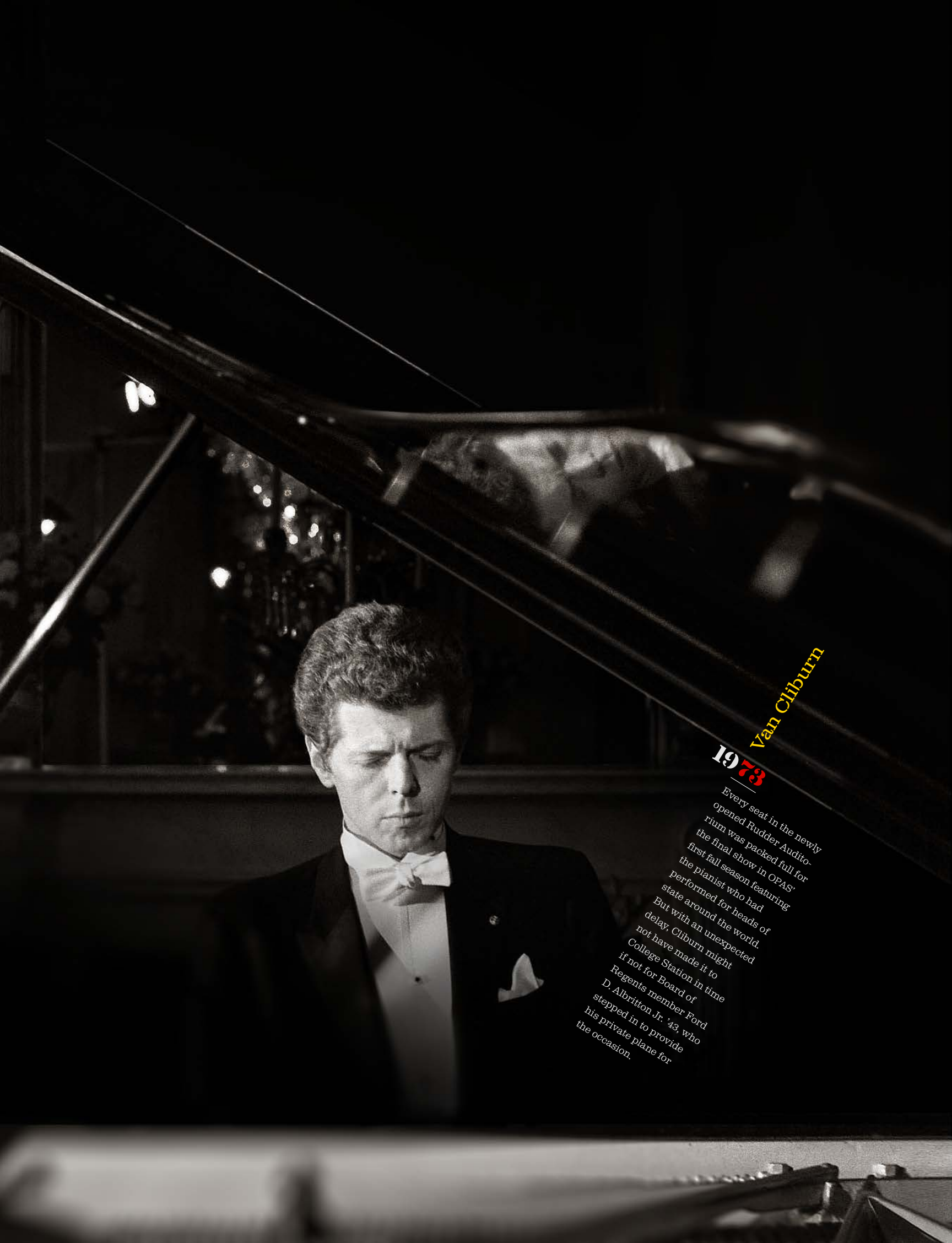
Florida's freshwater springs have fascinated Greenwood since she learned about them in the maritime program at Texas A&M University at Galveston. After graduating with a degree in marine biology, she moved to Gainesville, Florida, to experience and advocate for the springs. She is a member of the Springs Council and promotes freshwater preservation through her photography business, which captures couples and maternity clients underwater in the area's surrounding springs.

A partnership blossomed after Greenwood met fellow Aggie and female entrepreneur Rodriguez during a photo shoot in 2020. Greenwood mentored Rodriguez as her floral business grew exponentially, and the pair soon began collaborating on underwater floral photo shoots. "We want our photos to convey the magic and beauty of freshwater to everyone," Rodriguez said.

It wasn't long before they caught the eye of national floral wholesaler Mayesh, which offered them a shot at creating an editorial installation of their choosing. The

two designed this English garden-inspired scene to evoke conversation about the strength and grace of women and water. "Women can be very critical of themselves, but during underwater modeling, you're only focused on your next breath," Greenwood shared. "The beauty of the water is that it captures models in a raw, authentic way." ©





Van Cliburn

1973

Every seat in the newly opened Rudder Auditorium was packed full for the final show in OPAS' first fall season featuring the pianist who had performed for heads of state around the world. But with an unexpected delay, Cliburn might not have made it to College Station in time if not for Board of Regents member Ford D. Albritton Jr. '43, who stepped in to provide his private plane for the occasion.

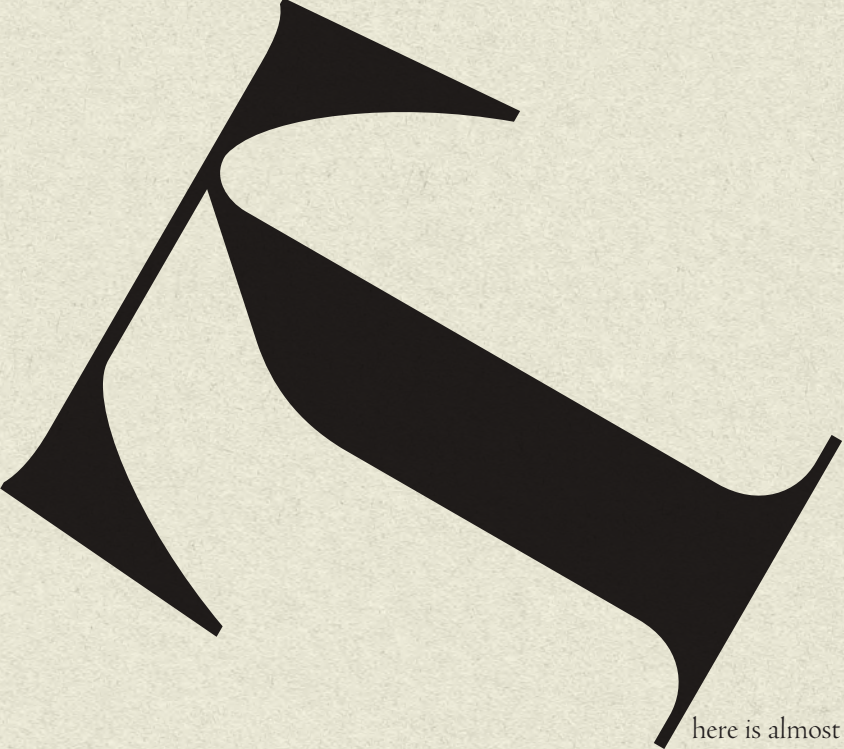
THE

BEST

FROM BROADWAY TO BALLET, OPAS HAS BEEN HOSTING
TOP PERFORMANCES IN AGGIELAND FOR 50 SEASONS.

SHOWS

★★★★
By Lydia Hill '21



here is almost 30 minutes to showtime, and already a crowd has gathered in the Rudder Tower lobby. The area by the box office bustles with theatergoers who've braved the cold November evening, eager for a night of fun, excitement and head-bobbing rhythm thanks to the latest OPAS performance: the award-winning percussion group "STOMP."

After receiving my ticket and a cheerful "Enjoy the show!" from the man at will call, I head toward the auditorium. A volunteer beckons me and gladly scans my ticket, offers a program and echoes the box office warm wishes before I enter the auditorium and find my seat.

The murmur of conversation gradually increases to an eager buzz as families, students and couples trickle in until the venue's maroon seats are packed. Onstage, barrels, brooms and scaffolding covered with a jumble of trash can lids, road signs and various other city flotsam make it look like a portal to a New York City junkyard. For those familiar with the show, the cluttered collage hints at the musical magic that awaits.

At 7:30 p.m., a man dressed in tattered street clothes emerges with a broom. He could pass for a stagehand as he starts sweeping, but as the lights fade, the audience hushes

to hear every slow, methodical swish. This is what they have been waiting for. The award-winning show that has sold out theaters all over the world and delighted New York audiences 11,472 times for 29 years has arrived in Aggieland.

Soon, Rudder is reverberating with rhythm as the eight performers weave swishes, thumps, bangs, claps, clicks, rustles and stomps into music, using nothing but ordinary objects like brooms, matches, paper, trash cans, suitcases, shopping carts and even the kitchen sink. From the first moments, a smile spreads across my face as I'm caught up in the performance. The audience around me feels it, too, laughing, cheering and nodding to the beat as they get lost in the show.

But there was much more to the group's College Station appearance than the 105-minute performance. The memorable night resulted from countless hours of preparation by the students, staff and volunteers of Texas A&M University's OPAS. A unique partnership among students, the university and local community members, the organization has brought such talent to the area as the London Philharmonic Orchestra, Carol Burnett, Tony Bennett, Willie Nelson, "Rent," "Les Misérables," and other top theater, music and dance programs.

Like the rhythms of "STOMP," it takes a lot of skillful coordination to consistently bring captivating entertainment to Aggieland, but OPAS has been making it look effortless for 50 seasons.





The Curtain Rises

It was a year and a half before “STOMP” would take the stage, and OPAS Executive Director Anne Black was already preparing. The organization’s program advisory committee, composed of community members and Texas A&M students on OPAS’ board of directors, was discussing shows for its historic 2022-23 50th anniversary season, and Black was busy attending conferences and checking tour schedules for booking availability. “Every season begins with putting together a wish list,” Black said, “and it’s a balance between audience interests and touring logistics.”

The intricate planning at the start of each season harks back to OPAS’ beginnings. In 1970, the local community was growing, with Texas A&M attendance totaling 14,200 and Bryan-College Station boasting a combined population of 51,000. However, the area still lacked an organization dedicated to presenting professional fine arts programs. Memorial Student Center (MSC) Director J. Wayne Stark ’39 was determined to change that. “In those days, Texas A&M students were largely from rural Texas and had never seen a ballet, opera or play,” Black explained. “Stark wanted to provide that.”

In 1972, the planned opening of the new Rudder Theatre Com-

THROUGHOUT ITS HISTORY, OPAS HAS BEEN ONE OF THE FIRST STOPS FOR NEW SHOWS THAT WENT ON TO BECOME CULTURAL SENSATIONS, INCLUDING BLUE MAN GROUP, “STOMP,” TAP DOGS AND THE MIDTOWN MEN.

Yo-Yo Ma and Emanuel Ax

2004

The renowned cellist and pianist delighted the audience when they teamed up for a special performance. When Black went to call them onstage for a brief reception after the show, she found their dressing room empty. While she was frantically looking for them, the two were already onstage, talking and laughing with OPAS donors like old friends.



plex provided the extra push needed to achieve Stark's vision. He put together a small group of university and community leaders to form the Opera and Performing Arts Society as a committee within the MSC Town Hall student organization. The group soon expanded into its own MSC organization and a town and gown affair, with 200 members from all walks of life with both university and community members serving on its board of directors.

On Nov. 3, 1973, all the preparation paid off when classical guitarist Christopher Parkening took to the Rudder Theatre stage as OPAS' first performer for an audience of 800. The first season was an immediate success, and subsequent years filled the Rudder stage with opera, music and other classical performances. As the community continued to grow and audience tastes evolved, OPAS expanded to additional variety performances and added Broadway shows to its repertoire in season 15. "Over the years, we've tried to meet the community's requests and do more to serve a broader audience," Black said.



Leading Lady

It was a year before "STOMP" would rock the Rudder stage, and Black was deep in the world of dates and calendars to translate their season 50 show selections into one cohesive performance schedule. "The

AS OPAS' EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, ANNE BLACK COMBINES HER BUSINESS EXPERIENCE AND LIFELONG PASSION FOR THEATER TO BRING THE WORLD'S BEST PERFORMERS TO AGGIELAND.



calendar is the biggest challenge," she said. "We have to work these puzzle pieces around football weekends, spring break, commencement, the holiday break and anything going on in the MSC or Rudder. And just when we have it all scheduled, an agent will call asking if I can move their show by a few days, and it's all upended again."

But if anyone can be trusted to work everything out, it's Black. Warm and welcoming yet matter-of-fact, she's a master at coordinating the chaos of negotiating with producers, communicating with university personnel and overseeing the details that make each season a success.

"Anne is one of my favorites in the business," said theater producer Stephen Gabriel. The president and executive producer of Work Light Productions, Gabriel has collaborated with Black and OPAS as a booking agent and producer for more than 30 years and has helped Aggieldand put on such shows as the Bolshoi Ballet, "Cirque Ingenieux" and the original tour of "STOMP." "She's smart as a whip but also a bit of a risk-taker, and I have huge respect for her. She does the community a great service by bringing so many top-tier acts to the area."

Black has been the organization's leading lady since season 12 in 1984. For three years, she served as its program coordinator before stepping into her current role as executive director in 1987. In this position, she's guided OPAS from a fresh organization to the respected veteran theater presenter it is today. But like a true backstage player, she's slow to take any credit. "I don't know if it's about me," she protested. "Responding to the community's interests is what has grown OPAS."

Others, though, are happy to applaud her. "Anne has been instrumental in making this program a success," said Zou Cherry, a former OPAS board member and president of the board for season 46. "She has so many contacts in the theater community. Everybody in the industry respects her."

"Anne has been instrumental in making this program a success. She has so many contacts in the theater community. Everybody in the industry respects her."

—Zou Cherry

Saving the Show

It was seven months before "STOMP" would wow Aggieldand and only five months until OPAS' 50th season began when Black's phone rang. Bad news came from the other end: The tour of "Waitress" scheduled to come to College Station in March 2023 was canceled. But OPAS had already announced its season schedule and printed brochures advertising the Broadway musical as part of the lineup. With no time to lose, Black turned to her Broadway connections, asking if anyone

went through some really tough years,” Black recalled.

In OPAS’ moment of need, the community stepped in by creating a \$100,000 endowment through the Texas A&M Foundation to permanently support the group. In 2002, additional donors grew the endowment to \$1 million, ensuring OPAS could keep presenting quality programs even when sales were off. “Looking back, it’s amazing to think OPAS is funding itself because it wasn’t for a long time,” Black said. “Before, it was not uncommon to lose \$200,000 in a season and try to make it up the next year.”

With a current annual budget of \$2.3 million, covering all the costs is no small feat. But thanks to ticket sales, playbill ads, sponsorships and donors’ consistent generosity, OPAS continues to present 25 events each year, including mainstage shows in the 2,500-seat Rudder Auditorium, Intimate Gathering shows in the smaller 750-seat Rudder Theatre, one-night Singular Sensations, and multiple programs for children and local schools.

had a show with open tour dates in the same timeframe. One responded with “Legally Blonde,” and just like that, things were back on track. “It’s all about having relationships so that when you send out an email like that, they respond,” Black said.

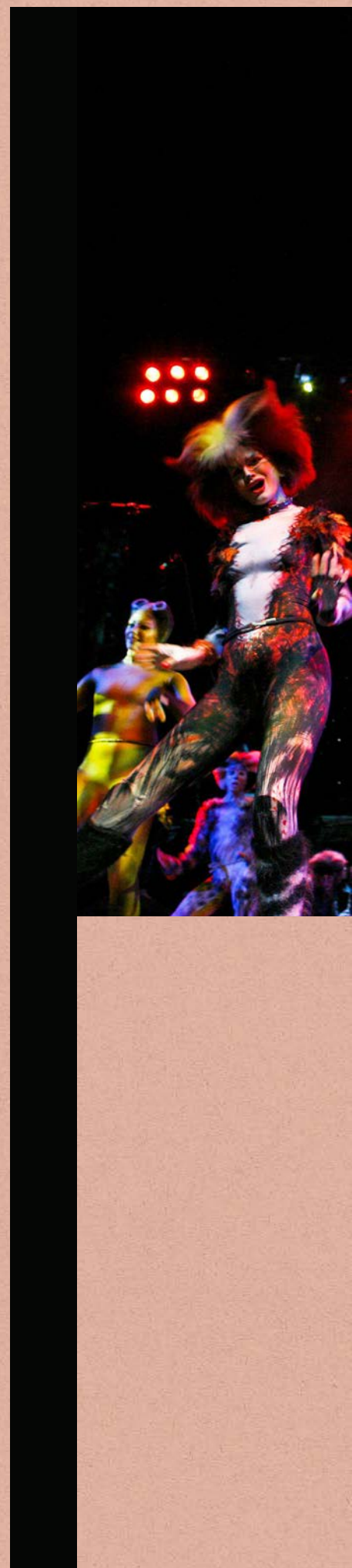
Unexpected schedule snags are only one challenge OPAS has dealt with through the years. In an industry reliant on in-person attendance, anything from a downturn in the economy to a nearby hurricane can adversely affect ticket sales.

Most recently, the COVID-19 pandemic created a massive shakeup, forcing OPAS to cancel its remaining season 47 shows in the middle of the year and completely skip over an official season 48. “We’ve been awed at how quickly we bounced back,” Black said. “We thought we might experience a couple of negative years due to COVID, but luckily, we haven’t. That’s partly due to the university. We kept our jobs, but many of my colleagues in private theater nonprofits didn’t.”

Perhaps the most disheartening downturn came in the late 1980s. When an increased oil supply drove the decade’s oil bust, it also dried up the funds OPAS received from the Texas Commission on the Arts that had helped supplement ticket sales. “When we didn’t have that money coming in to subsidize, we

Starring: Students

It was 14 hours before “STOMP” would take the stage, and Rudder was a flurry of activity despite the early morning hours. The stage crew was busy loading the set into Rudder Auditorium and assembling the pieces into the hodgepodge of scaffolding.





1988 "CATS"

Andrew Lloyd Webber's whimsical world of musical felines ushered in a new era for OPAS as part of the first season of Broadway shows. The musical ran for three nights in Rudder, and with an average attendance of 2,300 each night, the show left audiences caterwauling for more Broadway.

folding that audiences would see a few hours later. While the show's professional touring crew worked onstage, another team worked backstage: the Aggies in the MSC OPAS Student Committee. From providing the crew with coffee to setting up the performers' green room, the students played a vital part in preparing the cast and crew for success.

The 80 students in the organization are the bright stars of OPAS, tirelessly assisting with every aspect of the performance process, including promoting the show, providing hospitality and transportation to the cast and crew, serving as ushers and ticket-takers during shows, and helping make decisions as part of OPAS' board of directors. "Our students are the arms, legs and heart of OPAS," Black said. "They contribute the energy, youth and imagination that keep us going."

Students have been part of the organization since the beginning, and their continued involvement makes the group one of a few student-led university performing arts organizations in the country. The student committee remains with the MSC while the rest of OPAS now lies under the Division of Academic & Strategic Collaborations, which was established in 2021 to support community and university-wide engagement and collaboration. "Students make OPAS unique," said Edith Gonzalez Brizuela '22, who participated in the OPAS student committee throughout her time in Aggieworld and served as the 2021-22 committee chair when the group began planning season 50. "Not everyone in the group wants to pursue theater as a career, but we all enjoy sharing the arts."

Their hard work has benefits. Students gain lifelong friendships, and their hospitality role allows them to meet many of the visiting performers. The organization also provides networking opportunities



KNOWN AROUND THE WORLD FOR HIS HUMOROUS FILM ROLES, ACTOR AND COMEDIAN STEVE MARTIN PROVED HE WAS NO JOKE AS A MUSICIAN IN 2011 WHEN HE SHOWED OFF HIS BANJO-PICKING SKILLS WITH THE STEEP CANYON RANGERS.



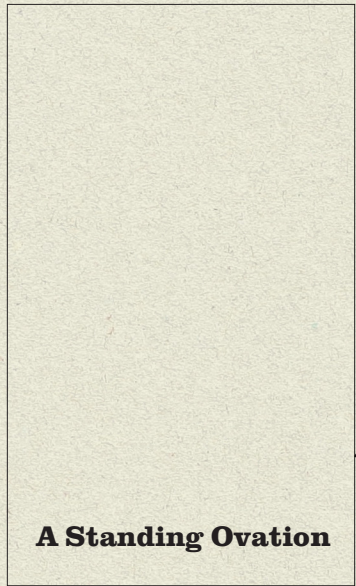
Tony Bennett

2016

The venerated legend treated the audience to a night of such classics as "Steppin' Out With My Baby" and "I Left My Heart in San Francisco" before ending the night by singing "Fly Me to the Moon" without a microphone while the crowd sat spellbound.

with Brazos Valley citizens and former students, as well as leadership skills that will serve them well beyond their time in Aggieland.

"OPAS has been a very impactful chapter in my life," Gonzalez Brizuela said. "It helped me become a stronger, more confident person and opened new doors. When I started college, I was a physics major, but now, I plan to pursue an arts-related career."



A Standing Ovation

It was an hour and a half since "STOMP" first swept onto the stage, and the show was nearing an end. Following a booming number with trash can lids, the performers began clapping out a rhythm, encouraging the audience to copy the beat. The claps were slow at first but intensified as the audience got the hang of it. Soon, the crowd had become an inextricable part of the performance, providing the underlying rhythm as one member accented it with his swishing broom.

By drawing the audience into the performance, the moment also encapsulated OPAS' secret to success for all these years: community support. From donating and volunteering to buying tickets and telling friends, everyone who supports the organization has a hand in its impact on Aggieland. Since it began, OPAS has sold more than 1 million

"The arts are central to life and learning. They nurture, entertain, inspire and enlighten. We all need that."

Anne Black

tickets, not only providing entertainment and enrichment to students and community members alike but also giving Texas A&M a name in the arts world.

"OPAS creates this center of art in what is typically considered a technical and agricultural-focused university," observed theater producer Stephen Gabriel. "What Anne has built with OPAS has stood the test of time. I always want to support it because it's critical to have organizations like this that serve as the backbone of touring theater."

"The arts are central to life and learning," Black added. "They nurture, entertain, inspire and enlighten. We all need that."

This season, OPAS celebrated its history and the impact of art by looking back and looking forward. "STOMP," which first hit the Rudder stage during its initial U.S. tour in 1994, points to shows from seasons past, while "Anastasia," a new Broadway show, promises good things to come. And OPAS has lots to look forward to—most notably the planned construction of a new Performing Arts Center on campus that could host future shows. "I hope the new center becomes a destination for people across Cen-

tral Texas," Black shared. "I believe OPAS' future is bright."

But more than a center, it's the dedicated individuals in the organization that make OPAS shine like a spotlight on a dark stage. As audience members file out of Rudder Auditorium on that chilly November night after "STOMP," buzzing about the show, a few volunteers remain, cleaning up and discussing anything that could make the next event even smoother. And in the dark theater, the standing ovation the show received still echoes, not only for the performers but also for the staff, students and community members who transformed a room full of strangers into a united group as they laughed, clapped and made music together. @

Passionate about supporting the behind-the-scenes stars who bring top talent to Aggieland? Contact:

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AFTER CAROL BURNETT'S SUCCESSFUL SHOW IN 2013, OPAS RECRUITED A TRUE STAND-UP ICON IN JERRY SEINFELD IN 2015, WHO BY ALL ACCOUNTS KILLED THE SOLD-OUT SHOW WITH HIS TAKE ON THE ABSURDITIES OF EVERYDAY LIFE.

Make a gift to the organization online by visiting give.am/SupportOPAS.

ALL
THE

THEY'VE SPICED UP YOUR FAVORITE DISHES FOR DECADES. BUT BEHIND BOLNER'S FIESTA BRAND AND ITS QUEST FOR SUPERIOR SEASONING LIES A FAMILY HISTORY THAT INFORMS THE COMPANY AND ITS AGGIE LEADERS TO THIS DAY.

BY BAILEY PAYNE '19

RIGHT
INGRE-
DIENTS

➔ *The late Clifton "Clif" Bolner '49 founded Bolner's Fiesta Products in 1955. Today, his family members carry on his legacy of superlative product quality and customer service.*



BOLNER'S
Fiesta
BRAND
GARLIC SPICES



“EVERY SPICE FACTORY SMELLS ABOUT THE SAME,” MIKE BOLNER ’73 SAID. IT DOESN’T MATTER WHERE THE FACTORY IS OR HOW MANY DIFFERENT BLENDS ARE MADE THERE. “YOU ALWAYS SMELL GARLIC, PEPPER AND COMINO. GREAT COMBINATION.”

That potent mixture had hit me earlier when I approached the front door of the Bolner’s Fiesta Brand headquarters in San Antonio, Texas, and sank in as I waited in the entryway. It wasn’t a bad smell, but it was strong enough to stay with me for the rest of the tour. Decades in and around the factory had rendered Mike mostly immune to the pungent air, but even he still sneezed now and then.

The entryway of the company’s second home, built in 1964, was decked out in wood paneling. Framed newspaper clippings, awards and community memorabilia covered the walls, all surrounding a small stained glass window depicting the company’s recognizable mascot: a red and green dancer in traditional “ballet folklórico” garb. You’ve most likely seen her dancing across semi-translucent plastic bottles of spices and seasonings at grocery stores across the nation, along with Fiesta’s wordmark in simple, festive colors.

While larger food brands like Pepsi have continually updated their brands to keep them fresh over the decades, the Bolner family has left theirs relatively intact, just how they like it. Except for a few tweaks here and there, the logo is the same as it was when Mike’s father, the late Clifton “Clif” Bolner ’49, bought it in 1955 as part of a small local plant just across the freeway from where we were sitting. The biggest change to the Fiesta logo came soon after: the addition of “Bolner’s” in Bolner’s Fiesta Brand, a gesture of accountability for and pride in each product’s quality. And though the company has since transformed into a massive globe-spanning operation dedicated to delivering flavor, it remains a humble family business at its heart.

Sugar and Spice

The accumulated accolades and commemorative keepsakes from Clif’s community involvement continued along the hallway walls as Mike and his son, Jeff Bolner ’04, led me toward a conference room. Before Mike retired, he was the company’s vice president of sales and marketing, which showed in his courteous, affable demeanor. He had attended Texas A&M University’s business school with the full intention of transferring the skills he learned in Aggieland to Fiesta, earning his management degree in 1973. The second oldest of Clif’s seven children, he shares the closest resemblance to his father, with his silver mustache curving upward atop his friendly smile.

Inside the conference room where the bulk of our conversation took place, the sea of plaques and pictures gave way to sparse but characteristic decorations: a copy of the U.S. Constitution, a Texas flag and a map of 19th-century San Antonio, which Mike used as a visual aid for a quick history lesson. “That right there is where Santa Anna watched the Battle of the Alamo,” he said, pointing to the San Fernando Cathedral in modern-day downtown. Another wall sported two framed photos, both family portraits taken decades apart in the warehouse I was about to explore. Just like the Texas A&M campus that Clif, Mike and Jeff had all called home at one point, much of the Fiesta headquarters was dedicated to honoring its past.

Jeff has made a name for himself, however, in helping push the company into the future. Where Mike relayed anecdotes from the family lore and recalled relationships he helped the company build, his son showed an affinity for the nitty-gritty details of manufacturing. “As long as I can remember, I’ve

always liked taking things apart and putting them back together,” Jeff said, giving the classic engineer origin story. Taking after his father, he graduated from Texas A&M with a mechanical engineering degree in 2004, joining the family business soon after. “My uncle Tim built some of the machines here himself, and he showed me how they worked.” As plant engineers, Jeff and his cousin Greg follow in Tim’s footsteps, revitalizing old machinery and monitoring the production of the many thousands of bottles and bags on their journey from the factory to customers’ kitchen shelves and barbecue pits.

**CLIF DIDN'T JUST
PUT THE BOLNERS
ON THE PATH TO
SEASONING SUPREMACY;
HE ALSO SET AN
EXAMPLE FOR HOW THEY
WOULD GIVE BACK
TO THE COMMUNITY
AND PROVIDE
QUALITY SERVICE
NO MATTER WHAT.**

While the family’s patriarch has passed on, his presence lingered throughout the conversation and in the older parts of the building, which stood almost exactly as they had more than six decades before. Clif didn’t just put the Bolners on the path to seasoning supremacy; he also set an example for how they would give back to the community and provide quality service no matter what. He inherited these traits from a long line of doers and dreamers who journeyed far to find stable livelihoods and, upon finding success, invariably dedicated it to others.



Mike Bolner ’73 (retired) and his son, Jeff Bolner ’04, have contributed to their family’s spice business by managing its industry relationships and manufacturing practices.

An Italian Farmer in Mexico

In the late 19th century, Mexico was ruled by Porfirio Díaz, a general who led a coup to overthrow the recently reelected president—arguing that reelection was a slight against democracy—before promptly serving as president for seven terms. Díaz was a dictator, but he felt he could win over his subjects' hearts and secure his power by invigorating the nation's stagnant economy. With this goal in mind, he invited Italian farmers like little Giuseppe "Joe" Bolner and his parents to Mexico in the 1880s, providing cheap land and resources in exchange for their world-renowned green thumbs.

This initiative to improve Mexico's agriculture fared poorly with the country's native farmers, who soon ran Joe and his family off their land near San Luis Potosí when the political winds shifted. The Bolner clan relocated to Texas, where Joe found work as a cook alongside other Italian immigrants on the "Macaroni Line," a railway running from San Antonio to Houston. From there, he tried his luck in Louisiana and Tennessee before returning to the Lone Star State to join his brother, settle down and start a family outside San Antonio in Berg's Mill. He and his wife had eight children, the fifth being Joe Jr., Clif's father.

In 1909, Joe Sr. opened Bolner's Grocery and Meat Market on South Flores Street, where it served the public for more than a century. Joe Jr. got married, and he and his wife Josephine welcomed two children, including Clif, into the world just before the Great Depression hit. The meat market later passed down to Joe Jr. and his two brothers, providing early job opportunities to young Clif and his numerous relatives.

That meat market, still owned by Clif's cousins, survives today on South Flores, its brick façade and wooden scaffolding standing alone on a corner by the freeway, relics of the San Antonio of yesteryear. Unfortunately, you can't walk in and buy a fresh steak anymore; COVID-19 shuttered its public store indefinitely. The business now delivers quality cuts solely to local restaurants and hotels, but its sign is still there, along with three generations of memories made and lessons learned. It's where Clif adopted the Bolner work ethic, sweeping floors and trimming beef for \$5 a day. But when it came time to build on his family's legacy, he set his sights on a small military college some 170 miles away.

How It's Made

As we donned personal protective equipment, left the quiet and calm of the office, and entered the expanded warehouse area that stretched for a few football fields behind it, the factory's smell took on more power but affected me less and less. The real challenge was staying out of the way. Mike and Jeff scooted me around scores of workers in hard hats and hair nets. Forklifts turned corners only to meet the three of us scurrying to the side like deer in headlights on a farm road.

When the Bolners found a safe spot to stand and yell over the machinery, they pointed out each room's purpose. "This is the blending room!" Mike said as we observed workers dump enormous bags of ground garlic and other good stuff into a



5,000-pound mixer before emptying the blend into thick barrels. "This is the pepper grinding room!" he said in front of a 20-foot-tall machine that churned out more than 200 pounds of fresh ground black pepper every hour. "This is the bottling room!" And lo, there were hundreds of bottles gliding neatly down the conveyor belt with the instantly recognizable packaging materializing as they marched along.

As Mike led me around, Jeff alternated between explaining the inner workings of each machine and breaking off from our trio to fiddle with equipment and manually remove visually defective products from the line. It was clear this was his domain, each part of the production line presenting the same burning question: How could this be faster, better and more efficient? The newer machines and reworked older ones were presumably his team's answer to the question, and they were spellbinding in a way that's familiar to anyone who's enjoyed an episode of "How It's Made" on a late-night TV binge.

One particularly ingenious apparatus stood in an area devoted to chili pods, which the Bolners sell in droves every winter. Ask yourself this: How would you go about taking whole chile pasilla peppers with irregular shapes and weights and delivering them in uniform 1.5-ounce bags? You need to provide at least that much weight to fulfill your promise on the label, but you don't want to overpack the bags and lose money. For a while, Fiesta workers individually weighed out loads of peppers, but adding and subtracting them one at a time to level out each bag was time- and labor-intensive.

Instead, the Bolners opted for a machine consisting of a conveyor belt and about a dozen miniature scales on both sides, each complete with its own conveyor belt feeding toward a central belt. A single worker simply places one or two random pepper pods on each scale. All the scales are connected to a computer, which takes each measurement, calculates which pep-

**CLIF GAINED
HIS EXPERIENCE IN
THE FOOD BUSINESS
BY WORKING IN
THE FAMILY
GROCERY STORE
THAT HIS
GRANDFATHER,
JOE BOLNER SR.,
STARTED IN 1909.**

some college credits before receiving draft letters. They were all talented bandmen, with Clif playing clarinet and saxophone, but none enrolled with hopes of joining the Fightin' Texas Aggie Band. When Clif and his buddies saw the band practice one day, however, they soon changed their minds. "We were so impressed that we decided right then to sign up," he remembered in an interview shortly before his passing.

When the war ended, Texas A&M declared a holiday, and the boys returned



pers most closely add up to 1.5 ounces, and feeds the right ones onto the takeaway belt and into a plastic bag. The worker then simply adds more peppers to the empty scales, and the process continues. Now, that's Aggie engineering at its finest.

A Chili Truck and a Dream

Clif graduated high school in May 1945, just three months before the United States would deploy two atomic bombs in Japan and bring World War II to a close. Those at home couldn't know that, though, so Clif and a few of his Central Catholic High School classmates went to Texas A&M for summer school thinking they would earn

home to San Antonio to celebrate. Looking for company, Fish Bolner called up an old friend in Rosalie Richter, whose immigrant family made a name for themselves in baking with their popular Richter's Butter-Krust sandwich bread. The two continued courting after Clif returned to campus, where he kept his grades high, served as an executive officer in the band and eventually walked the stage as a Distinguished Military Graduate. On weekends, he returned home to work long shifts at the meat market, building business relationships that later served him well.

Clif proposed to Rosalie during his junior year, and the two married after he

graduated in 1949. He went on to serve in the Army Air Corps, splitting his time between Kelly and Lackland air bases as a reserve officer and managing the meat market, of which he had inherited his share from Joe Jr. Keeping in tradition with his family, he and Rosalie soon had three children, putting some pressure on Clif to stake out a business of his own that could provide for his expanding family.

That business came in the form of Fiesta Products, a 6-month-old venture that consisted of four employees, a Chevrolet panel van and a production plant the size of a four-bedroom apartment. Negotiations moved swiftly once Clif and Rosalie caught wind of the operation being up for sale, and the Bolners soon found themselves in the spice business in July 1955. With just four women hand packing products, the couple only produced about 55 dozen products per day at first. The same women ultimately helped create the Bolner's debut product—a quick chili mix—by sharing and comparing their own menudo dish recipes.

Today, reigning supermarkets would make or break an upstart like Fiesta, but back then, the couple found swift success by pitching their products directly to local grocers whom Clif had previously built relationships with and meeting the unmet demand for high-quality spices and seasoning blends among South Texas' Mexican American and Hispanic populations. With his nose set firmly on the grindstone, Clif drove the company van to hand-deliver his products around town and throughout the region, traversing its streets and highways with a trunk full of chili mix and a vision for what his little company could be.

It Doesn't Get Fresher

As Mike and Jeff led me through their shipping department's endless maze of products, almost all packaged and ready for in-store displays, they dished out the kind of sociological research you can only get from the back end of a macroscale food



After graduating in 1949, Clif Bolner (top center) split his early adulthood between serving in the Army Air Corps and managing his family's grocery store and meat market.

business. "Most people think barbecue season starts on Memorial Day weekend, but it actually kicks off with Easter Sunday," Mike remarked, passing an industrial pallet of steak seasoning. Inside the warehouse, winter announces its arrival not with colder temperatures and Christmas cheer but with mounting stockpiles of corn husks destined to sell out quickly in the weeks leading up to New Year's Day.

Bolner's Fiesta Brand now sells more than 600 products with ingredients sourced from more than 60 countries. As Clif and Rosalie built Fiesta from the ground up, they consistently put their profits back into their church, local schools, the San Antonio community and Texas A&M students. As Clif once explained, "Without the local community's support, it is impossible for the business to thrive. If you support them, they will support you in turn."

The couple's contributions to Aggie-land alone include three scholarships for students in the Corps of Cadets, one for Mays Business School students, and four Endowed Opportunity Awards named after Mike and three of his siblings who graduated from Texas A&M: Cindy Bolner Meeh '78, Beverly Bolner '82 and Mary

Beth Bolner '88. Clif's love of Texas A&M has also been passed down to his grandchildren, with five graduating from his prized alma mater thus far: Jeff '04, Josh Meeh '07, Elizabeth Curtis '09, Caroline Bauer '13 and Christopher Bolner II '20.

Rosalie passed away in 2008 after battling Alzheimer's. Clif joined her in January 2023, having long since retired to watch Fiesta grow from afar. Mike has spent his own retirement taking up his father's philanthropic activities, serving on numerous community boards and establishing three scholarships for Aggies from the San Antonio area. "My dad always told me that if you give a scholarship, there's a good chance that student will give a scholarship to the next generation," he said.

One generation to the next—that's how the Bolners have done business from the start. When Joe Sr. was working long hours on the "Macaroni Line" to make a living, he was unknowingly making that living for the Bolners to come and the millions of customers they would serve. The Fiesta facility may have smelled and appeared the same as any other spice factory, but it was the living embodiment of a dream passed down through centuries.

The Bolner family still firmly holds the reins of the company today, with five of Clif's children and five grandchildren involved in every aspect of production, operations, sales and marketing. And in case you were wondering: Yes, Uncle Chris of Gourmet Steak Seasoning fame is real. He's stepped into Mike's role following his retirement, taking up his older brother's role handling sales and marketing.

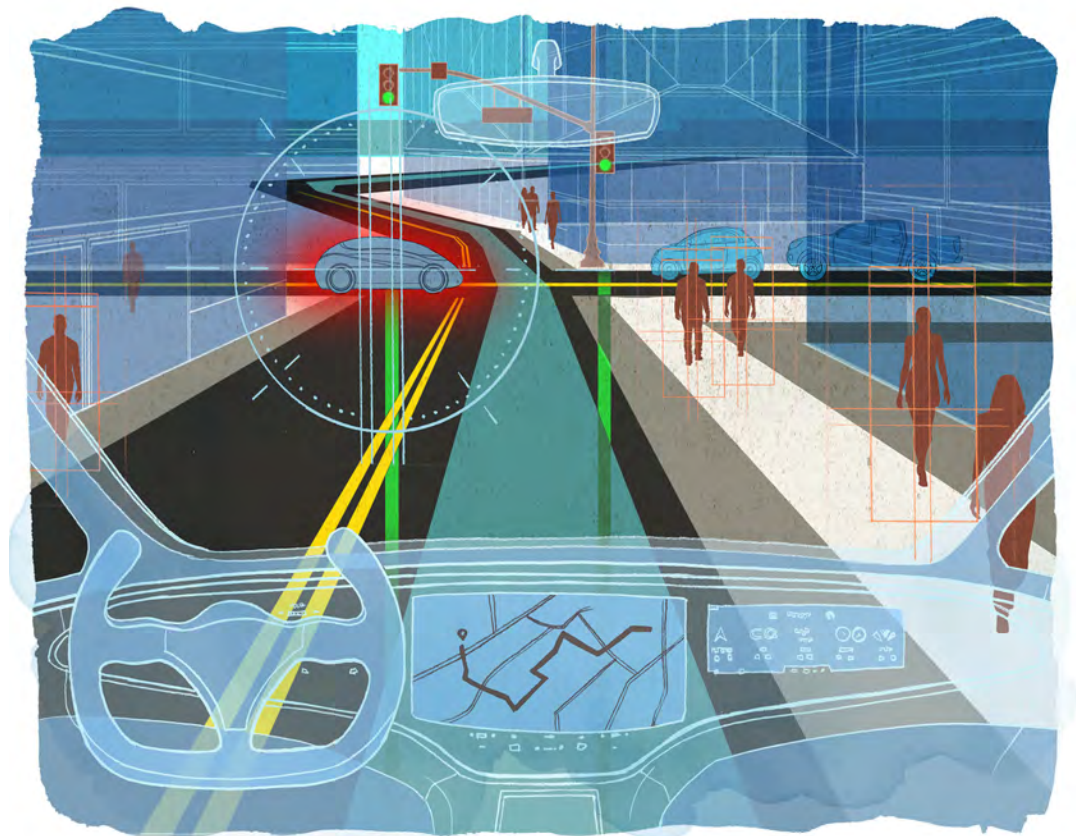
Moments before Mike and Jeff escorted me to the door and bid me farewell, Mike snatched a box of ground pepper bottles right off the production line. He then walked back over, presented the box with outstretched hands and flashed a grin that could knock you off your chair. "Here you go!" He yelled over the machines. "It doesn't get fresher than that!" ©

How Will Next-Gen Vehicles Drive Our Future?

Engineering researchers discuss prevailing technological and societal trends in electric, hybrid and driverless vehicles.

By BAILEY PAYNE '19

According to a study conducted by Harvard Health Watch, the average American spends 101 minutes driving every day. That translates to nearly a month out of every year behind the wheel. So, it makes sense that the ongoing evolution in next-generation and driverless vehicles holds the key to positively impacting not only our daily commute but also our lives. Three professors from the Texas A&M University College of Engineering provide insights on what to expect from the cars of the future.

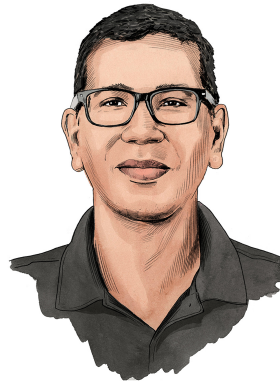


With support from chairs, professorships and faculty fellowships, Aggie engineering faculty conduct impactful research to address pressing issues and advance knowledge. Contact Jay Roberts '05 at jroberts@txamfoundation.com or 979.777.6777 to learn how you can support leading faculty.



Dr. Mehrdad "Mark" Ehsani

ROBERT M. KENNEDY '26 PROFESSOR I,
ELECTRICAL AND COMPUTER ENGINEERING



Dr. Srikanth Saripalli

J. MIKE WALKER '66 PROFESSOR,
MECHANICAL ENGINEERING



Dr. Dominique Lord

A.P. WILEY FACULTY FELLOW AND PROFESSOR,
CIVIL AND ENVIRONMENTAL ENGINEERING

A

By electrifying the road in unexpected ways.

When Dr. Mehrdad "Mark" Ehsani first heard about automakers investing in electric vehicle propulsion in the late 1980s, he was skeptical. "At first, I didn't think it would be a viable alternative or support for conventional propulsion," Ehsani said. "But the more I looked at it, the more it seemed promising, at least in certain areas." He and his team have since conducted landmark research to make electric and hybrid vehicle energy viable, and his research has been cited more than 24,000 times.

Though Ehsani and his team have helped advance today's electric and hybrid vehicles, his views on their implementation differ from most. For one, he is skeptical about their ability to single-handedly turn the tide on or significantly impact climate change. "If we could eliminate all carbon emissions from surface transportation in the U.S. tomorrow, its impact on global temperatures over 50 years would be roughly 1/40 of a degree Celsius," he stated.

Instead, he sees more potential in electric vehicles making for better budget cars in the developed world and revitalizing vehicle infrastructure in the developing world. For example, he pointed to quality electric cars potentially replacing the noisy, inefficient rickshaws that populate India's busy streets.

By introducing new driverless technology.

On Oct. 31, 2018, Chancellor John Sharp '72, Dr. M. Katherine Banks (then dean of the College of Engineering) and the mayor of Bryan, Texas, boarded a trolley that took them in a simple loop around Bryan's historic downtown. Dr. Srikanth Saripalli was behind the wheel, but the trolley drove itself—literally. It was one of two self-driving vehicles operating that day, making Bryan one of the first U.S. cities to have autonomous vehicles roving its streets. "We worked closely with the city to ask the question: Are these vehicles ready to be used in dense pedestrian areas?" Saripalli said.

As director of Texas A&M's Center for Autonomous Vehicles and Sensor Systems, Saripalli has worked at the forefront of driverless technology. His current research focuses on autonomous off-road vehicles for the military, which present unique obstacles since their sensors cannot rely on street markings for direction. "It's a totally different domain," Saripalli said. "The sensor may detect that the vehicle is on grass, but it can't tell if there's anything beneath it to bog it down."

As for driverless cars on the road, he remains hopeful for further implementation and believes deep learning technology can help autonomous vehicles safely share the road with their human counterparts.

By posing new safety challenges.

When car manufacturers first tested their high-end driverless vehicles in California, they prioritized safety and programmed the cars to follow state traffic laws to the T. They soon realized this was a mistake when the vehicles experienced a series of low-speed collisions with human drivers. This lured Dr. Dominique Lord, a traffic safety researcher, to investigate.

"We ran a study where students in a driving simulator followed a vehicle that mimicked the patterns of driverless cars," Lord said. Many of the student drivers nearly crashed into the virtual vehicles. "What happens is that automated vehicles are designed to follow traffic rules almost too closely." For example, a self-driving car stopping for three seconds at a stop-controlled intersection—as mandated by law—can addle human drivers' rhythm when they are used to other drivers doing a "rolling stop," causing a collision.

If autonomous vehicles eventually overcome obstacles like this, though, they have the power to make us rethink our traffic safety infrastructure. "Think about the rumble strips that shake your car and grab your attention when you veer off the road," Lord explained. "This does nothing for a driverless car, as it uses cameras and sensors to maintain lane control. So, ultimately we'll need to rethink how to keep driving safe for everyone."

“At that moment,
I realized I needed to step up and
become my own
inspiration.”

—Jada Greenidge '26

JON L. HAGLER '58 FOUNDATION EXCELLENCE AWARD
SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENT & ANIMAL SCIENCE MAJOR



As a high school freshman, Jada Greenidge '26 helplessly watched her beloved older brother suffer convulsions from a drug overdose. “At that moment, I realized I needed to step up and become my own inspiration,” the La Porte, Texas, resident remembered. “I would be the deciding factor in how my future turned out.”

Fortunately, Greenidge had a strong role model in her mother, who has juggled caring for her children, working at Memorial Hermann and attending college as a single parent. “She’s been in school since I was in elementary school, and she graduated with a psychology degree last December,” Greenidge said proudly. “She’s always told us, ‘I really want you to go to college and not worry about working, going to school and having kids, because it’s hard.’”

Her mother’s commitment to furthering her own education also introduced the Aggie to what college is like. “I grew up loving math, and I think that mostly comes from my mom going back to college and having to do her basics,” Greenidge said. “Because I was so young, she couldn’t leave me at home, so she took me to her college classes. She’d give me a few math problems on a piece of paper, and then we’d talk to the professor at the end of class.”

When it came time for her own college journey, Greenidge—who grew up caring for dogs, cats, lizards and frogs—knew she wanted to attend Texas A&M and become a veterinarian. “I remember visiting the campus when I was 12 and thinking, ‘That’s where I’m going to go,’” she recounted.

Now, thanks to the Jon L. Hagler '58 Foundation Excellence Award and other scholarships, her freshman-year expenses are covered, which allowed both mother and daughter to focus on their respective studies to fulfill their potential. “My parents always told me, ‘Hard work beats talent every day,’” said Greenidge, who finished high school ranked sixth out of a graduating class of 435. “My scholarships allow me to completely focus on my studies so I can make my dreams of owning my own veterinary practice and traveling the world to help large animals come true. I’m very grateful for all the support.”

By DORIAN MARTIN '06

Interested in leveraging this matching program to create an FEA? Contact:

AL PULLIAM '87
ASSISTANT VICE PRESIDENT FOR
DEVELOPMENT
TEXAS A&M FOUNDATION
800.392.3310 OR 979.209.0867
APULLIAM@TXAMFOUNDATION.COM

FOUNDATION EXCELLENCE AWARD MATCHING PROGRAM

WHO: The Texas A&M Foundation and Texas A&M University have partnered on a matching program to assist individuals, groups and corporations in establishing Foundation Excellence Award (FEA) scholarships.

WHAT: FEA scholarships provide critical financial support to promising students from underserved groups or economically and educationally disadvantaged backgrounds. Since the FEA program's establishment in 1999, generous supporters have given more than \$15 million in gifts and pledges, providing thousands of Aggies financial support as they earned their college diplomas. Approximately 500 Aggies currently receive an FEA scholarship annually.

WHEN: The matching program began in 2021 and aims to support 1,500 more Aggies with FEA scholarships by fall 2029.

WHERE: FEA scholarships can benefit Aggies who attend Texas A&M's College Station campus or Aggies by the Sea enrolled at Texas A&M University at Galveston.

WHY: Texas is the nation's fastest-growing state, and its citizenry is among the most diverse. According to the Texas Demographic Center, the state's population grew by 4 million residents between 2010 and 2020—and 95.3% of that growth was attributed to people of color (Hispanic, Black, Asian and indigenous communities).

The FEA program helps Texas A&M's classrooms reflect the state's rapidly changing demographics by giving the university a vital resource to recruit and retain promising students. Ultimately, FEA scholarships help Texas A&M fulfill its land-grant mission by educating a well-qualified, diverse workforce prepared to succeed and assume leadership roles in an increasingly complex world.

HOW: You can utilize university matching funds to create your own FEA through 2029. The matching program offers a non-endowed scholarship option that supports one Aggie for four years or an endowed option that will support Aggies forever. You can customize your FEA by designating specific recipient qualifications—such as major, college or hometown—and naming the scholarship in honor of a person, class or organization.

Non-Endowed Option:

Your Gift	Texas A&M President's Office Match	Total Gift Value	Annual Student Stipend (four years)
\$10,000 <i>Payable immediately or at \$2,500 per year for four years.</i>	\$10,000 <i>Payable at \$2,500 per year for four years.</i>	\$20,000	\$5,000

Endowed Option:

A \$50,000 endowed FEA will support Aggies in perpetuity. The current matching program supports donor gifts fulfilled within one year of the initial pledge. The university will match the endowment's earnings during its first four years, generating a larger annual stipend for recipients.

Jada Greenidge '26

Take advantage of a unique matching program to support deserving Aggies.

FEA

I Serve Because

The Class of 1980 E. King Gill Selfless Service Award's recipients share why they serve.

By TORIE NOELLSCH

Buzzing through Rudder Plaza, students are greeted by the bronze likeness of an Aggie legend: Dr. E. King Gill '24. While only a statue, Gill represents selfless service for all Aggies—an idea the Class of 1980 hoped to elevate when their statue, a gift to the university, was relocated from Kyle Field to its central location in Rudder Plaza in 2014.

By 2018, its members brought this idea to life by endowing the Class of 1980 E. King Gill Selfless Service Award, the university's first core value award. This prestigious accolade honors and celebrates graduating seniors who demonstrate exemplary service during their undergraduate career through a \$5,000 award.

"Texas A&M advertises selfless service as a key component in the university's DNA," said William "Bill" Jentsch Jr. '80, co-class agent. "We developed this award to showcase students living out this core value. By holding up these outstanding Aggies, we hope not only to inspire others to make similar impacts in their communities and beyond in the name of selfless service, but also to encourage former students to consider establishing awards for the other core values."

Do you know an Aggie who is selflessly serving? Let our editor know at dreader@txamfoundation.com, and they could be featured in a future issue.



I'm Thankful for My Blessings.

Lauren Breazeale '20

2020 RECIPIENT

As the award's inaugural recipient, Lauren Breazeale's journey with the special needs community began at age 16 through Mane-Gait, a nonprofit that uses equine therapy to help children and adults with disabilities.

Once in Aggieland, she volunteered with Aggie Emeralds after learning its priority was serving people with special needs. Breazeale '20 jumped into leadership roles and helped establish a connection with the Brazos Employment Enterprises (BEE) Community, a workplace where adults with special needs create artisan products. "I'd only worked with kids who had disabilities, so touring the BEE Community opened my eyes to the large population of underserved adults who have special needs," she recalled.

Today, as a second-year medical school student at Texas Tech University, Breazeale continues serving the population she has grown to love by volunteering with High Point Village, an organization similar to the BEE Community. "People with special needs are challenged by things I don't even have to think about, yet they are so optimistic. Serving them inspires and reminds me to be thankful for my blessings."

There's a Lot To Learn From Others.

Alexandra "Alex" Ramos '21 '25

2021 RECIPIENT

While her peers enjoyed junk food without worry, 14-year-old Alexandra "Alex" Ramos '21 focused on a well-balanced diet because she had just been diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes. Ramos armed herself with nutritional knowledge, improved her quality of life and began volunteering with the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation to help others.

Years later, she chose the university's Hunger Consortium as her service capstone project, which evolved into the bright beginnings of TAMU Urban Farm United (TUFU), a student-run farm that grows and supplies fresh produce to the Bryan-College Station community through on-campus food pantries. Ramos worked at TUFU and used her life experiences—including a study abroad trip to Rwanda—to educate shoppers on nutrition. "Rwandan citizens always ate fresh vegetables, and freshly butchered meat was an understatement," she laughed. "I realized how different our culture is and learned that Americans want to eat this way if it's available."

Now pursuing an engineering master's degree and medical doctorate through the university's EnMed program, Ramos enjoys rallying her fellow classmates to volunteer at a local community clinic where they engage with a variety of patients. "Engaging with people on different life paths allows me to learn from them and keeps me grounded when school is tough. It reminds me of what I'm working toward: helping people improve their health."



We're All in This Thing Together.

Chris Thompson '04

2022 RECIPIENT

Chris Thompson '04 practiced selfless service well before donning his Aggie ring. During his time as a Green Beret in the War on Terror, selfless service meant survival. "Everything is about the greater good on a special forces team," he said.

After seven deployments and 10 years serving his country, Thompson re-entered civilian life with two missions: completing the Texas A&M education that he started before 9/11 and helping veterans acclimate to their new lives through Team Red, White and Blue, a national nonprofit that connects former servicemembers to their local community through physical and social activities.

"Social connection is important for veterans, including myself, who wonder if they even 'fit in' anymore," he shared. "Physical activity also relieves stress, anxiety and depression as veterans and their families navigate a tough transition." Seeing the organization's value, Thompson was instrumental in building its Bryan-College Station chapter.

Today, he plays a vital role in supporting veterans through organizations like Veterans Exploring Treatment Solutions, which assists those suffering from conditions like PTSD and traumatic brain injury, a task he considers challenging yet rewarding. "My parents taught me that serving others is not easy or convenient; it's the opposite. Seeing the need and helping those who are struggling is the right thing to do, and it can create a lasting ripple effect."



A Walk to Remember

Elephant Walk, one of Texas A&M University's oldest traditions, has inspired seniors to reflect on their time in Aggieland for nearly a century.

1

As with most beloved Aggie traditions, it began with a few ordinary cadets during Texas A&M University's halcyon days. In 1922, the Aggie football team had dropped its two opening games against Howard Payne and Tulsa, and the consensus around campus was that Coach Dana X. Bible's squad was cursed.

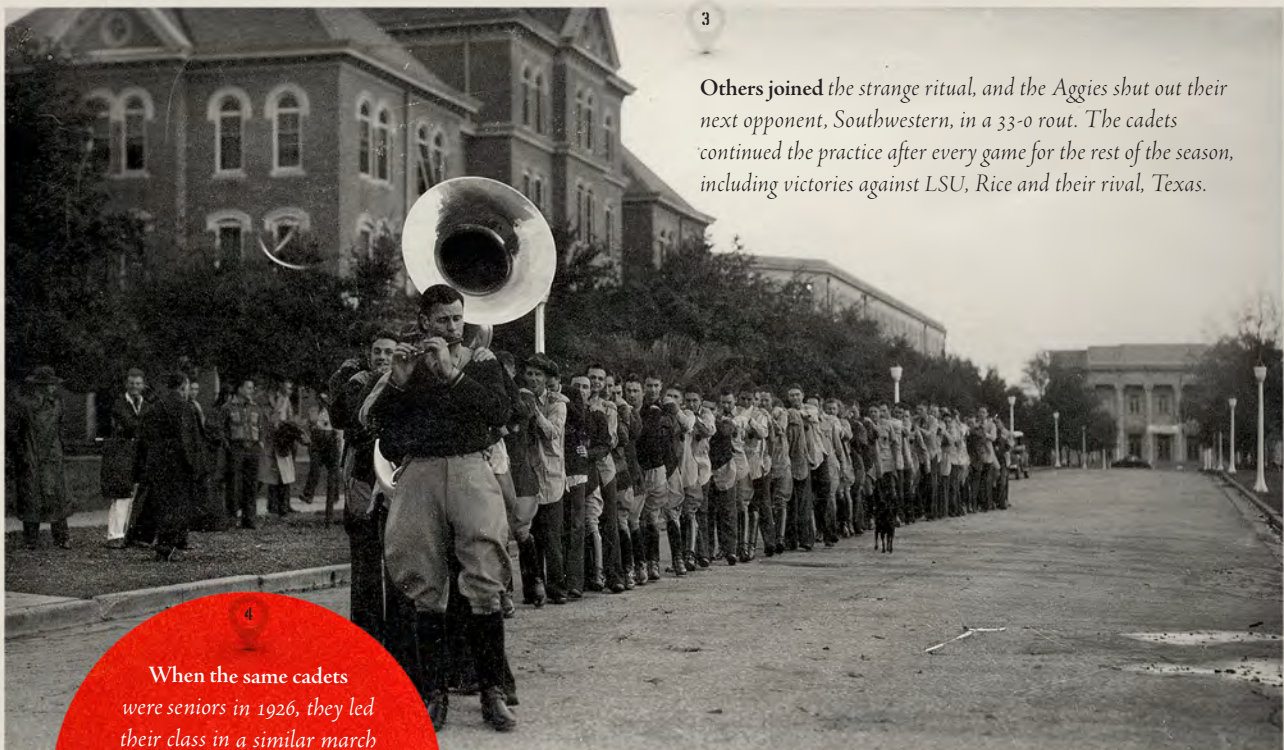
2

To break the curse, two Fightin' Texas Aggie Band members, Oluf "Red" Carlson '26 and Julius "Sarge" Dorsey '26, marched around Kyle Field, playing a funeral march on piccolo and brass horn along the way.



3

Others joined the strange ritual, and the Aggies shut out their next opponent, Southwestern, in a 33-0 rout. The cadets continued the practice after every game for the rest of the season, including victories against LSU, Rice and their rival, Texas.



4

When the same cadets were seniors in 1926, they led their class in a similar march around campus to reflect on their waning time in Aggieland—this time in a single file, with each cadet placing his hand on the shoulder in front of him.

TimeCapsule

5

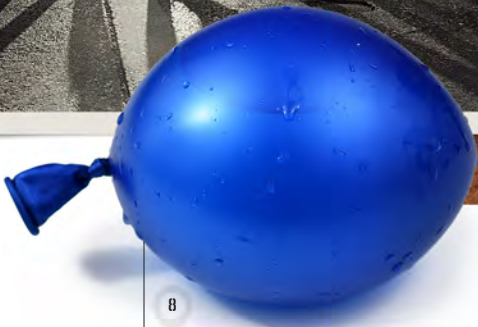
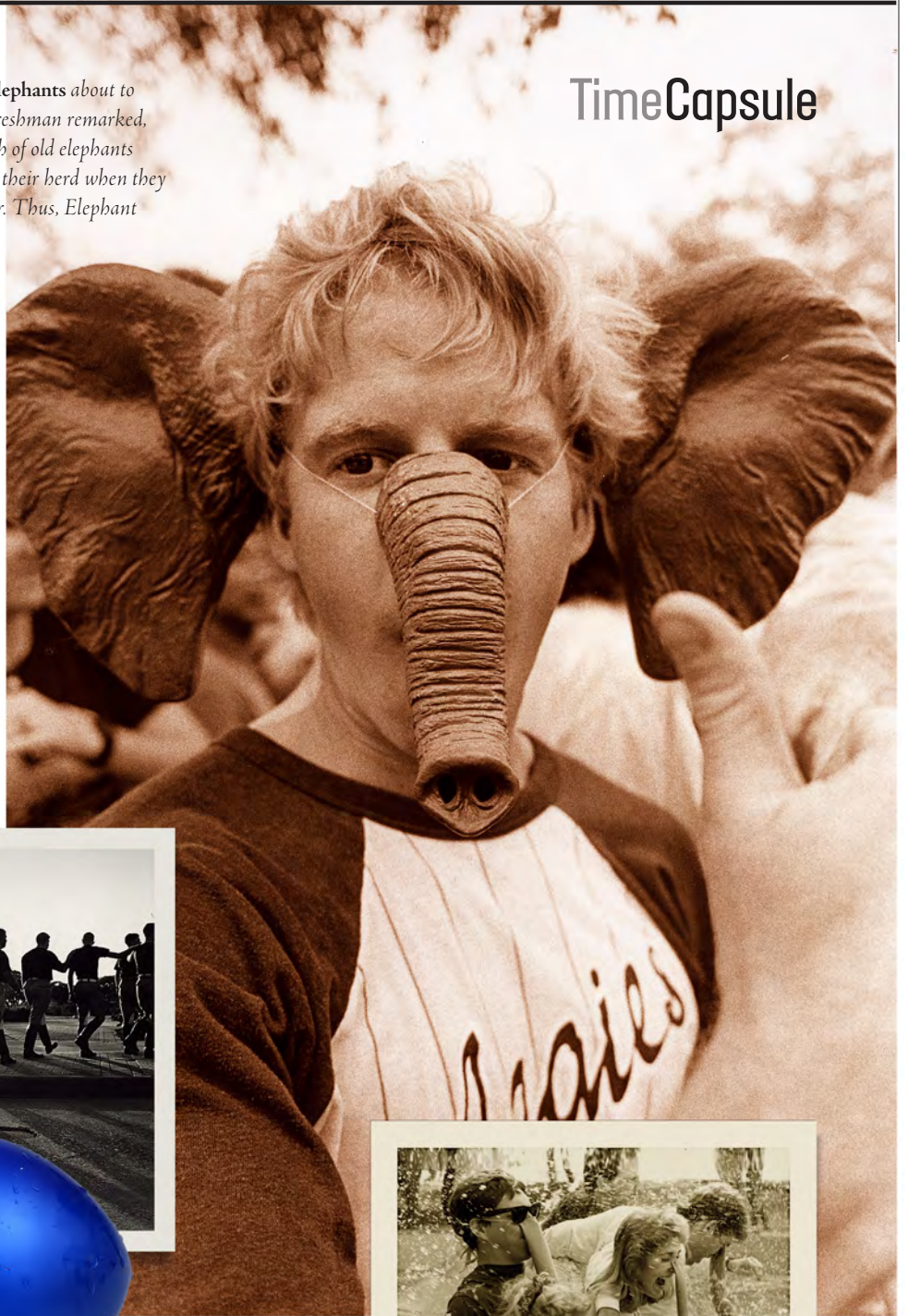
"They looked like elephants about to die," an onlooking freshman remarked, referencing the myth of old elephants walking away from their herd when they feel their end is near. Thus, Elephant Walk was born.

6

Since it had happened now at least twice on campus, Elephant Walk was inevitably christened an Aggie tradition. In time, Class Councils sponsored and organized the walk, routinely holding it before the season's last home football game.

7

Over decades, the tradition evolved and added new elements, including expanding its route to stop at various campus landmarks, staging yell practices and presenting the senior class gift to future generations of Aggies.



8

During the '80s and '90s, an ongoing Cold War of sorts between the junior and senior classes regularly came to a head during Elephant Walk, with juniors sabotaging the celebration for their upperclassmen peers. These attempts at obstruction involved throwing water balloons, baby powder and shaving cream at marching seniors.

9

After some peace talks, Class Councils established Junior E-Walk in 1992, giving juniors an alternative celebration that symbolized their imminent rise to campus leadership. Their E-Walk started minutes after Elephant Walk began, marching in the opposite direction of seniors, until the spinoff tradition was retired in 2019.



10

It's been a century since those two cadets set out on their funeral march, and the Elephant Walk tradition lives on. The festivities are not as wild as they once were, but seniors still march, one after another, year after year, across the place they've called home with the people they've called friends and fellow Aggies.

By CRYSTAL HOUSTON

The Future Is Maroon

An innovative new program in Mays Business School preps students for careers in the tech industry.

Remember when banking involved visiting a branch location, ridesharing meant hailing a taxi, and entertainment companies made movies, not content platforms? Today, the customer experience has steadily shifted to the digital space, and as the world becomes more convenient for consumers, industry leaders face new challenges and opportunities. Thanks to a new program at Mays Business School, Aggies will soon be ready to meet them.

Slated to launch in fall 2023, Aggies in Tech provides a specialized curriculum for students who have their sights set on leadership positions with firms like Amazon, Apple and Google. “The vision is to create opportunities for our students to obtain highly paid jobs with influential tech firms, primarily on the West Coast, and to replicate the success we’ve had in New York with Aggies on Wall Street,” explained Sorin Sorescu, professor of finance and director of the Adam C. Sinn ’00 Center for Investment Management.

Along with coursework created with input from industry leaders, Aggies in Tech students will gain experience in the industry through networking events, internships and Tech Treks—trips to Seattle and Silicon Valley to meet with Aggies in the tech field as well as leaders of targeted firms for potential in-

ternships and careers. Importantly, the Aggies in Tech program will be open to students from across the university.

“Aggies are currently underrepresented in the tech industry,” said David Alexander ’98, chief marketing officer at Everbridge, a critical event management company based in Burlington, Massachusetts. Alexander has spent his career in tech previously with Microsoft, SAP and F5 and is using his insights to teach a course for the Aggies in Tech program. “We’ll develop core competencies that will differentiate Aggies from others by focusing on practical skills, not just theory,” he said, noting that it’s not about just training students to code but rather exposing them to the bigger picture of how to make a tech company successful.

A key deliverable of Aggies in Tech is an app each student will create from initial concept to final execution. The goal is to demonstrate technical skills and a vision for improving consumers’ lives through technology. “When these students interview for jobs, they’ll have an exciting story to tell that sets them apart,” predicted Sorescu.

Many Aggies have the skills and passion needed to break into the tech space, but Texas A&M has not been a target school for most of these companies. Similarly, top

tech firms have not historically recruited heavily in Texas. “There’s no shortage of talented, intelligent students at Texas A&M,” explained Preston Bloskas ’15, an executive at Checkout.com. All that’s missing is the pipeline to opportunities in this field. “As Texas A&M students get recruited to these places, their value will become apparent, and they will multiply.”

Aggie Venture Fund and Aggies in Tech backer Evan Loomis ’03, founder of ICON Build, and his wife, Brandi ’05, are thinking bigger. “If we want to get Aggies jobs at Google, SpaceX and LinkedIn, that’s actually a very easy proposition, but it’s not what I’m most interested in,” he said. Instead, Loomis envisions Aggies creating the future of business with technology. “I want the values of Texas A&M to shape the future world that we live in. Aggies can be leaders in entrepreneurship and innovation. This is just the first strike of the match that will set something bigger ablaze.” ©

The Aggies in Tech program needs endowed excellence funds to support travel, events, speakers and staff. Additionally, the program seeks Aggies in the tech industry willing to lend their expertise. To learn more, contact:

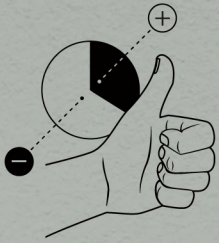
MARK TOLER ’19
DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT
TEXAS A&M FOUNDATION
800.392.3310 OR 979.862.4531
MTOLER@TXAMFOUNDATION.COM

What's Next

“Aggies are extraordinary. They have an impeccable work ethic, and we teach a rigorous curriculum. They have all the capacity to excel in the tech field.”

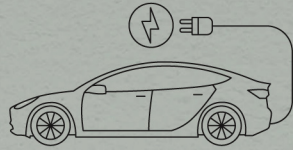
—SORIN SORESCU
PROFESSOR OF FINANCE AND
DIRECTOR OF THE ADAM C.
SINN ’00 CENTER FOR
INVESTMENT MANAGEMENT





34%

A small percentage of Americans have favorable views of "Big Tech." With more Aggies in tech roles, Mays hopes to improve this statistic.



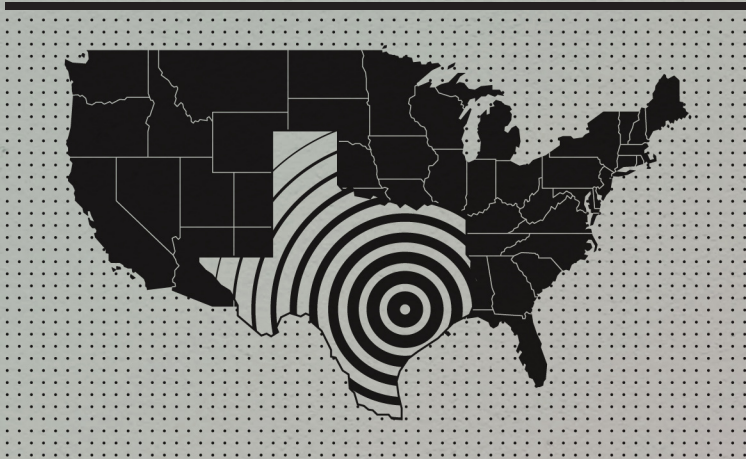
10

Top 10 U.S. tech firms (by revenue for 2022): Apple, Alphabet, Microsoft, Meta, Dell Technologies, Intel, IBM, HP, Tesla and Cisco Systems.



20

Mays Business School welcomed 20 students to the first Aggies in Tech cohort, with plans for future expansion.



872 students, or 18% of Mays' undergraduate population, attended the first Tech Talks event in 2021. Organized by Preston Bloskas '15, the event featured a panel discussion with other Aggies from Universal Entertainment, Disney, Facebook, Stripe and Google.



"Mays students are often wildly underestimated, but Aggies can accomplish anything. Former students have the ability and the duty to educate students on career opportunities in tech and build a bridge of opportunity."
—PRESTON BLOSKAS '15
EXECUTIVE AT CHECKOUT.COM

ATX Austin is home to the secondary offices of many of the world's largest tech companies, including Google, Apple, Oracle, Amazon, Meta and SpaceX, making Texas A&M a potential recruiting utopia.

The average starting salary range for business roles in tech is:

\$130K

180K



HOME IS WHERE THE AGGIES ARE

How a chance encounter with an incoming student helped me find my home in Aggieland.

From the warmth of Starbucks, I took a sip of coffee and watched a storm of flashing blue and red lights engulf two cars with fresh dents. As police and bystanders responded to the accident, I caught myself staring and attempted to return my focus to my homework.

Frazzled and concerned, a girl carrying a laptop walked from the crowd outside into the coffee shop and sat at a table next to me. Noticing her “Class of 2025” T-shirt, I realized she was also a student and leaned over to offer my help. “We’re fine outside,” Kelbi said as she introduced herself. “But it’s my New Student Conference, and I’m supposed to register for classes in 15 minutes.”

My heart stung as I relived the intimidation and confusion of start-

ing college. “I’m a student here—I can help you register,” I offered. Instantly, her demeanor softened, and she opened her laptop with relief. We searched for classes, rearranged her schedule, and laughed together as we talked about her apprehensions and goals for college.

Thirty minutes later, Kelbi walked away registered for her first semester at Texas A&M University, and I walked away with one of the most treasured pieces of my Aggie story. Though I was the one who helped Kelbi, our brief interaction gave me more than I could ever give her.

I started college at the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, and as my abnormal freshman year ended, I still struggled to find my place in Aggieland. My small moment with Kelbi changed that. For nearly a

year, I had desperately hoped that, just like in the movies, a football game or a student organization would help me feel like I belonged. But our chance encounter taught me that I didn’t need any of these experiences to feel at home at Texas A&M.

That day, I discovered the truth about what makes Aggieland feel like home: It’s the shared connec-

tion that happens when an Aggie supports another Aggie. After all, being a Texas A&M student is not just about calling Aggieland home; it’s about making it a home for others. ©

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ryan Williamson '24 is a junior business honors major from El Campo, Texas. In his free time, you can find him frequenting College Station’s coffee shops or spending way too much money on his vinyl record collection, which ranges from Taylor Swift to Prince and anywhere in between. Though his career goals are constantly changing, he’s certain he will one day travel the world and backpack across Europe.

CHARLIE



EA



Staff Sgt. Al Mampre served as a medic with Easy Company in the Army's elite paratrooper unit, the 101st Airborne Division, during World War II. Its members participated in the historic 1944 D-Day victory.



By JEANNIE RALSTON

The “Band of Brothers” Ripple Effect

Al Mampre's legacy in World War II's legendary Easy Company is being memorialized at Texas A&M University through a veterans scholarship.

Al Mampre would have turned 100 last year. But even though the medic from World War II's famed Easy Company, known as the “Band of Brothers” in book and film, died four years ago, his legacy lives on.

Sam and Barney Gershen '69, who befriended Mampre in his later years and were impressed by his bravery, work ethic and kindness, created a substantial scholarship endowment at Texas A&M University in the late infantryman's name. “He was such an impressive role model in the way he led his life,” said Barney, “and we want to capture and commemorate that.”

Originally from Oak Park, Illinois, Mampre immediately enlisted in the Army's elite paratrooper unit, the 101st Airborne Division, when World War II erupted. He was one of about 1,800 men who completed the intense training, out of 5,300 who started.

“He wanted to be the best of the best,” said one of his three daughters, Virginia Mampre. A medic who rose to the rank of staff sergeant, Mampre never carried a gun during the war so that he could take two medic kits instead of one. He and his fellow medic referred to themselves as the “Band-Aid Brothers.”

Mampre's dedication to the mission and the men in his unit endured throughout the war's hardships. He was wounded twice amid Operation Market Garden in Hol-

land, and he later fought at the Battle of the Bulge and almost froze to death in Bastogne, Belgium. During the intense battle, he jumped into a foxhole one night to escape enemy fire and thought his partner in the pit was sleeping. The next morning, he was startled to see the man was actually a frozen enemy soldier.

After the war, Mampre pursued studies in psychology and anthropology, doing his graduate work at the University of Chicago. In addition to working full time at International Harvester, he also ran a private family psychology practice. Even before author Stephen Ambrose popularized Easy Company in his “Band of Brothers” book—and before Tom Hanks and Steven Spielberg cranked up its fame with the HBO miniseries—Mampre and other veterans gathered regularly. “All of these guys were very humble. It was never about them,” Virginia said. “It was always about recognizing those who didn't make it home.”

Mampre became friends with the Gershens through Virginia, who served with Barney on the board of Crimestoppers, a nationwide crime-solving and prevention network. The Gershens have previously given a scholarship for business honors students in Mays Business School and a Corps of Cadets 21st Century Scholarship. Their scholarship in Mampre's honor through the Don

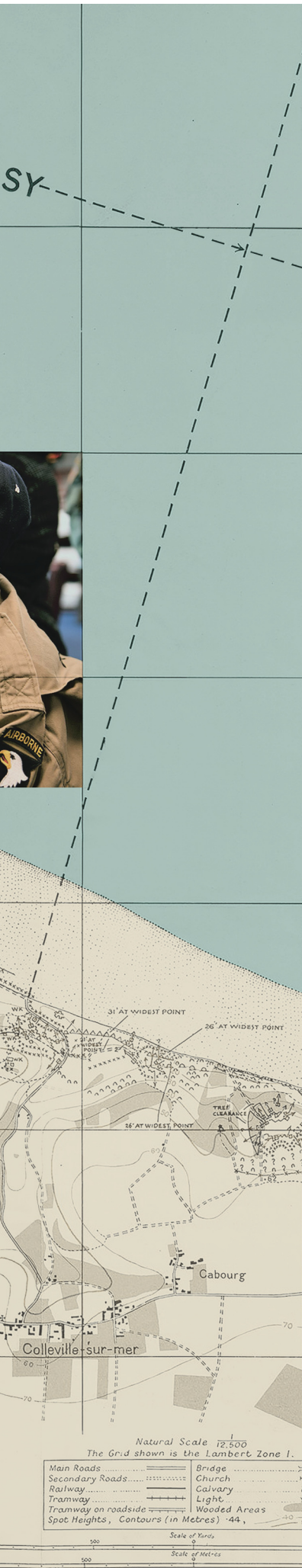
& Ellie Knauss Veteran Resource & Support Center reflects a value of service and will aid student veterans pursuing careers in the medical field. “We'd like recipients to know Al's history and how he served,” said Barney, a former Army officer who went on to build the ninth-largest private janitorial service provider in the U.S. The Gershens are also supporters of the Holocaust Museum of Houston, the YMCA, the Harris County Sheriff's Office Foundation, the Houston Ballet and Crimestoppers.

The couple hopes the scholarship and Mampre's legacy inspire others to join them in honoring his life while helping veterans at Texas A&M. “It's inspirational and meaningful that the scholarship will support veterans,” Virginia concluded. “It will give them a new lease on life and a way to take their skills to the next level. It's a ripple effect, and my father would have loved it.” ©

TO SUPPORT STUDENT VETERANS AT TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY, CONTACT:

DAVID BACOT '90
SENIOR DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT
TEXAS A&M FOUNDATION
800.392.3310 OR 979.473.9065
DBACOT@TXAMFOUNDATION.COM

Help honor Mampre's legacy by giving to the Sgt. “Al” Mampre Memorial Veteran Scholarship online at give.am/AlMampre.





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Next Stop: Aggieland!

In 1883, the middle-of-nowhere Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas got a new addition: a train depot. Though the Houston & Texas Central Railroad made routine stops since the college opened, the new depot added a formal gateway to campus. In 1900, a larger depot replaced the original and, along with a station for the International & Great Northern Railroad, welcomed endless Aggies on to greatness.

In 1938, the depot witnessed the area become an incorporated city that drew its name from the familiar conductor call, “All out for the college—College Station!” The station served visitors until 1959, when most students no longer arrived by train, and the last depot was razed in 1966.

But the building lives on in Aggie legacies like that of Raymond Crosby Armstrong, Class of 1925. While in college, Armstrong met his wife at the sta-

tion as she was boarding a train, and nearly 100 years later, that encounter has produced four generations of Aggies in the family. “My grandfather could never have known that one day, his great-granddaughter Alyse Armstrong ’20 would walk the same halls at the university he loved so much,” said his grandson John V. Armstrong. “And it all started at the station.”



The College Station Depot, circa 1914-16