

VOL. 51 ★ NO. 1

SAWDUST

SFA ALUMNI ASSOCIATION ★ STEPHEN F. AUSTIN STATE UNIVERSITY ★ THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS SYSTEM



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President's Letter



Dear Lumberjack Family,

I am filled with a profound sense of gratitude and optimism. Over the past many months — during our centennial year —

serving as your interim president has been both an honor and a unique journey, one marked by challenges, achievements and an unwavering commitment to excellence and innovation.

I have had the privilege of interacting more closely with our students, learning about their experiences, aspirations and challenges. These conversations have been eye-opening and inspiring, reinforcing my belief in the transformative power of higher education and the incredible potential of our Lumberjacks.

In my position, my interactions with students were more limited and infrequent. However, as interim president, I have gained a deeper understanding of the backgrounds, talents and perspectives our students bring to SFA. Their creativity and commitment are remarkable, and I am proud to be part of a university that fosters such exceptional individuals.

As we move forward, I am more committed than ever to ensuring that SFA remains a welcoming and supportive environment where all students can thrive. We will continue to invest in programs and resources that enhance the academic experience, promote personal growth and prepare our students for success in their chosen fields. We will also strive to create more opportunities for meaningful engagement between students, faculty, staff and administration, fostering a sense of belonging and shared purpose.

When I stepped into this role, it was amidst a time of transition for SFA. We embarked on a journey together, navigating the complexities of our integration into The University of Texas System — a historic milestone that promises to bolster our resources, enhance our programs and solidify our standing as a leading institution of higher education in Texas and beyond.

Our progress has been remarkable. Despite the inherent challenges of such a significant transition, our university community has shown adaptability and a collective determination to not only maintain but elevate our standards of excellence. This has been evident in several key areas:

1. Academic Achievement and Innovation: Our faculty has continued to excel, garnering accolades and fostering an environment of academic rigor and innovation. Our students' achievements continue to prove the quality of education SFA provides.

- 2. Enrollment and Retention:** In the face of national trends of declining college enrollment, SFA has remained resilient. Our efforts to enhance student life, coupled with strategic initiatives aimed at increasing enrollment and retention, have begun to yield positive results. This is a critical area of focus as we look to the future, and one that we will continue to prioritize.
- 3. Community Engagement and Expansion:** Our commitment to serving the broader Nacogdoches community and beyond has never been stronger. Through expanded outreach programs, partnerships and service initiatives, we continue to strengthen our bonds with the community, enriching both our university and the lives of those we touch.
- 4. Financial Stability and Growth:** The transition into the UT System opens new avenues for financial growth and stability. Access to the Permanent University Fund and other resources are enabling us to further invest in our faculty and staff, facilities, and student programs, improving the outlook of SFA for generations to come.

In the coming months, we will welcome Dr. Neal Weaver as the new permanent president of SFA. Dr. Weaver brings a wealth of experience and a proven track record of leadership in higher education. Under his guidance, and with the continued support and dedication of our faculty, staff, students, alumni and friends, I am confident SFA will expand its reach and force for good.

This transition is the beginning of a new era of leadership and opportunity. Our goals remain steadfast — to provide an unmatched educational experience, foster a vibrant community of scholarship and service, and uphold our legacy of excellence.

As I transition from my role as interim president, I express my deepest gratitude to each of you for your support, hard work and dedication to SFA. It has been a privilege for me to serve as president, and for Chris to support me as the university's inaugural First Gentleman, as we contributed to the legacy of our beloved university. I look forward to continuing to support SFA and to witnessing the incredible achievements I know lie ahead for our university.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve.

Axe 'em, Jacks!

Gina Smith Oglesbee

Gina Oglesbee '11
Interim President
Stephen F. Austin State University



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Stephen F. Austin State University is a comprehensive institution in The University of Texas System dedicated to excellence in teaching, research, scholarship, creative work and service. Through the personal attention of our faculty and staff, we engage our students in a learner-centered environment and offer opportunities to prepare for the challenges of living in the global community.



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Additions to the 1959 Griffith Fine Arts Building doubled its size and included multiple new performance venues and related spaces to accommodate growth in the Micky Elliott College of Fine Arts' academic programs. Photo by Michael Tubbs '05, '10 & '11 and artwork by Meagan Rice '12

Sawdust

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Read past issues, watch video extras and submit class notes at sfasu.edu/sawdust.

Sawdust is published twice a year by SFA and the university's Alumni Association. Alumni and friends of the university receive both issues free of charge.

News Briefs

University announces microcredential program for faculty, staff, students and alumni

A new partnership with Coursera, a global online learning platform, will give SFA students, employees and alumni the opportunity to earn more than 40 professional certifications and develop a competitive edge in their current and future careers.

Made possible by SFA's affiliation with The University of Texas System, the partnership gives Lumberjacks free access to Career Academy, which features more than 300 short courses taught by leading companies, including Google, IBM and Meta.

"This is an exciting opportunity for all members of the Lumberjack family to continue to sharpen their skills to meet the demands of regional and national economies," said Megan Weatherly, executive director of the Lumberjack Learning Commons at SFA. "Pairing a college degree with a certificate from one of these leading corporations will signal to others that Lumberjacks are both broadly educated and specifically skilled."

Alumni can contact the Alumni Association for more information.

SFA joins the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate to elevate doctoral education program



The Doctor of Education in educational leadership program offered through SFA's James I. Perkins College of Education has joined the Carnegie Project on the

Education Doctorate, a consortium of over 125 colleges and schools of education that have committed to critically examine the doctoral degree in education.

"Through collaborative efforts, CPED member institutions work together to share best practices, engage in research and advocate for the transformation of doctoral education in the field of education," said Dr. Summer Pannell, associate professor and coordinator for SFA's educational leadership program. "This will help us produce graduates who are well-prepared to address complex educational challenges and contribute to positive change in educational organizations and systems."

Lumberjack Nursing Guarantee offers promise of admission to SFA's DeWitt School of Nursing

Incoming first-year college students who want to pursue a Bachelor of Science in Nursing will now find the admission process easier at SFA with the Lumberjack Nursing Guarantee.

Prospective students who are interested in nursing can earn guaranteed admission to the DeWitt School of Nursing based on their entry into SFA as a first-year student with excellent academic performance. These students will still be required to submit an

application for admission to the nursing school, but their acceptance will be assured as long as they meet certain criteria.

"We chose to create the Lumberjack Nursing Guarantee because we want to support and motivate students who come to SFA wanting to pursue nursing as a degree," said Dr. Katy Trotty, assistant professor of nursing and BSN program coordinator. "We believe in investing in students with exceptional academic performance, and we love the idea of taking out the uncertainty of being accepted into the program."

New dean of research and graduate studies named



SFA has named Dr. Forrest Lane, an educator with nearly 20 years in a variety of academic and administrative positions within higher education, dean of the Office of Research and Graduate Studies.

"I am genuinely excited about joining the SFA community," Lane said. "SFA has been a significant resource to our state and region for 100 years. Since its founding as a normal college in 1923, it has become an institution with a deep

legacy and rich tradition of supporting Texas. It is a privilege to be selected as dean of research and graduate studies, and it's important to me that I come into this role willing to listen and represent the needs of our students, faculty, staff and community partners. I look forward to supporting SFA's continued success."

Lane comes to SFA from Sam Houston State University, where he served as a professor in the Department of Educational Leadership as well as associate dean of graduate studies and research in the College of Education. At SHSU, he was an education faculty member since 2015 and held various administrative roles there since 2017, including program coordinator, assistant department chair and full-time chair.

He received a Bachelor of Science in political science from Texas A&M University in 2001, a Master of Education in higher education from University of North Texas in 2007 and a Doctor of Philosophy in educational research from UNT in 2011.

Founder of Sprinkles Cupcakes and bestselling author serves as speaker for SFA's Nelson Rusche Distinguished Lecture Series

Candace Nelson is a serial entrepreneur, "Shark Tank" guest shark, New York Times and Wall Street Journal bestselling author, and an expert in turning one's passion into a profitable business.

She also was the guest speaker for the fourth installment of SFA's Nelson Rusche Distinguished Lecture Series held March 26 in the Baker Pattillo Student Center Grand Ballroom on campus.

"The Nelson Rusche Distinguished Lecture Series was established

News Briefs



to inspire our students to pursue their dreams by bringing highly accomplished business leaders to campus to engage in discussion as students plan their futures,” said Dr. Tim Bisping, dean of the Nelson Rusche College of Business. “Candace Nelson’s story is one of perseverance applied to passion resulting in incredible success. We were so honored to have her here to speak with our students, sharing with them

her invaluable insights and expertise.”

Her book “Sweet Success: A Simple Recipe for Turning Your Passion Into Profit” published by HarperCollins Leadership in November 2022 hit No. 4 on the Wall Street Journal bestseller list, and her debut book “The Sprinkles Baking Book: 100 Secret Recipes from Candace’s Kitchen” is a New York Times bestseller.

SFA dedicates new Centennial Ring Plaza during university’s Centennial Celebration



Lumberjacks filled the corner of Alumni and Vista drives in September as employees and administrators dedicated the new Centennial Ring Plaza and its towering ring statue, adding another landmark to the picturesque campus.

Located across from the Austin Building, the plaza is a bricked area featuring a 9-foot-tall statue of the revered SFA ring. The ring is a representation of one of the crowning achievements students will experience during the graduation process and serves as a celebration of their educational journey at SFA.

“The SFA ring serves as a symbol to the world that you are a proud SFA alumnus,” Erika Tolar ’02, president of the SFA Alumni Association, said during the dedication ceremony. “The ring sends a message to all who visit this beautiful campus how serious we are about student success while focusing on our Lumberjack legacy.”

Entrepreneurship program, center named a top emerging entrepreneurship program in country

SFA’s entrepreneurship academic program and Arnold Center for Entrepreneurship in the Rusche College of Business were collectively named one of the top three emerging entrepreneurship programs in the nation by the United States Association for Small Business and Entrepreneurship.

This award recognizes colleges and universities for their efforts developing nascent entrepreneurship programs that demonstrate outstanding progress toward becoming comprehensive, bold and innovative educational programs with early records of student impact.

“We introduced the entrepreneurship major in fall 2020 and opened the center in 2023, and it is amazing to see what ACE has accomplished in just a short amount of time and the impact that it is having not only for SFA students but also for the community,” said Matthew Smilor, ACE director. “This award validates a lot of work Rusche College of Business faculty, staff and students, as well as local community members, have done to build this hub for entrepreneurs in East Texas.”

Chemistry faculty member receives patent for new type of antibiotic medication for resistant bacteria treatment



Dr. Matibur Zamadar, SFA associate professor of chemistry and biochemistry, received a patent from the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office for his second invention of a drug to treat bacteria that is resistant to most existing antibiotics that kills millions of people around the world with an invasive infection.

Zamadar created a drug to reduce antimicrobial resistance, which occurs

when medication loses its ability to kill bacteria. This drug is effective at a relatively low single dose or reduced repeat doses. His invention treats cancer as well as bacterial infection complications of cancer treatment, especially when cancer cells are surgically removed.

“Pathogenic bacteria often develop resistance against conventional antibacterial agents, which lose efficacy over time,” Zamadar said. “By developing adaptive bacterial resistance, many bacteria become resistant to specific antibacterial structures. As bacteria become more resistant to antibacterial medications, dosages are increased until the highest doses become ineffective against the most resistant bacteria.” ★

'Its Functionality Equals Its Beauty'

Additions to the 1959 Griffith Fine Arts Building doubled its size and included multiple new performance venues and related spaces to accommodate growth in the Micky Elliott College of Fine Arts' academic programs. The exterior of the building features dynamic new facade panels, or "Dragon Scales," which represent movement, rhythm and drama directly relating to the programs within the college. The facade colors change from purple to orange to copper as you move around the building and with the time of day. The innovative design also added impressive entrances and a 3,000-square-foot, two-story lobby that can accommodate a wide variety of campus functions and an art gallery space to display student work and traveling exhibitions. Photo by Michael Tubbs '05, '10 & '11

ED AND GWEN COLE
CONCERT HALL

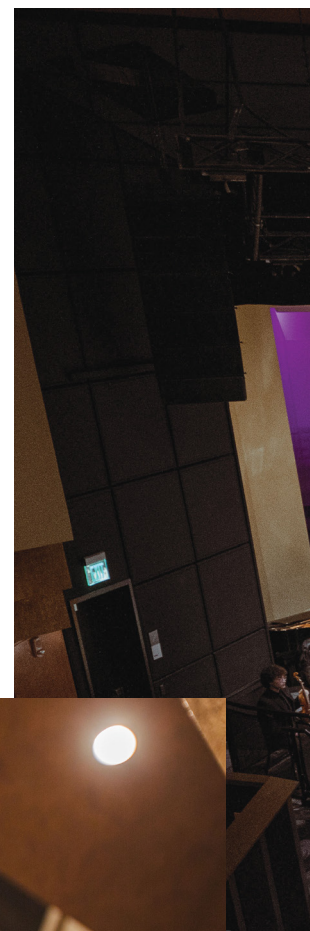


Months after reopening, Griffith Fine Arts Building's architectural innovation remains a reflection of programs' excellence

STORY BY ROBBIE GOODRICH '82

THROUGHOUT ITS HISTORY, SFA has embraced all arts disciplines as a way to enhance the educational experience of the university community and expand appreciation for art, music, theatre and dance for all of Nacogdoches.

In the months since last fall's well-attended grand reopening of the newly expanded and renovated Griffith Fine Arts Building, faculty, students and staff who now call the building a second home continue to admire its beauty and appreciate its functionality. ➔



TOP: The stone reliefs by German-American sculptor Anton Grauel at the former entrance of the Griffith Fine Arts Building were preserved and incorporated into the interior of the newly renovated building.

ABOVE: The third-floor lobby, known as “The Treehouse,” is a gathering place for students to study, collaborate and create.

RIGHT: A refresh of Turner Auditorium included the addition of a new lighting and sound booth, parterres on either side of the auditorium allowing accessibility to the stage, new seating and flooring, and modern house lighting.

Photos by Michael Tubbs '05, '10 & '11



What was three and a half years of work is now a structural beauty with thriving programs. Students are reaping the benefits of specially designed laboratories, classrooms, theatres and other spaces with state-of-the-art technologies designed to put fine arts graduates at the top of their game in future job markets.

It's also a building that looks to the future while respecting the past. Beautifully carved stone reliefs on the original structure's exterior, along with a carefully laid original Stephen F. Austin State College seal in the terrazzo floor of the former entrance foyer, are now architectural highlights of an impressive second-floor lobby.

“There is a natural degree of anxiety that builds up as you wait for a building to be constructed,” said Dr. Gary Wurtz, dean of the Micky Elliott College of Fine Arts, which is housed in the Griffith Fine Arts Building.

“It's impossible to truly know how a building will look and function by looking at drawings. But now that we've lived here for over six months, we're realizing that this new facility is better than we had hoped it would be and that its functionality equals its beauty.”

The building is home to the School of Theatre and Dance, and its director, Cleo House-Keller, believes the building serves as another recruiting tool with its spaces that are “aspirational and inspirational regardless of what high school or junior college a student might come to us from,” he said.

“The new and updated spaces support the standard we have set, but the building also asks all of us to raise the bar a little higher,” House-Keller added. “As Dean Wurtz said, ‘We now have a space that is reflective of the quality of the faculty, staff and students who are part of the Elliott College of Fine Arts.’”



At last fall's grand reopening, local and state dignitaries joined SFA administrators, faculty, staff, students and community patrons as part of SFA's 100th birthday weekend of events. Newly installed plaques honoring the contributions to SFA made by the Micky Elliott Family Foundation and Teresa Jill Adams were unveiled, along with a plaque naming the William E. Arscott Sound Stage in honor of the beloved filmmaking professor who will retire this year after 62 years of teaching at SFA.

The grand opening concluded with a sold-out Centennial Concert, which premiered the original composition, "How Proud the Pines," by Dr. Stephen Lias, SFA professor of composition. For the piece's lyrics, he used poems by the late Karle Wilson Baker, an original faculty member and one of Texas' most celebrated poets in the first half of the 20th century. The commissioned piece honors SFA's 100 years of educational excellence and service.

The construction project, titled Fine Arts Expansion Initiative, extended the original 1959 Griffith Fine Arts Building along North Street. In addition to the renovations to Turner Auditorium, the state-of-the-art building has two dance studios, two new theatres, a recording studio, a sound stage, audio and video editing rooms, an art gallery, multiple classrooms, rehearsal facilities, faculty offices, and the offices of the Elliott College of Fine Arts dean. These facilities house the college's sound recording technology, filmmaking, theatre, dance and musical theatre programs. *Continued on Page 11 ➔*



*Images from the
Centennial
Concert in
September. Photos
by Lizeth Garcia*

UNIVERSITY HONORS RESIDENT WITH DEEP LOVE FOR COMMUNITY, ARTS

IN RECOGNITION OF an \$8 million gift from the Micky Elliott Family Foundation to support scholarships for SFA fine arts students, the former SFA board of regents renamed SFA's College of Fine Arts to honor the longtime Nacogdoches resident who had a deep love for the community and the arts.

The Micky Elliott College of Fine Arts was officially dedicated at the grand reopening of the newly expanded and renovated Griffith Fine Arts Building in fall 2023 as a highlight of the university's Centennial Celebration. Bill Elliott, husband to the late Micky Elliott for whom the college was named, commended his employee team at Elliott Electric Supply, the eighth largest electrical supplies distributor in the U.S., for being the driving force behind the creation and funding of the Micky Elliott Family Foundation, which allows continued contributions to SFA and other entities.

The impetus behind the Elliott Foundation gift to fine arts was the couple's appreciation of SFA and the education it provides, along with a love of music. Elliott, who majored in music at Louisiana Tech University, said he was "blown away" with the quality of SFA's music department, its faculty and students when he and his wife arrived in Nacogdoches more than 50 years ago.

"Micky and I were attracted to Nacogdoches to start our business by the presence of SFA and the effect it has on the entire community," Elliott said. "You recognize the cities that have a significant university; they have an entirely different vibe."

Other endowments funded by the Elliott family include the Micky Elliott Symphony Orchestra Scholarship, Micky Elliott Computer Science Scholarship, Micky Elliott Engineering Professorship, Gary Wurtz Jazz Scholarship and Gene Moon Professorship. When Elliott began considering a larger gift to the arts, his accountant, Robert Flores, suggested the college naming opportunity, "and it was a way for me to remember Micky," Elliott said. ★

Dr. Gary Wurtz, fine arts dean, speaks at the Micky Elliott College of Fine Arts dedication in September. Photo by Lizeth Garcia



MIDDLE: Bill Elliott (right) with Wurtz and SFA Interim President Gina Oglesbee during the plaque unveiling for the Micky Elliott College of Fine Arts.

BOTTOM: Oglesbee, Elliott and Wurtz (middle) with members of SFA's former board of regents during the building's ribbon-cutting.

Photos by Lizeth Garcia



LEFT: SFA students enrolled in the sound recording technology program have the advantage of learning their craft using the newest industry equipment and technology. Photo by Michael Tubbs '05, '10 & '11

BELOW: A dance student uses the newly installed aerial hoops to deliver an unforgettable athletic and acrobatic performance. Photo by Michael Tubbs '05, '10 & '11

BELOW LEFT: August Wilson's award-winning "The Piano Lesson" was the first play presented in the new Flex Theatre. The intimate setting brings audience members closer to the stage, giving patrons a feeling of being part of the performance. Photo by Lizeth Garcia



While the college welcomes the community to enjoy the new spaces by attending plays, art exhibitions, and music and dance concerts, it's the students who are the primary recipients of everything the performance center has to offer.

"The new building is triumphant and beautiful; it makes me feel like I'm accomplishing something just by being in it," said Eric Sosa, junior theatre major from Houston.

Brad Maule, filmmaking professor, believes the new facilities offer valuable recruiting tools.

"The new classrooms for filmmaking are incredible. Giant screens, plush chairs for the students, phone and laptop chargers beneath each desk, elevated platforms for unobstructed viewing of films and lectures, soundproof walls between each room — it is a filmmaker's dream," he said.

The addition of the Flex and Black Box theatres in the building's new construction provide theatre students their own performance spaces aside from Turner Auditorium. *Continued on Page 13 ➔*

"Each day when I enter these beautiful new facilities and contemplate their incredible potential to facilitate student learning, I feel gratitude for all of those who worked for decades to make them a reality, above all Dr. Ric Berry and the late Dr. Clarence Bahs."

- Scott Shattuck, SFA professor of theatre

Sound stage naming recognizes beloved filmmaking professor

WHEN ART PROFESSOR William E. Arscott retires this year at the end of the spring semester, he will have taught 62 years at SFA. Of all the feats he could list as achievements during those years, including establishing a top-rated filmmaking program with accomplished graduates in the industry, he hopes to be remembered as someone who "cared about his students and taught them what was needed for a career in filmmaking or any other career in their later life."

As a strong advocate of the School of Art's filmmaking program, The Cole Art Center @ The Old Opera House and SFA Friends of the Visual Arts, Arscott has set an outstanding example for all as a devoted artist, teacher and generous contributor to SFA. As a result, former SFA President Dr. Steve Westbrook expressed his admiration for Arscott by naming the film studio sound stage in the Griffith Fine Arts Building the William E. Arscott Sound Stage to recognize his remarkable legacy. The sound stage was dedicated during the Griffith Fine Arts Building grand reopening last fall.

A sound stage is used to shoot movie scenes that can be recorded indoors with complete control of the environment, such as weather, light and sound. For example, sets, such as a living room, are constructed and installed within the sound stage.

Trained as a painter and ceramist, Arscott was originally hired in the fall of 1963 as an art instructor at Stephen F. Austin State College. In 1976, Arscott was asked to run SFA's new filmmaking program, a position he's held since that time. Arscott's legendary filmmaking program has turned out successful industry graduates, such as Derek Wayne Johnson, known for his documentary about Oscar-winning director John G. Avildsen, "40 Years of Rocky: The Birth of a Classic," narrated by Sylvester Stallone, and other films. Johnson joined the filmmaking faculty at SFA last summer.

"For longer than I've been alive, Professor Arscott has laid a solid foundation for the film program, which he built from the ground up,"

Johnson said. "I only hope to add to that foundation and keep his legacy alive."

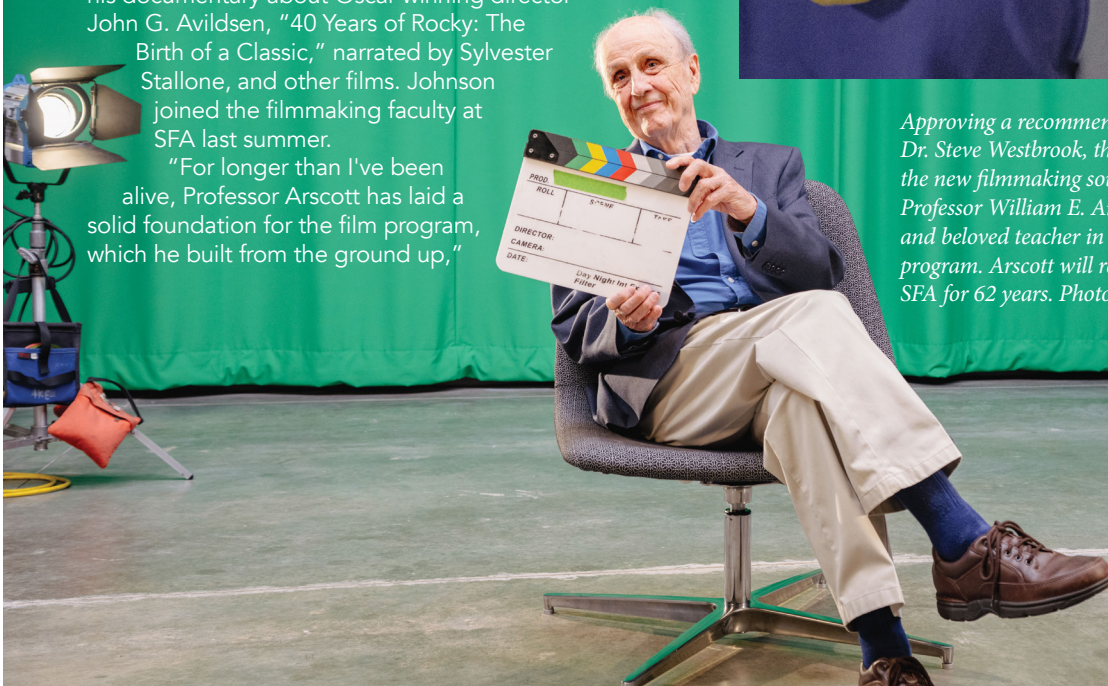
Arscott's teaching abilities are reflected in the awards he received at SFA throughout the years, including being named a Regents Professor in 1984 and the SFA Alumni Association's Distinguished Professor in 1986. His favorite SFA memory is of teaching art appreciation.

One of his proudest moments came when the late Dr. Baker Pattillo, former SFA president, recognized Arscott for his 50 years of service to SFA, proclaiming Aug. 22, 2013, as William E. Arscott Day at SFA.

When asked to name his most successful students, Arscott replied there are "just too many, most of whom I don't even know" to list. "I consider success in life a person who is compassionate and tolerant of other people, religions and races," he said. ★



Approving a recommendation by former SFA President Dr. Steve Westbrook, the former board of regents named the new filmmaking sound stage in honor of longtime Professor William E. Arscott, a strong advocate for and beloved teacher in the School of Art's filmmaking program. Arscott will retire this spring, having taught at SFA for 62 years. Photos by Lizeth Garcia



"Giving us a space of our own to perform, learn, study and even hang out in has given me a sense of community and involvement in the School of Theatre and Dance," said Ariana Cox, senior theatre major from Addison, Texas. "The building overall creates a warm and welcoming feeling, full of opportunity and collaboration."

Connor Molen, senior theatre major from Ponder, Texas, said the building was created with students in mind, "and you can tell," providing an encouraging environment for "student life and creativity."

"I love holing up in a study room or stopping to chat with friends in 'The Treehouse' (third-floor student gathering area),"

Molen said. "On my morning walk to the Movement Studio, I pass the Lighting Lab. It is thrilling to have these specialized locations in our facility. While one class learns rapier and dagger technique, the other is programming right down the hall."

House-Keller believes the Griffith Fine Arts Building's facilities "rival any in the state."

"All of this means that our students can be confident that they are working in spaces that will fully support their education, no matter their level," he said. "This will aid us in recruiting competitive students who are serious about their education in theatre, dance, film and sound recording technology." ★

Photo by Lizeth Garcia



GALLERY LEGACY HOPES TO INSPIRE OTHERS TO GIVE BACK

TERESA JILL ADAMS' love of art and art education led the SFA alumna to establish the Teresa Jill Adams Foundation, which primarily supports art education and various charitable organizations. Her generosity and desire to give back to her alma mater caused the former SFA board of regents member to name the new art gallery in the remodeled and expanded Griffith Fine Arts Building the Teresa Jill Adams Art Gallery, which was dedicated during the building's grand reopening last fall.

Adams received a Bachelor of Fine Arts from SFA in 1979 and went on to achieve a Master in Elementary Education at Sam Houston State University in 1986. She taught art and reading for more than 30 years across the north Houston area. A contribution to SHSU resulted in the establishment of the Teresa Jill Adams Plaza outside the SHSU Art Complex on that campus.

"I have been blessed by the good Lord above my whole life, for I am a living miracle," Adams said, referencing serious health issues as a child. "I have followed the advice of my

parents who gave me the resources I have today. I want to do more, and what better way than to leave my legacy for my only son and others to see so they may be inspired to do the same."

Adams also established a scholarship at SFA and has plans for more to honor "two of the greatest teachers who passed away before their time."

"Like a parent who wants things better for their children, I feel the same about SFA, and I want things better for today's students than I had," she said.

She hopes the Adams Art Gallery provides SFA art students a "formal, professional area to display their artwork" and an avenue to see viewers' reactions to their art. She also hopes the gallery provides public schools with a place where young artists can become inspired to create their own art dreams to display.

Adams is an advocate of art education "throughout one's life, whether it's creating it, participating in it or viewing it."

"Art done today is a historical marker for those who come afterward." ★

FASTBALL

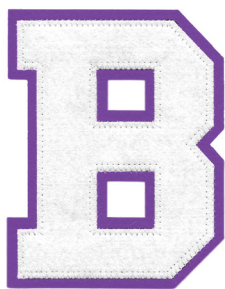
Friendship

Alumni create SFA connection in one of MLB's fiercest rivalries

STORY BY NATHAN WICKER '19

Sean Fields (left) and Eric Velazquez — assistant athletic trainers for the Texas Rangers and Houston Astros, respectively — pose for a photo prior to a matchup between the two teams in the 2023 American League Championship Series in October. Fields and Velazquez were in the same cohort and graduated from SFA's Master of Science in athletic training program in May 2010. Photo courtesy of Bailey Orr/Texas Rangers





ASEBALL IS A GAME of inches.

The game often hinges on minute details — a close play at the plate, a pitcher missing his spot in the strike zone by a whisker, or a long ball hit an inch either to the left or right of the foul pole can be the difference in a memorable home run or a mammoth, yet quickly forgotten, foul ball. All come into play, and all could be the difference between the elation of winning and the anguish of defeat.

The line drawn between the Houston Astros and the Texas Rangers also can be measured, though the distance between the two teams depends on which fan base you ask.

Referred to as the Lone Star Series, the rivalry began in a friendlier nature during the 2001 season when the teams first met in an interleague matchup. The two even compete for a trophy, and the team with the most wins in the season series takes home the Silver Boot, modeled after the symbolic, if not conventional, cowboy boot.

When the Houston Astros jumped from the National to the American League in 2013 and straight into the Rangers' division, the rivalry evolved from a cordial battle for bragging rights to a win-at-all-costs affair to get a better foothold in the division.

The rivalry intensified when both teams met during the 2023 American League Championship Series — the first time in baseball's rich history that two teams from Texas squared off in the postseason. In a seven-game slugfest, the Rangers topped their in-state rival and a few days later claimed their first World Series title in franchise history against the Arizona Diamondbacks.

But as the dust settled, two individuals — one from each organization — shared a tighter, more specific bond.

Eric Velazquez and Sean Fields, assistant athletic trainers for the Houston Astros and Texas Rangers, respectively, were in the same cohort and graduated from SFA's Master of Science in athletic training program in May 2010.

The two have kept in touch throughout the years since graduating and occasionally have crossed paths when their minor league teams competed. Now, at the big-league level and competing in the same division, Velazquez and Fields cross paths more often — 13 times in the regular season and counting.

Depending on their workload, their interaction can be as subtle as a head nod and wave, but often it's a 15-minute conversation in center field to catch up since last they spoke.

"It's fun to be able to look across the diamond and see [Velazquez] there," Fields said. "We've always kept in touch over the years, but 2023 has been even more special knowing that we are both where we want to be."

SEAN FIELDS, TEXAS RANGERS

Fields is constantly reminded that he's living his dream.

Entering his second season as assistant athletic trainer and 15th season in various roles within the organization, Fields works with professional baseball players, watches major league games in the dugout and gets to call Globe Life Field — or any ballpark, for that matter — his office.

Much like Velazquez in 2022, Fields accomplished what most in his field never will — being on a World Series-winning team in his first year with a big-league club. It being the first in his beloved franchise's history was a valuable bonus to his lifelong dream.

"It was a dream come true," Fields said. "Having an opportunity to be a part of an MLB staff was crazy enough.

Winning the World Series and having that World Series be the first in franchise history is unfathomable. There isn't much that can top this now."

Getting to this point, however, was quite the journey.

Intrigued with the idea of working in baseball, particularly at the collegiate level, Fields chose a career in athletic training following his undergraduate studies at Texas Tech University and upon his acceptance in SFA's athletic training program. The program cohort, with a head count of eight students at the time, also interested Fields due to its intimate setting.

During his time in SFA's athletic training program, Fields also served as an intern with the Rangers, which placed him in the Dominican Republic with the Rangers' rookie affiliate, the Dominican Summer League Rangers. This fueled his desire to work in the professional baseball ranks.

"I can honestly say that SFA prepared me for almost every facet of my professional career," Fields said. "I first noticed it during my internship when I was put in some stressful situations and was able to handle them calmly and collectively due to the experiences and classes taught by Dr. Linda Bobo and Dr. Stephanie Jervas. Conversations on triage and in-game decision making with Sandy Miller also helped to mold my thought processes in tough situations."

Bobo is a professor and program director of the athletic training program and has worked in the Department of Kinesiology and Health Science for 21 years. Jervas, who is now director of the athletic training program and professor of professional practice kinesiology at Texas Christian University, served as clinical coordinator at SFA from 2006 to 2012. Miller served as a head athletic trainer at SFA for 31 years and later served in a part-time faculty role following retirement.

Once his studies were complete, Fields accepted a full-time position with the Rangers in May 2010 that sent him back to the Dominican Republic for the 2010 Dominican Summer League season. From there, Fields worked his way up the organization's ladder, earning such positions as minor league rehab coordinator and Arizona league medical coordinator along the way.

Fields' responsibilities include preparing the athletic training room and providing medical coverage during practices and games. He also assists with maintenance treatments for athletes, pre- and post-rehabilitation exercises for various injuries, shoulder and forearm strengthening and maintenance programs, workload monitoring, and postgame treatments.

ERIC VELAZQUEZ, HOUSTON ASTROS

Velazquez could only use one word to describe being a part of the Houston Astros organization during its 2022 World Series-winning run — "surreal."

It was his first season with the big-league club, following 12 years as an athletic trainer in minor league clubs, working his way up the ranks with about six years each in the New York Mets and Boston Red Sox organizations. He also worked in winter leagues in the Dominican Republic and Venezuela, worked in the Arizona Fall →



League, and was on Team Columbia's staff during the 2017 World Baseball Classic.

"I had spent so long working toward being a part of a major league staff that the entire season and playoffs I was just trying to make sure I was doing even the smallest thing to help the team," Velazquez said about the 2022 World Series-winning run. "After everything was done, I reflected on how fortunate I was to land this job and be able to be involved in that season."

Velazquez was first introduced to athletic training while working toward a degree in exercise biology at the University of California, Davis, and realized it was a career path he wanted to pursue.

Spurred by the opportunity to immediately work with the athletic teams and athletes, his pursuit led him to the piney woods of East Texas.

"SFA's athletic training program provided me the opportunity to be hands-on since day one," Velazquez said. "The extensive, immersive clinical experiences provided different opportunities to learn and begin to formulate a catalog of how to deal with situations."

Now entering his third season in his position with the Astros, Velazquez's day-to-day responsibilities include preparing players for pregame, game and postgame activity and providing medical coverage during practice and games.

Velazquez's mentality, along with the rest of the team and staff, is to put their team back in a position to win.

"At this level, everyone wants to win," Velazquez said. "Our piece of the puzzle is to maintain the players in the best playing physical shape they can be. We strive to mitigate time spent on the injury list and keep players on the field performing at their best."

Velazquez and Fields are both examples of the well-established success SFA's Master of Science in athletic training program has had in producing high-caliber professionals.

"The quality of the Master of Science in athletic training is exemplified by its long-standing accreditation by its national organization, the Commission on Accreditation of Athletic Training Education," said Dr. Judy Abbott, dean of SFA's James I. Perkins College of Education. "But as important as an accredited master's degree is the caliber of graduate students attracted to this degree and the high-quality preparation they experience in this two-year program. These two alumni, Eric and Sean, took their knowledge and skills to professional sports and thrived in that fast-paced, intense setting. We like to think that SFA helped them in being successful in their careers." ★

Rangers win!

Business alumni help make history

STORY BY JOHANNA GILMORE

WORKING AS BUSINESS development and ticketing operations staff, four SFA sports business alumni got to be a part of Texas Rangers history when Bryana Novegil '21 & '23, Aaron Rangel '20, Isaiah Schreiber '20 and Isaiah Yates '18 saw their team take home its first World Series title in its 62 years.

"Achieving the status of World Series Champions is beyond a dream," said Novegil, a Houston native who has been an account executive for new business development with the Rangers for two seasons. "The feeling of hoisting the trophy has not faded."

Rangel, a Tyler native, wrapped up his third season of serving as an account executive for season tickets.

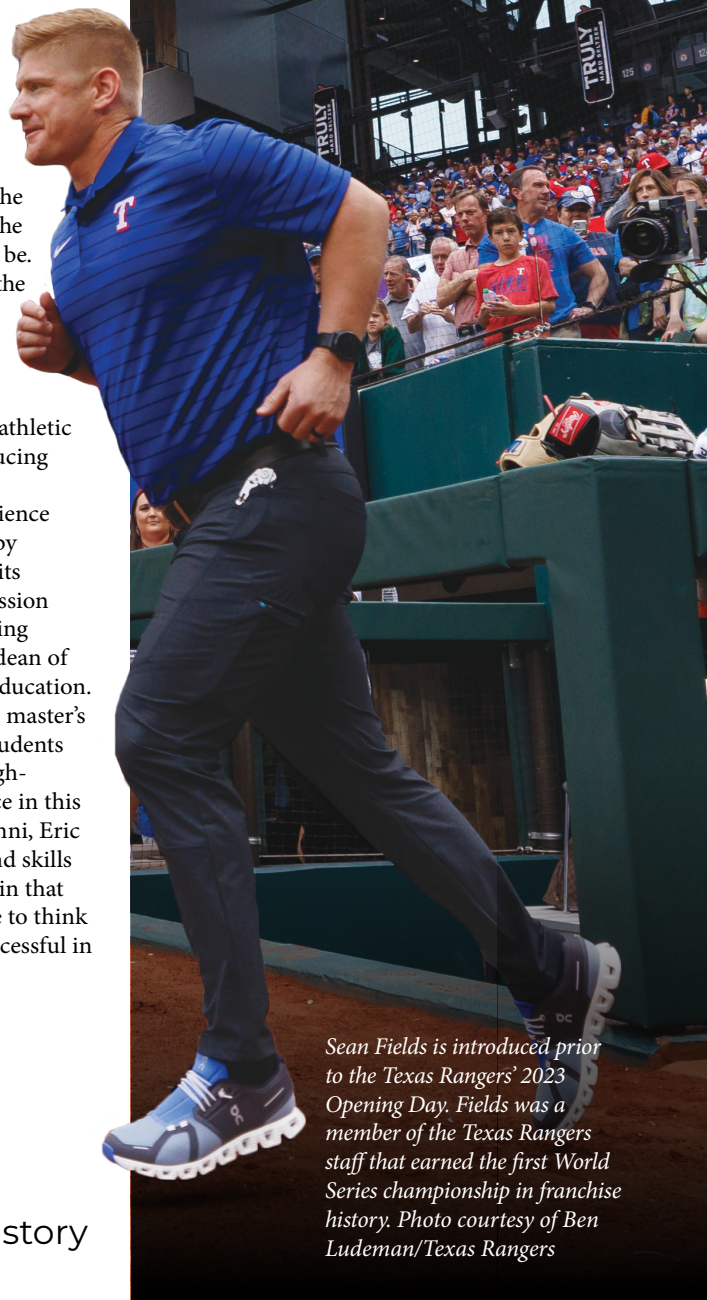
"Experiencing the thrill of a World Series championship in person is indescribable; being part of the first-ever franchise win adds

an extra layer of significance," he said.

Yates, another Tyler native, has served the Rangers for five seasons as an account executive in group sales. His team's journey to the World Series "is a surreal feeling," he said. "I was able to be in attendance for the clinching game 5 victory with my fellow SFA sports business alumni. I am thankful to the SFA sports business program for opening doors for me."

In his third season with the Rangers as a new business development representative, Schreiber said his SFA connections were key to his joining the team right after college.

"The faculty at SFA supported my career path and provided me with the early networking opportunities that helped me enter the Rangers organization shortly after I graduated," he said. ★



Sean Fields is introduced prior to the Texas Rangers' 2023 Opening Day. Fields was a member of the Texas Rangers staff that earned the first World Series championship in franchise history. Photo courtesy of Ben Ludeman/Texas Rangers



Pictured, from left, Aaron Rangel '20, Isaiah Schreiber '20, Bryana Novegil '21 & '23 and Isaiah Yates '18. Photo courtesy of SFA's Nelson Rusche College of Business sports business program



The scene at Thomas "Tuck" Kemper Jr.'s '69 funeral with the Sawyer axe handles representing each of the SFA graduates in attendance.

DR. STEVE WESTBROOK, FORMER SFA PRESIDENT



Just a sweet little sun shower at the end of the day to bring us a double rainbow, knock down some pollen and remind us to take a deep breath!

SFAEARTHSCIENCES / INSTAGRAM



Beautiful day to paint ... my daughter's paint brush cup! Always smile when I see this from 1995.

KATE SPURWAY
MURPHY /
FACEBOOK



When your colleague has no purple because she went to Sam, you hook her up with your best purple shirt for spirit day!

KAYLA MARIE
BEESLEY / FACEBOOK

This morning I'm reading the centennial magazine with a timeline of university highlights. My friend Carlos Whitaker's father, the late Willie Gene Whitaker, was our first Black graduate. On the shoulders of giants.

DR. LARRY HYGH JR. / X

Life Members

8609. Sarah E. Dockery '00, Katy
8610. Amy R. Bennett '10, Richmond
8611. Rhonda L. Jones '95, Pearland
8612. Michael R. Jones '95, Pearland
8613. Crystal D. Kilmer '94, Nacogdoches
8614. Carrie A. Mullins '23, Crockett
8615. Elizabeth M. Castle '23, Brandon, South Dakota
8616. Brandon M. Bond '09, Oak Ridge North
8617. Stephen Shane Malnar '11, Nacogdoches
8618. Kristina M. Malnar '13, Nacogdoches
8619. Holly S. Gibson '23, Katy
8620. Patrick R. Castillo '08, Lufkin
8621. Lacy R. La Force '13, Big Sandy
8622. Edward M. Ironsmith IV '87, Nacogdoches
8623. David W. Webb Jr. '83, Nacogdoches
8624. Molly A. Miniard '12, Houston
8625. Alyssa L. Alva '07 & '12, Houston
8626. Brianna L. Mazzei '22, Allen
8627. Reisor A. Pickett '90, Nacogdoches
8628. Cindy Pickett '92, Nacogdoches

8629. Lawrence Wayne Smith '22, Huntington
8630. Maria Betancourt-Smith '83, Huntington
8631. LaToya W. Young '96, Tyler
8632. Matt Rocco, friend of SFA, Nacogdoches
8633. April Rocco, friend of SFA, Nacogdoches
8634. Erica M. Casillas '08, Katy
8635. Sandra E. Hendrix '81, Rowlett
8636. Michele R. Beadle '87, Plano
8637. Dr. Shelby F. Payne '13, Conroe
8638. James P. Anderson '92, Frisco
8639. Tracy Wilkinson '86 & '99, Frisco
8640. David Alders, friend of SFA, Nacogdoches
8641. Hannah L. Zuniga '07, League City
8642. Rashelle Furrh '95, Spring
8643. Jeffrey P. Furrh '97, Spring
8644. Reagan A. Kallina '23, Katy
8645. Nicholas Orlowski '24, Tyler
8646. Shelia F. Golden, friend of SFA, Desoto
8647. Calvin Golden, friend of SFA, Desoto
8648. Laura A. Wisniewski '02, Houston

8649. Shelby A. Lero '23, Nacogdoches
8650. Mackenzie E. Cook '22, Plano
8651. Devin A. Rosillo '22, Pearland
8652. Melinda K. Brown '92, Tyler
8653. Elizabeth A. Zajicek '81, Humble
8654. Brodrick J. Grooms Jr. '23, Trinity
8655. Trena E. Walters '94, Houston
8656. Kenneth Weade, friend of SFA, Houston
8657. Kim M. Burrows '89, Heath
8658. Monica M. Loa '20, Nacogdoches
8659. Timothy S. Hernandez '17, Nacogdoches
8660. Jody R. Creel '08, Nacogdoches
8661. Stephanie D. Creel '03 & '07, Nacogdoches
8662. Nicholas W. Stransky '23, College Station
8663. Thomas Gene McDonald '95, Kilgore
8664. Tonya M. Emberton '23, Spring
8665. Monica L. Green '08, Houston
8666. Carson L. Sifford '25, Teague
8667. Riley S. Tabat '25, Temple
8668. Thomas H. Heslep '81, Highland Village



UT System regents name Dr. Neal Weaver as 11th president of SFA

ON MARCH 18, The University of Texas System Board of Regents unanimously approved Dr. Neal Weaver as the new president of SFA. Weaver, who has served as president of Georgia Southwestern State University (GSW) since 2017, will officially begin his new appointment in mid-May.

Weaver succeeds Interim President Gina Oglesbee to become the 11th president in SFA's 100-year history and first as a member of the UT System. SFA, which has six colleges that offer more than 80 bachelor's degree programs, 40 master's degree programs, and four doctoral degrees that cover more than 120 areas of study, officially became the 14th member institution of the UT System last September.

With an impressive 33-year career in higher education administration across four public university systems, Weaver has demonstrated his leadership prowess at GSW. Under his guidance, the university experienced notable growth in enrollment, student retention and fundraising. GSW's fall 2023 enrollment of 3,300 marked a historic high for the university and included an 18.5% increase in first-year student enrollment as well as an 16.8% increase in graduate enrollment. Additionally, first-year student retention rose by more than 7%, and annual giving to the GSW Foundation more than doubled.

"The regents met with outstanding candidates, and Dr. Weaver's ability to lead in a thriving academic environment, coupled with his commitment to innovation and strategic growth, make him an ideal appointment to serve SFA as it enters its new era as a UT institution," said UT System Board Chairman Kevin P. Eltife. "We are grateful for the thorough work of SFA's presidential search advisory committee and the UT System leadership whose guidance and recommendations helped us arrive at today's final selection."

Before his role at GSW, Weaver served as the vice president for university advancement and innovation at Nicholls State University in Thibodaux, Louisiana. In this capacity, he provided leadership in fundraising, enrollment management and athletics while generating new revenue and improving retention, operating efficiencies and customer service. While there, the university's 16-semester enrollment decline ended with four consecutive semesters of enrollment growth and a 40% increase in applications.

Prior to that, Weaver served as vice president for institutional advancement at West Texas A&M University. He saw significant accomplishments in that role, including a 125% increase in fundraising and the implementation of an integrated marketing plan that identified new markets and ensured brand-centered marketing and communications.

Weaver also was vice president for university relations at Northeastern State University in Tahlequah, Oklahoma, where he worked in various roles from 1998 to 2008.

Weaver stays active both professionally and personally, having served on 25 university committees and on regional and school facilities planning commissions, a chamber of commerce legislative affairs committee, and youth leadership groups. He was chair of the Council for Advancement and Support of Education's District IV board of directors and member of CASE's national chairs committee.

He also hosted GSW's "What's in the Cup" podcast and, for a brief time in 1990 after college, trained with the New York Jets.

Weaver's candidacy was recommended to the board of regents by a presidential search advisory committee that was chaired by UT System Chancellor James B. Milliken. The search committee included representation from SFA faculty, staff, students, alumni and community leaders, as well as UT presidents and regents.

Milliken praised Weaver's ability to maximize the potential of the institutions he has served throughout his career.

"Dr. Weaver's accomplishments in fostering student success, driving enrollment growth and spearheading successful fundraising efforts position him to guide SFA into new opportunities as a member of The University of Texas System," Milliken said. "I am pleased with the regents' unanimous support of his candidacy and appreciate the efforts of everyone that helped us navigate this historic search."

Weaver earned a doctoral degree in organizational leadership from the University of Oklahoma, a Master of Business Administration from Southeastern Oklahoma State University and a bachelor's degree from Oklahoma Panhandle State University. He is a native of Oklahoma City. He and his wife, Kristi, have three sons and one granddaughter. ★

A Brush Stroke for Every Untold Story

Morales amplifies the stories of Latino people through larger-than-life canvases

STORY BY CHRISTINE BROUSSARD '10 & '20

PHOTO BY LIZETH GARCIA

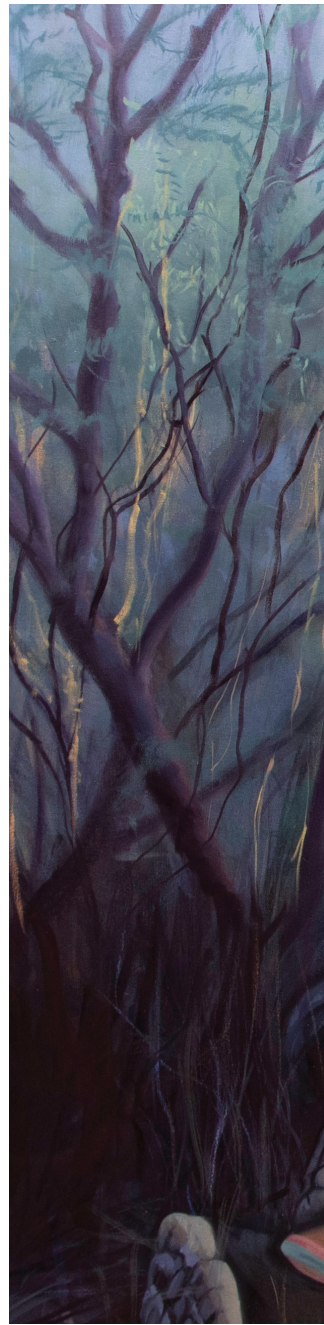
ARTWORK BY ARELY MORALES '15

THE HALF-LIDDED EYES and relaxed mouth were the first things I noticed. At first, the painting of a man lying flat on his back in a field of gold and black lines seemed to offer a glimpse into a moment of pause — perhaps even of rest.

But then I saw the jug of water lying empty next to the man's body and felt my stomach drop. The gold of the field turned from soft to harsh, and the black charcoal lines marking the field's shadows became a creeping gloom. The dark-haired man in worn shoes and dirty clothes wasn't resting, I realized with horror. He was passed out — perhaps much worse — with vacant eyes staring into an unseen sky.

Propped in a corner of Arely Morales' studio garage, the 9-by-6-foot painting holds a weighty presence in a space filled with the SFA alumna's years of work. It's not the only piece, though, whose presence you can feel in your bones. ➔





Since graduating with a Bachelor of Fine Arts from SFA in 2015, Morales has focused her artistry around visually sharing the realities of the migrant experience. The piece of the man, titled “Eyes Without Water, Without Name,” stands in stark contrast to a piece of equal size propped next to it showing a woman in a work apron standing in front of a sink and radiating joy.

The first is from a series Morales calls “Border” and the second from a series she titled “Labor.”

“Both incorporate that dream of wanting a better life,” Morales said.

Joy, sorrow, dedication, a litany of other inscrutable emotions pours from the faces and postures of the figures Morales paints. All appear mid-movement, like she froze a single moment in their day. And in using her paint brush to capture the precise angle of a tilted mouth or the shadows of a furrowed brow, Morales lets the viewer find the subject’s life story in a single look.

The emotive nature of Morales’ pieces is so captivating that they’ve led to a number of professional successes for her, like meeting President

George W. Bush in a private dinner orchestrated by the CEO of the George W. Bush Presidential Center in Dallas, having a piece hung in the U.S. Embassy in Mexico City, and being selected as one of 28 international artists to be featured in the “New Worlds: Women to Watch” exhibition taking place at the National Museum of Women in the Arts this year.

While her “Labor” series is inspired by the day-to-day experiences of immigrants, Morales felt she needed a different approach to evoke “the vulnerability of migrants as they take on the decision to leave their home country for the United States” with a “focus on their humanity.”

This pushed her into experimenting with landscapes, and one of the first she created was “Eyes Without Water, Without Name,” which is a part of her “Border” series.

“The piece does talk a lot about that fine line between life and death in taking that risk [to migrate],” Morales said. “There are so many individuals who lose their life in the process, and their family never hears from them because a lot of them travel without IDs. So, they become one folder on the shelf of other [human] remains.”



It's hard to view some of Morales' pieces without having a raw emotional reaction — and the size of her pieces add to that. Most canvases in her studio stretch from floor to ceiling and are wide enough that hugging one would be difficult work.

"The size is intentional," Morales said. "The issues I explore in my work have to do with visibility of marginalized communities, and working this large helps me make a very bold statement that says, 'There's no way you cannot see this figure.'"

The heart of Morales' work is to tell the stories of a community who often chooses — or is forced — to live behind the scenes. And as a Mexican native who ended up calling the United States home when her family moved here when she was 14 years old, her own story was the first one she had to grapple with.

SFA, she said, played a major role in helping her confront her identity.

"Undergrad was a special part of my upbringing as an artist because it was around those years that I became comfortable with my identity," Morales said. "I was insecure about who I was, what I represented, and

during those years in the painting studio at SFA, I started to explore and celebrate my roots, my heritage, my culture."

Following in the footsteps of her photographer mother, Morales originally came to SFA to study photography. However, despite hating her first painting class, she eventually fell in love with painting and switched majors. She still often uses

LEFT: *Reina*, 2024
Oil on canvas
96 by 60 inches

ABOVE: *Untitled*, 2024
Oil on canvas
72 by 72 inches

photography as a first step to capture the subject before digging into depth, angles and color.

"There was a moment in my first painting class where a switch flipped for me, and it was when we started working with color," Morales said. "I remember painting this metal base and becoming so intrigued, because you think of an object as one color, like a blue pot. But then you realize there are things around it and light reflecting off it. It's blue, but it has red, and it has yellow. I was curious and challenged by this." ➔

“But I’m no longer afraid to speak up. So, I want to be that [voice] for my community, because there are beautiful people with beautiful stories and so much strength, so much love. That’s what I hope others get to see and experience in my work.”

- ARELY MORALES '15



ABOVE: María, 2017
Oil on canvas
65.5 by 60 inches

After graduating from SFA, Morales moved away from Nacogdoches to attend graduate school at the University of Washington in Seattle, where she received a Master of Fine Arts in 2017.

All of Morales’ work is a study in identity, informed by the years she spent grappling with her own. But coming out on the other side of that struggle made her determined to share the stories of Latino individuals.

“Painting through all those years became a way of healing for me,” she said. “In grad school, I began to find this desire to speak out, because when I was younger, I didn’t want anyone to know I was an immigrant because I was embarrassed and scared. There are still a lot of people within my community who are scared to express their feelings.

“But I’m no longer afraid to speak up. So, I want to be that [voice] for my community, because there are beautiful people with beautiful stories and so much strength, so much love. That’s what I hope others get to see and experience in my work.”

Every piece Morales completes is a collaboration with the people she paints. It’s one of her favorite parts of the process — sitting down with someone, getting to know them and their story, researching histories, then finding the best shadows and lights and brush strokes to make their story come to life on canvas.

Her dad was one such subject. In Morales’ piece, titled “Mi Apa,” her father stands with a small cooler in one hand and a full plastic bag in the other, either headed to or just

returning from work. His eyes look mildly skeptical while his mouth still curves up in a slight smile.

"I really wanted to share that smile, because when he gets home from a 12-hour or 16-hour shift, he hasn't slept and is about to pass out. But every time I would see him — always that smile," Morales said. "I could see the toll [that much work] took. And I feel bad knowing that it's all because of me, his family, that he's taking on that much responsibility."

The heart Morales pours into her work is evident in every brush stroke (or sometimes broom stroke, with how large-scale she works). It's helped create professional connections that led to many collaborations, including her current partnership with the Talley Dunn gallery in Dallas, where a few of her pieces are always on display.

In April, the exhibit "New Worlds: Women to Watch" will open for a multi-month run at the National Museum of Women in the Arts in Washington, D.C.

And as one of 28 international artists chosen through multiple rounds of interviews and presentations, Morales will be there on opening night to celebrate not only the significance of the moment but also the stages of personal and professional growth she's endured to get there.

To learn more about Morales and her artwork, visit arelymorales.com and find her on Instagram @arely.art. ★

View an extended gallery of photos from Morales' studio at gosfa.com/arelymorales.

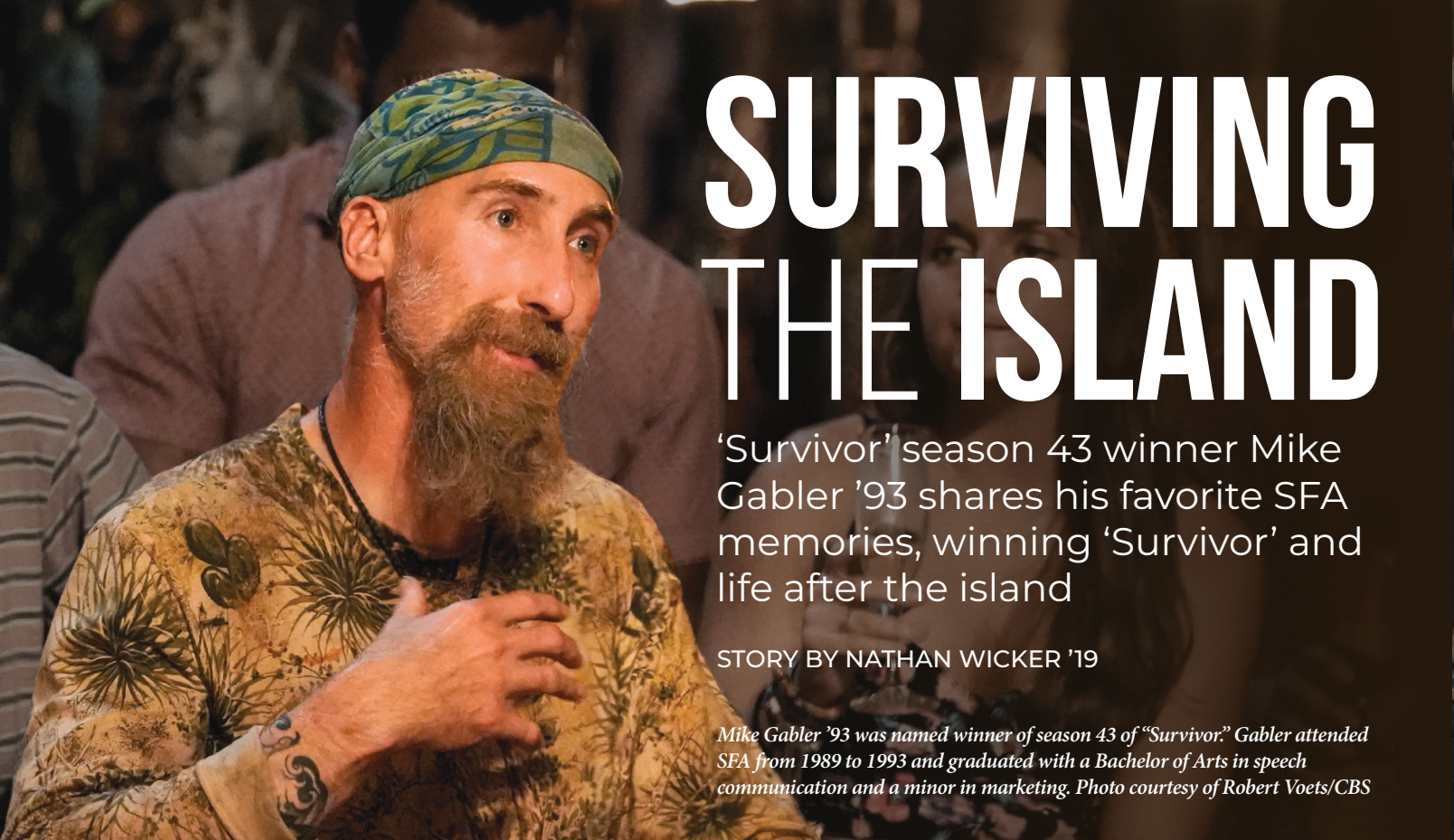


TOP: *Mi Apa' (My Dad)*, 2018
Oil on canvas
108 by 78 inches

BOTTOM LEFT: *One by One*, 2019
Oil on canvas
95 by 75 inches

BOTTOM RIGHT: *Rosa*, 2019
Oil on canvas
65.5 by 60 inches





SURVIVING THE ISLAND

'Survivor' season 43 winner Mike Gabler '93 shares his favorite SFA memories, winning 'Survivor' and life after the island

STORY BY NATHAN WICKER '19

Mike Gabler '93 was named winner of season 43 of "Survivor." Gabler attended SFA from 1989 to 1993 and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in speech communication and a minor in marketing. Photo courtesy of Robert Voets/CBS

From campus corridors to the tense nature of tribal councils, Mike Gabler '93 not only accomplished the challenges of graduating from our beloved university but also emerged as a strategic force by claiming victory in the unpredictable rigors of "Survivor" season 43. Read about the profound effect competing had on Gabler's life, the agony of keeping his win a secret and how his alma mater set him up for success.

SFA

Q: What years did you attend SFA?

A: Fall 1989 through December 1993

Q: What degree(s) did you earn from SFA?

A: Bachelor of Arts, December 1993

Major: Speech communication

Minor: Marketing with an emphasis in international business

I was also a member of the Phi Delta Theta fraternity, 1992 light heavyweight fight-night champion and SFA Orientation leader in 1993.

Q: What is your favorite memory of your time at SFA and why?

A: I always loved the fall when school was back in session. There was always a fun energy and lots of excitement to see old friends and to attend new classes. I also enjoyed times with friends going to Lumberjack football games, watching the Ladyjacks basketball team, La Hacienda, Crossroads and Bullwinkles.

"SURVIVOR"

Q: You mentioned in the first episode of season 43 that you are a regular viewer of "Survivor." What is it about the show that created such fandom for you? What inspired you to compete on the show?

A: I love "Survivor" because you never know who is going to rise and win. It is an organic adventure that no one can predict. To be successful, you must be true to yourself and push yourself to find new edges outside of your comfort zone. It is a human story of perseverance and a wonderful show to watch with family and friends. We have been watching since the beginning of the show 20+ years ago!

Q: What did you find was the most challenging about competing on "Survivor" and why?

A: What I found most challenging on "Survivor" was the journey into my "self." The longer I was out there, the stronger I became — physically, mentally and emotionally. I channeled my heroes to help keep me strong. I kept my focus on winning the money for others because I knew many people in need were counting on me. As mentioned prior to the game, I planned to donate the entire \$1 million prize to veterans' charities to combat PTSD, traumatic brain injuries, depression and addiction and to promote suicide prevention. Sadly, 21 veterans a day take their own lives. We must do better as a nation to help bring our veterans all the way back home. Veterans make up 1% of our population and protect the other 99% of us. While I never had the honor of serving, it was my honor to serve those who served us. This thought fueled me on those tough days in the jungle. A person can endure anything if they can find meaning in their suffering. I knew whatever I was going through was nothing compared to what our heroes have endured, and knowing that I could help them if I won made me steadfast in my determination. I was relentless.

Q: Describe the moment you were named champion. What did that mean to you?

A: It was surreal and humbling. I was grateful for the amazing people I got to play with on the show. I was grateful to host Jeff Probst and CBS for the opportunity. I was grateful to God for keeping me strong and allowing me to help a population near and dear to me. In a time when we are so divided as a nation, I was grateful to be able to do something to bring people together. “Survivor” is a microcosm of the United States — made up of diverse people — and to be able to connect with people in a meaningful way, the way I’d like to see it done in our country, was important to me. In the end, the cast of season 43 played hard, and we made “Survivor” and television history by donating the entire prize to help people in need.

POST “SURVIVOR”

Q: Have you been able to watch your season since winning? If so, what was it like watching the events play out?

A: After season 43 aired, I took a break from “Survivor.” It was a lot to process. Then, one weekend, when my family was out of town, I watched the entire season again by myself. It was great seeing my old castaway friends reaching deep and battling together. It was a great experience. I was so blessed to have so many great people on the cast with me, and we are all friends to this day.

Q: What was the reaction of family and friends like when they found out you were the winner? Did they know immediately after filming, or was it a secret until the show’s broadcast concluded?

A: “Survivor” films in April and May and airs many months later. When I returned home in June, I was 30 pounds lighter. When my wife, Joanna, saw me, she cried. I looked feral. (I was feral!) Prior to the show, we had discussed what we would do with the money if I won. Joanna had signed all of the same nondisclosure contracts that I had signed, so I was able to confide in her. At the airport, I looked at her and said, “We won!” Then, I said, “... and I hope you’re still okay with what we discussed about the money because I did that, too!” We had a laugh, dried our eyes and had to sit on that information until Dec. 14!

It was very hard coming back from a big adventure and having to wait six months for the story to be told. Once season 43 finally started, it was a blast seeing friends and family watching me rumbling, bumbling and stumbling to the

end. I appreciate that so many people got to be on that amazing adventure with me. Forty three was an incredible season.

Q: How has winning “Survivor” impacted your life?

A: “Survivor” has been an incredible blessing for me. One of the great things I love about “Survivor” is how relatively flat it is in that everyone is a fan and once in a while a fan gets to play! Therefore, the “Survivor” community is really fun, grounded and cool. “Survivor,” like anything you do where you put your heart and soul to the test, helped me become a better person. Plus, the \$1 million is helping so many people and their families that it warms my heart every single time I think about it.

Q: What led you to donate the entire \$1 million prize to charities supporting veterans, first-responders and humanitarian organizations?

A: To be able to go on the show I love and to compete at a high level was amazing. To be able to pay it forward was even more profound to me. Our heroes who run toward danger to protect us need our help. I am grateful that this opportunity has been able to shed light on this important cause and that it has been able to help so many people and their families. My grandpa always said, “Talk is cheap, and it takes money to buy whiskey.” In short, put your money where your mouth is. It is not enough to call attention to something important — you must put action to it.

Q: “Survivor” pushes its contestants into difficult situations that require a great deal of perseverance, determination and decision-making. What words of advice would you give SFA students and alumni who are facing difficult situations?

A: Philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche said, “To live is to suffer. To survive is to find meaning in the suffering.” What matters most is how you walk through the fire in life. Grace and wisdom will come to you after much failure and folly. A life worth living should not be easy. Strive for a strenuous life. Attitude is everything. Whether you think you can or cannot, you are correct. The key is having the guts to go for it and the discipline to make things happen! You must anchor infinite possibility with necessity in order to actualize your dreams. You want to be successful? Dream big and be disciplined in the things that are necessary to accomplish your dreams. No one will do for you what you need to do for yourself. Lastly, do not waste time. Life is short. Life is now! Live it! ★



TOP: Mike Gabler bumps the fist of “Survivor” host Jeff Probst following a challenge. Gabler said winning “Survivor” was “surreal and humbling.”

BOTTOM: Mike Gabler smiles during a challenge in season 43 of “Survivor.” After winning, Gabler donated the entire \$1 million prize to various charities, a plan he and his family decided before the competition.

Photos courtesy of Robert Voets/CBS



To read more of Mike Gabler’s ‘93 Q&A or see a full list of charities he supported, visit gosfa.com/survivor.



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From the Association



Greetings, Jack Nation Alumni!

In Nacogdoches, 2024 is starting off with the hustle and bustle of a new spring semester that's generating energy

and enthusiasm for the year ahead. Beautiful azaleas are in bloom, and weekends are picking up at The Fredonia Hotel, Fredonia Brewery and downtown Nacogdoches. On campus, a brand-new dining hall is under construction across from Steen Hall, a new forestry complex is on the horizon, and a new center for entrepreneurship in the Rusche College of Business continues to evolve. Time to come back for a visit to Nac!

In February, our incredible group of SFA alumni ambassadors came back to campus for our ambassador weekend and brought ideas and inspiration before completing training on how to engage with alumni across Texas. They are key players in our mission of growing Lumberjack pride where you all live and work, both in East Texas and beyond. They will be working closely with our university team members to recruit students to SFA so they may enjoy the Lumberjack life we all so fondly remember. Look for more to come from our amazing ambassadors soon, and join us at our 2024 Ballpark Days! If you are interested in becoming an SFA Alumni Ambassador, give

our office a call!

You may have heard that we have announced the 11th president of SFA, Dr. Neal Weaver.

It was an honor and privilege to serve on the search committee with The University of Texas System regents and fellow SFA faculty and staff, as well as Nacogdoches community members.

I can tell you this: Dr. Weaver is going to be a fantastic fit for our beloved SFA culture and community on campus as well as Nacogdoches as a whole. "Transformative" is the word that comes to mind, and I can confidently say that in five to 10 years, everyone across the state and nation will say, "What is going on in the East Texas region and at SFA?" With his leadership successes, Dr. Weaver is uniquely equipped to unlock the potential and "art of the possible" to jump-start growth and evolve our next 100 years at SFA. Please help me extend a warm welcome to Dr. Weaver!

No matter where you are in your life journey, know this: 2024 is the year of transformation and growth across the SFA campus. We look forward to seeing you soon, whether that be on a visit back to Nac or at an SFA Alumni Association event near you soon!

Axe 'em, Jacks!

Erika Tolar '02
Nacogdoches
President, SFA Alumni Association

SFA ALUMNI ASSOCIATION OFFICERS

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Amber Lindsay
recording secretary

ALUMNI ASSOCIATION STAFF

Craig Turnage '00 & '05
executive director of alumni relations

Amber Lindsay
assistant to the executive director

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director of events and engagement

Derek Snyder '01
director of alumni relations

Alicia Roland Chatman '16
coordinator of gifts and records

Amie Ford '09 & '11
coordinator of events and engagement

Travis Turner '05 & '11
*coordinator of communications
and sponsorships*

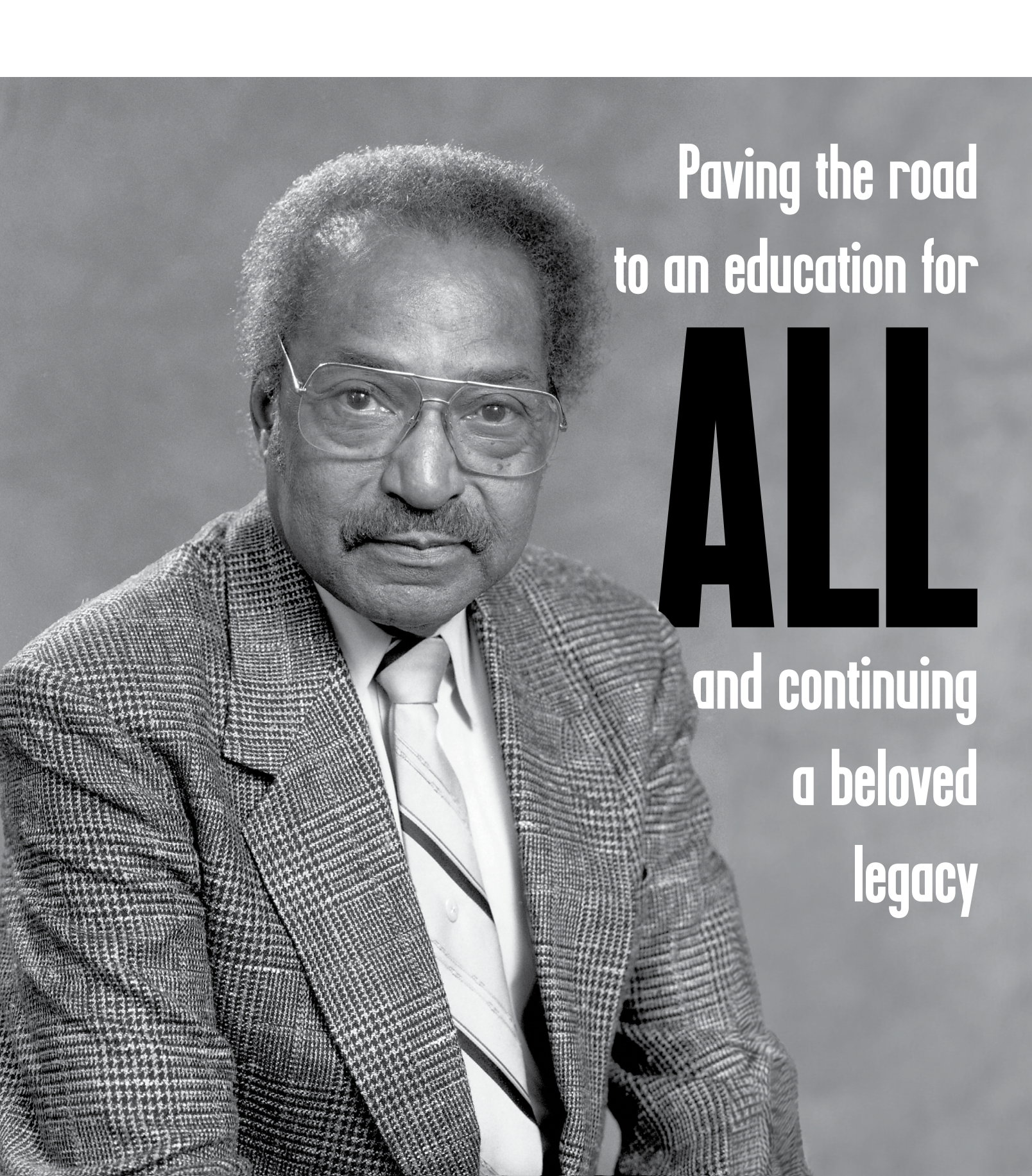
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THE SFA ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

is a nonprofit organization dedicated to engaging SFA students, alumni and friends to create an attitude of continued loyalty and support.



Paving the road
to an education for

ALL

and continuing
a beloved
legacy

Dr. Odis Rhodes

SFA's first Black professor is honored with an endowed memorial scholarship established by former students

STORY BY PARASTOO NIKRAVESH '18 & '23

THIS PAST SEPTEMBER, as the summer heat began to fade, Lumberjacks came together to celebrate SFA's centennial. Thousands of Lumberjack memories poured in during the months leading up to the Sept. 18 birthday bash, all reflecting on the formative time the university played in their lives.

While waxing nostalgic during this moment of celebration and reflection, some alumni stories became a humbling reminder that not everyone experienced equal access to the collegiate experience throughout those 100 years.

In fact, it's been only 55 years since SFA welcomed its first Black professor to the front of the classroom. The late Dr. Odis Rhodes joined SFA as a professor of reading and language arts in 1968 and made history during his more than 20-year tenure at SFA, leaving an indelible mark that will be remembered for years to come.

While a professor at SFA, Rhodes also was a faculty advisor for the Alpha Phi Alpha Iota Mu fraternity. To honor his tenacious pursuit of education and celebrate the centennial in a unique way, fraternity brothers established a memorial scholarship in his name. The Dr. Odis Rhodes Memorial Scholarship was officially endowed in September 2023 and will be awarded to an SFA student in fall 2025.

Creation of this scholarship offered a unique opportunity to reflect on the legacy Rhodes left behind and his place in SFA's 100-year story. ➔



LEFT: This photo from the 1977 Stone Fort yearbook introduces the first line of Alpha Phi Alpha Iota Mu men at SFA, whom Rhodes advised. Members were also pledges of the chapter at Wiley College in Marshall, Texas, where Rhodes earned his bachelor's degree in biology and physical education. (From left: Charles Caldwell, Billy Hill, Billy Moye and Robert Rison.)

"If there's anything else in the world I can do for a living to get me out of this cotton patch I want to do it ... So I went into teaching. Then I fell in love with learning."

- Dr. Odis Rhodes

Winters Hill Rhodes' interest in education began in childhood. He was born in a rural farming community 11 miles northwest of Nacogdoches called Winters Hill that, at the time of his birth in 1931, consisted of 10 to 20 African American families. His grandfather had a farm of approximately 200 acres, making him one of the few African Americans at the time to own a sizable tract of real estate to farm his own land.

Rhodes was interviewed in 2012 — three years before his passing — by SFA graduate students Jake Keeling and Tracy Allen for inclusion in the SFA East Texas Research Center's East Texas African American Oral Histories project.

During the interview, Rhodes described how the families of other adjoining farms were close-knit and often helped each other. He also mentioned the work was hard — it included pulling corn, digging potatoes, chopping cotton, and planting and picking cotton.

Rhodes knew it wasn't the job he wanted to do for the rest of his life. However, career options were sparse for Black people at the time, and Rhodes' teachers discouraged his aspirations of becoming a lawyer.

"They just saw no future in becoming a lawyer for a little poor Black boy in Lufkin, Texas," Rhodes said. "They'd say, 'It's best to be a teacher or a barber.'"

When asked what inspired him to go into higher education, Rhodes put it simply: "Cotton patch. I hated the cotton field, and I said, 'If there's anything else in the world I can do for a living to get me out of this cotton patch, I want to do it.' And, as I said, [teaching was] about the only opportunity that was open to me ... so I went into teaching. Then I fell in love with learning."

Unfortunately, there were obstacles to Rhodes' pursuit of education and to the aspirations of other children in the Winters Hill community, which had a school that included only first through sixth grades. The predominantly white community of Douglass three miles away had a school that went through the 12th grade, but it was segregated. This left

Winters Hill children to bus 15 miles away to Nacogdoches' E.J. Campbell High School.

"[Kids in the Winters Hill area] kind of looked forward to get out of sixth grade because we went to town to school at E.J. Campbell in Nacogdoches; but, of course, we would have preferred to simply go to Douglass, which was just right up the road," Rhodes recalled.

Rhodes stayed in Winters Hill until the seventh grade when his family moved to Lufkin. He graduated from Dunbar High School in 1950.

Besides distance, the poor condition of books and materials was another obstacle to Black students' education. Rhodes recalled not seeing his first new book until the 1940s when he was in the 10th grade. Books before then were passed down from the white schools and were often missing pages.

"So, you talk about Blacks being behind educationally," Rhodes said. "We've been pushed behind and chained behind and held behind for generations. So how in the heck can you expect a person to be at the same level when you held them back, giving them discarded information?"

The call to higher education

Despite living in Lufkin, Rhodes could not attend the then-segregated SFA, and in 1954, enrolled at Wiley College in Marshall, Texas, earning his bachelor's degree in biology and physical education.

He held a variety of teaching and administrative positions in public Texas schools in Waskom and Lufkin. Rhodes later pursued graduate degrees at Texas Southern University and the University of Houston, earning master's and doctoral degrees, respectively, before moving back home.

Although he had gained exceptional qualifications, his career advancement opportunities were thwarted by lingering intolerance upon his return to Lufkin. Luckily, a significant social shift was happening just up the road, enabling him to land an interview at SFA.

Under SFA President Ralph W. Steen, Rhodes was hired in 1968 as the first African American professor at SFA — and would remain the only one for six years.

He described his first few years as uneasy at times, but he eventually felt accepted by most on campus.

"And one thing [university administrators] didn't do, they didn't make a big pronouncement or announcement like 'Stephen F. Austin hires first Black professor.' They just quietly eased me in under the radar, and I think that helped," Rhodes said.

While some students were surprised and a few dropped Rhodes' class due to his race, he found after time he had garnered a good reputation among the students.

"Dr. Odis Rhodes was one of the finest individuals I have ever known," Dr. Thomas D. Franks, retired professor and dean of SFA's College of Education, said in a 2015 story in *The Daily Sentinel*. "[He] showed everyone who had the privilege to know him how to overcome adversities in a variety of forms in pursuit of worthy life goals," Franks said.

Franks first met Rhodes in the fall of 1967 when Rhodes interviewed for a teaching



Dr. Odis Rhodes and his wife, Hattie V. Rhodes, pose for a portrait that was printed in his celebration of life program. Hattie died one month after Odis in April 2015.



A member of SFA's Iota Mu chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha, Vince B. Adams helped organize Rhodes' memorial scholarship. Adams was initiated into the fraternity in spring 1985.

Photo by Parastoo Nikravesh '18 & '23

position at SFA. They worked together for 24 years until Rhodes' retirement in the winter of 1992.

"No one was respected, admired and loved by colleagues and students more than Dr. Rhodes," Franks said. "No students complained about how he treated them. Instead, they rated him highly as a professor and expressed appreciation for the manner in which he related to them."

In 1996, Rhodes was named professor emeritus of elementary education, becoming the first Black professor to receive that recognition at SFA.

Alpha Phi Alpha In addition to his teaching role, Rhodes was the faculty advisor of Alpha Phi Alpha Iota Mu chapter, where he made an incredible impact on many young Black men who attended SFA.

One former student, Vince B. Adams '88, helped organize Rhodes' memorial scholarship. He graduated with a bachelor's

degree in business administration and management and was a recipient of a full-ride scholarship for football. Adams met Rhodes when he was initiated in Alpha Phi Alpha in spring 1985.

Adams recalled how Rhodes was affectionately referred to as "Doc" by the men in the fraternity and said Rhodes looked after the brothers and emphasized their academic excellence. To the Alpha Phi Alpha men, Rhodes was an example of hard work and resilience.

"He was dedicated to African Americans, in particular African American males, getting their education, and that's why he was in higher ed," Adams said. "But still, being one of the only African American professors, he probably had a lot of challenges with that. Knowing how he transcended all of that to become the man that he was is inspiring."

Adams has carried Rhodes' experiences with him for many years, describing Rhodes' educational background as one of the main motivations for him and his fraternity brothers in establishing the scholarship.

The social and historical gravity of Rhodes being barred from attending SFA due to segregation then becoming its first Black professor was "major," Adams said. "We don't fully understand the plight people like him went through, but it's very humbling. I want younger generations to understand that. There isn't any excuse to not succeed academically. You just have to want to."

Honoring his legacy

After Rhodes passed away, Adams said several of the Alpha Phi Alpha men agreed to do something to honor his memory. That's when conversations of a memorial scholarship began.

Adams praised the support of Daron Deckard '87, another Alpha Phi Alpha brother who helped organize this scholarship, as well as Dr. Alton Frailey '83 & '85, former member of SFA's board of regents. Ultimately, the Alpha Phi Alpha brothers raised \$29,830 — more than the original goal of \$25,000.

"I thank God for the tenacity of the ones who gave," Adams said. "There were a lot of people who gave that weren't even members of the fraternity, like [Rhodes'] family. Even his former church in Lufkin, First Mission Baptist Church, donated. So, people who knew his legacy contributed to the cause."

Adams hopes those who receive the scholarship look up Rhodes' history and learn about the type of man he was — and ultimately pay it forward, challenging other alumni to make a difference for students.

"We got what we wanted, and to God be all the glory," Adams said. "We can make a difference in some kids' lives who attend our beloved Stephen F. Austin State University." ★

ALUMNI EVENTS

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— SFAAlumni.com/Events —



TAKE ME OUT TO THE BALL GAME

For pregame information, visit SFAAlumni.com/events or scan below.
Game times listed below.

SAN ANTONIO MISSIONS
Friday, May 31 | **7:05 p.m.**

ROUND ROCK EXPRESS
Saturday, June 1 | **7:15 p.m.**

FRISCO ROUGH RIDERS
Friday, June 28 | **7:05 p.m.**

SUGAR LAND SPACE COWBOYS
Saturday, June 29 | **7:05 p.m.**



HOUSTON ASTROS
Saturday, June 15 | **3:10 p.m.**



TEXAS RANGERS
Saturday, July 20 | **6:05 p.m.**



Class Notes

1970s

Ken Bragg '72 was appointed by Arkansas Gov. Sarah Huckabee Sanders to the Arkansas State Board of Education. Bragg received a Bachelor of Science in Forestry.

Gayle Stephens '72 was awarded a Lifetime Friend's Membership by the Friends of Kountze Public Library. Stephens received a Bachelor of Science in elementary education.

Cliff Todd '74 was appointed by Texas Gov. Greg Abbott to the Sabine River Authority board of directors. Todd received a Bachelor of Science in general agriculture.

Brian '77 and Kristine Carrow Kissell '77 traveled to the Sign Post Forest in Watson Lake, British Columbia, to leave a little bit of SFA spirit. There are over 100,000 signs in the forest. Both Brian and Kristine received a Bachelor of Science in elementary education.

Patricia Taylor Wells '77 published her book, "Maple Point," in January. Wells received a Bachelor of Arts in French.



Neal Franklin '84 was sworn in as Smith County judge in November 2022. Franklin received a Bachelor of Science in education with an emphasis in physical education.

Tina McGuffin '84 & '92 was named executive director of the Harrison County Historical Museum. McGuffin received a Bachelor of Science in vocational home economics and a Master of Education in early childhood education.

Michael "Shane" Allen '85 & '01 received his CompTIA Security+ certificate. He is a lecturer in Oklahoma State University at Oklahoma City's Information Systems and Technologies Department. Allen received a Bachelor of Science in computer science and a Master of Business Administration in general business.



Nancy Barlar '85 was named Dallas Market Center's senior executive director of new business. Barlar received a Bachelor of Arts in communication.



Mona Kamel Bryner '85 retired in May after decades working in multiple industries, including dining, automotive, tax, insurance and higher education. Bryner received a Bachelor of Arts in journalism.

Hudson Holmes '85 was named 2023 Realtor of the Year in the Galveston County Daily News Readers Choice Awards. Holmes received a Bachelor of Business Administration in accounting.

Robert Belt '88 of Houston was appointed by Texas Gov. Greg Abbott to the State Securities Board. Belt received a Bachelor of Business Administration in accounting.

Dr. Logan Faris '93, '95 & '06 of Leander, Texas, has been named an area superintendent with Round Rock Independent School District. Faris received a Bachelor of Science in biology, a Master of Education in secondary education and a Doctorate in Education with an emphasis in educational leadership.



Adalberto Garcia Jr. '93 was named El Paso Independent School District's superintendent of elementary schools. Garcia received a Master of Education in secondary education.



Dr. Roel Lopez '93 received the Conservation Trailblazer Award from the Dallas Safari Club, which celebrates the significant contributions of wildlife professionals to game and nongame wildlife conservation. Lopez received a Bachelor of Science in Forestry.

Bart Blair '94 was named chief financial officer for Carthage Independent School District. Blair received a Bachelor of Business Administration in finance.

Dave Conger '94 was named national sales manager for CERATIZIT's west region. Conger received a Bachelor of Business Administration in marketing.

David Garza '94 was named chief of police for the Lufkin Independent School District. Garza received a Bachelor of Arts in criminal justice law enforcement.

Dr. Tyrone Sylvester '94 received the Distinguished Service Award from the Texas Association of School Personnel Administrators. Sylvester received a Bachelor of Music.

Paulette Hartman '95 was named city manager of North Richland Hills. Hartman received a Bachelor of Arts in public administration.



Sharon McLain Jones '95 & '98 was named executive director of The Blake, a luxury assisted living and memory care community in Tyler, Texas. Jones received a Bachelor of Science in agribusiness and a Master of Science in general agriculture.

1980s



Todd Zurik '80 received his certified reverse mortgage professional designation in August 2023. Approximately 250 loan originators in the U.S. have this designation. He has been in the Mortgage Industry for over 30 years. Zurik received a Bachelor of Science in Forestry.



Gordon Betts '81 retired from Tyler Junior College after 18 years teaching human anatomy and physiology. Betts received a Bachelor of Science in Agriculture.

Colleen Coman Durham '83 retired from teaching and coaching after 38 years as a middle school teacher. She spent 12 years in Pecos, Texas, and 26 years in Del Rio, Texas. Durham received a Bachelor of Science in physical education.

Donnie Pitchford '83 was inducted to the Carthage Main Street Arts Walk of Fame. Pitchford received a Bachelor of Fine Arts in art.

1990s



Roland "Buddy" Timme '90 was named director of parks and recreation for the City of Lufkin. Timme received a Bachelor of Science in kinesiology.

Class Notes



Byron Wilkinson '97 was named president and general manager of KVUE, TEGNA's ABC affiliate serving Austin. Wilkinson received a Bachelor of Arts in journalism.

2000s

Ayo Taylor-Dixon '00 & '02 was named deputy athletic director for strategic communications and brand advancement at San Diego State University. Taylor-Dixon received a Bachelor of Business Administration in marketing and a Master of Interdisciplinary Studies.

Jennifer Wade Winston '00 was appointed by Texas Gov. Greg Abbott to the Texas State Board of Examiners of Professional Counselors. Winston received a Bachelor of Business Administration in finance and is a former member of the SFA board of regents.



Cassidy Lakota '02 was named the 2022-23 Texas Girls Coaches Association's Cheerleading Assistant Coach of the Year. She most recently accepted the position as head cheerleading coach at Birdville High School. Lakota received a Bachelor of Science in health science.



Dr. Brett A. Richardson '02 was recently appointed director of bands and Baenziger Professor of Music at Texas Lutheran University in Seguin. Richardson received a Bachelor of Music in music education.

Darla Nolen '03 was named superintendent of Academy Independent School District. Nolen received a Master of Education in educational leadership.



April Sarpy '04 was named administrative services director with Mesquite Independent School District. Sarpy received a Bachelor of Arts in English.

Katie (Clark) Mulligan '06, a reactive chemicals subject matter expert for Dow Chemical, was named a 2023 Rising Star of Safety by the National Safety Council. Mulligan received a Bachelor of Science in chemistry.



Anjuli Crouch '07 was awarded the prestigious Kinder Excellence in Teaching Award from the Kinder Foundation in August. This award highlights the accomplishments of individuals working in education and reinforces the important relationship between educational opportunity and a healthy, dynamic society. Crouch received a Bachelor of Science in child development and family living.

Corey Graves '07 was one of 30 teachers honored by the Country Music Association Foundation during its seventh Music Teachers of Excellence Ceremony. He works at Tony A. Jackson Middle School in Forney Independent School District. Graves received a Bachelor of Music.

Brandon '07 and Jessika Jefferson '12 of Houston announced the April birth of Zora Jefferson. Brandon received a Bachelor of Science in biology, and Jessika received a Bachelor of Arts in radio/TV.

Chris Skinner '07 was named 2023 Region 12 Superintendent of the Year. He is superintendent for Teague Independent School District. Skinner received a Master of Education in educational leadership.

Jonathan Patke '08 was hired as a defensive coordinator for Duke University's football program. Patke received a Bachelor of Business Administration in management.



Amber Burda '09 was named chief revenue officer for the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo. Burda received a Bachelor of Science in hospitality administration.



Francesca Chacon '09 & '11 announced the November 2023 birth of son, Luca Rocky Chacon. Chacon received a Bachelor of Science in biology and a Bachelor of Science in Nursing.

Taylor Kovar '09 of Lufkin, Texas, has been named an Investopedia Top 100 financial advisor for 2023. Kovar received a Bachelor of Business Administration in finance.



Dr. Josh Nation '09, '13 & '17 was named principal of Davis Ninth Grade School in Aldine Independent School District. Nation received a Bachelor of Science in Interdisciplinary Studies, Master of Education in educational leadership and Doctorate in Education with an emphasis in educational leadership.



Monique Davis Williams '09 of Pearland, Texas, was named Welcome Center director at the University of Houston - Clear Lake. Williams received a Bachelor of Arts in communication studies.

2010s



Walter Tacquard '10 became a police sergeant with the Nacogdoches Police Department in 2023. Tacquard received a Bachelor of Science in Interdisciplinary Studies.



Aaron and Jessica Winder '10 of Las Vegas, Nevada, announce the July birth of Navy Rose and Savannah Grace. Jessica received a Bachelor of Science in psychology.

Tim Knicky '11 — former linebacker for the Green Bay Packers, New York Jets and Cincinnati Bengals — was named athletic coordinator and head football coach for Legacy Ranch High School. Knicky received a Bachelor of Science in kinesiology.

Sylvia Balew '12 of Kirbyville was named a disaster assessment and recovery agent for Texas A&M Agrilife Extension Service's District 14. Balew received a Bachelor of Science in Agriculture with an emphasis in agriculture development and production.

Colleen Embersics '13 of Baton Rouge, Louisiana, was named chief veterinary neurologist and neurosurgeon at the Louisiana State University Veterinary Teaching Hospital and has since opened the long-awaited LSU Neurology and Neurosurgery Service. Embersics received a Bachelor of Science in Agriculture.

Class Notes



Justin Ikpo '13 had his work as a photographer featured in Shoutout DFW magazine. Photography is a passion project he undertakes when he's not working full time as a communication specialist with the Texas A&M University School of Law. Ikpo received a Bachelor of Arts in journalism and secondary education.



Jenny Peters '13 was selected as the Department of Texas Veterans of Foreign Wars recipient of the VFW Smart/Maher National Citizenship Education Teacher Program for 2022-23. Her nomination went to the state level, where she was named the Texas Smart/Maher Elementary Teacher of the Year. Peters received a Bachelor of Science in Interdisciplinary Studies.

Chad Lancaster '14 and wife, Alesha, opened the restaurant Sailer's Place Café and Bakery in Florence, Texas, named after their daughter, Sailer. Lancaster received a Bachelor of Science in psychology.

Lisa Sprague '14 was named the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service family and community health agent for Hopkins County. Sprague received a Bachelor of Science in Interdisciplinary Studies.

Norris White Jr. '15 was recognized by Humanities Texas as a 2023 commended teacher. White received a Master of Arts in history.



Jon '16 and Emma (Carr) Godeaux '19 were married Oct. 1 in Dallas. Jon received a Bachelor of Business Administration in business economics, and Emma received a Bachelor of Science in mass communication.



Mackenzie '17 & '17 and Spencer Blackwell welcomed their son Nixon Taylor Blackwell Aug. 3. Mackenzie received a Bachelor of Business Administration in public accountancy and a Master of Professional Accountancy.

Jacob Lusk '17 was named director of career and technical education for Pine Tree Independent School District in Longview, Texas. Lusk received a Bachelor of Arts in mass media.



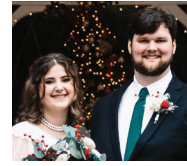
Jake '17 and Meagan (McNabb) Miserak '17 celebrated the birth of Miles Bradley Miserak Sept. 18. Jake, the son of **Mark '87 and Connie (Page) Miserak '88**, received a Bachelor of Science in communication studies; and Meagan received a Bachelor of Science in interior design.



Frankston Elementary School received the 2023 National Blue Ribbon School award from the U.S. Department of Education for exemplary achievement in gap closing. Pictured receiving the award in a Washington, D.C., ceremony are SFA alumnae **Melanie Blackwell '17**, who received a Master of Education and is principal of Frankston Elementary School; **Melissa Wimmer '18**, who received a Master of Education and is assistant principal of Frankston Elementary School; and **Paige Nicole "Nicci" Cook '94 & '98**, who received a Bachelor of Science in Interdisciplinary Studies and Master of Education and is superintendent of Frankston Independent School District.



Caitlyn '19 and Connor Vilven '19 announce the February birth of their first child, Claire Alayne Vilven. Photo taken by fellow alumna, **Sarah Ware '19**. Caitlyn received a Bachelor of Science in Interdisciplinary Studies, and Connor received a Bachelor of Business Administration in international business.



Brooke '21 and Cade Brewster '22 married Dec. 23 before road-tripping to New York City to watch the New Year's Eve ball drop. Brooke received a Bachelor of Science in Interdisciplinary Studies, and Cade received a Bachelor of Science in computer science.



JoNae Malbrough '22 was hired by ESPN and nominated for a sports Emmy during her first year working with "NFL Live." She also was interviewed by The Official Black Magazine, and the article was published in June 2023. Malbrough received a Bachelor of Arts in mass communication. ★

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2020s

Stacie Simmons '20 of Euless, Texas, became an LGBT crisis counselor for the new national suicide hotline 988. Simmons received a Bachelor of Social Work.

In Memoriam

DR. VERNA BARRON



Dr. Verna Barron, former SFA professor, passed away Oct. 29.

Barron joined the Department of Psychology at SFA in 1977, where she taught a wide breadth of courses until her retirement in 2006. In addition to teaching, she maintained a successful private practice for many years.

After graduating as valedictorian from Spearsville High School in 1966, Barron excelled at Louisiana Tech University, graduating with honors in 1970. She earned her master's and doctoral degrees from Oklahoma State University.

NANCY DUNN



Nancy Dunn, a 1972 graduate and longtime SFA staff member, passed away July 2.

Dunn earned her Master of Education in counseling from SFA while raising three daughters. She had a 35-year career in the Office of Admissions, where she rose to become assistant director of admissions.

Dunn attended First Baptist Church throughout her residence in Nacogdoches and loved the members of her longstanding Sunday school class. She was also a dedicated volunteer for many years at Nacogdoches Medical Center and a member of the Newcomers' Club.

PATRICIA DIANNE ELLIOTT

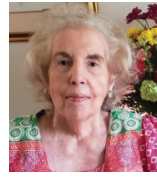


Patricia Dianne Elliott, a 1984 graduate, passed away Nov. 15.

Elliott earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts and graduated magna cum laude. She was also a member of Alpha Chi. After graduation, she was employed by Temple-Inland as a photographer before moving to Santa Barbara, California, and received a Master of Arts through the Brooks Institute.

This degree opened many doors, allowing her to work for companies such as Patagonia, The Territory Ahead, The Independent and the Santa Barbara News Press, where she was the photographer for a real estate magazine insert. She photographed celebrities and their homes, including Betty White, Tom Bosley, Ann Landers and Dick Butkus.

MARY LOUISE FLENIKEN



Mary Louise Fleniken, a 1957 graduate and former staff member, passed away Jan. 11.

Fleniken earned a Bachelor of Science in home economics and began her professional career working at SFA, where she made many lifelong friendships. She later moved to a career with McKinney Drilling Company, serving as an executive assistant to R.W. McKinney, Jack McKinney, John McKinney, Bob Banks and Jack Raines for many years until she retired.

MARK "FRIEDO" FRIEDMAN



Mark "Friedo" Friedman, a 1991 graduate and former SFA Alumni Association board member, passed away Oct. 1.

Friedman was a beloved radio personality and creator of the Friedo Nation podcast studio. He brought kindness, amiability and benevolence to the community and coworkers throughout his career in sports media, which included stops at ESPN Radio and Cumulus Media stations.

He volunteered with the Special Olympics, pouring his heart and soul into supporting and advocating for the Olympians, whom he held dear to his heart.

DR. NELSON JONES



Dr. Nelson Jones, a 1947 graduate and donor, passed away July 13.

Jones graduated from SFA with a Bachelor of Science in chemistry and mathematics. After college, he was employed by Gulf Oil Corporation in Port Arthur until 1951.

He graduated from The University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston in 1955 with his Doctor of Medicine then went into the U.S. Air Force, where he served as a physician with the rank of captain. After his discharge in 1958, he moved to Waxahachie, Texas, to practice family medicine until his retirement. He was known for his gentle demeanor, clinical acumen and ability to listen to his patients.

Jones also established the Nelson W. Jones M.D. Scholarship at SFA, which has helped many students from rural East Texas over the years and continues to do so. Memorial designations and/or contributions in his honor may be made to the Nelson W. Jones M.D. Scholarship Fund at Stephen F. Austin State University, c/o Alumni Association, P.O. Box 6096, SFA Station, Nacogdoches, Texas 75962.

In Memoriam

THOMAS "TUCK" KEMPER JR.



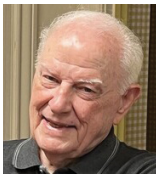
Thomas "Tuck" Kemper Jr., a 1969 SFA graduate, passed away Feb. 14.

After graduating from Marshall High School in 1964, Kemper came to SFA and met the love of his life, Sally York Kemper '70. The two were married in 1968, and he graduated with a Bachelor of Science in biology in 1969. He also joined the Delta Sigma Phi fraternity and played a vital role in the group's continued engagement with the university.

Kemper went on to serve as a helicopter pilot in the U.S. Air Force during wartime and as a southern Baptist missionary. Kemper taught Sunday school and was a deacon at Arp Emmanuel Baptist Church.

Kemper's love for SFA, the Sawyers and his fellow fraternity members ran deep. Even during his last days in the hospital, he found out his nurse was an SFA graduate and walked her through how to become an SFA Alumni Association life member. To carry on their legacy, the Kempers established the Tuck and Sally Kemper Memorial Scholarship, which annually supports SFA students studying biology or education studies.

BURL KIRKLAND



Burl Kirkland, a 1960 graduate, passed away Oct. 1.

After four years in the U.S. Air Force, where he rose to the rank of staff sergeant, Kirkland attended SFA and earned his Bachelor of Science in physics and mathematics. Following graduation, he was employed by RCA at Patrick Air Force Base in Florida, where he was a lead mathematician performing pre- and post-flight calculations for launches from both Atlantic and Pacific missile ranges.

In 1963, he was hired as an aerospace engineer at NASA in Houston and was instrumental in developing the launch escape system and heat shield for the Apollo program. His name is imprinted on microfiche inside a time capsule left on the moon by the crew of Apollo 11.

Kirkland also contributed to Apollo 15-17 missions. Following Apollo, he managed the flight crew equipment prepack facility for the space shuttle program until his retirement in 1989. He considered it a privilege to have a part in the nation's space program.

DR. ROBERT NEIL MATHIS

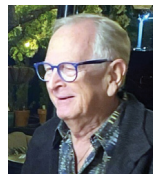


Dr. Robert Neil Mathis, former SFA professor, passed away Nov. 14.

Mathis completed his undergraduate degree at Texas A&M University and his doctoral degree in history from the University of Georgia. His interests were varied and many, but his academic passion focused on the U.S. Civil War era.

He joined SFA as a history professor in the late 1960s. He achieved tenure and held several leadership positions, including as Faculty Senate officer in 1979 then chair 1981-82, as well as the Department of History chair for many years until stepping down in 2000. Mathis partially retired in 2005 and was named professor emeritus in 2008.

JACK MURFF



Jack Murff, a 1971 graduate, passed away May 7.

Murff graduated from SFA with a Bachelor of Fine Arts, despite his college years being interrupted by the Vietnam War. He was known as an excellent citizen and entrepreneur, owning and operating several businesses, including The Greenhouse Pot Shop, Brick Street Antiques, and The Flower Shop and Greenhouse.

Murff was highly active in the Nacogdoches community. He also was an active member of his college fraternity, Sigma Tau Gamma, and served as advisor and house manager of the fraternity house on Mound Street for many years. His community service included the Nacogdoches Chamber of Commerce, Texas Blueberry Festival, Downtown Merchants Association and the Nacogdoches Christmas Parade. Most recently, Murff had served on the board of the SFA Friends of Visual Arts, an organization near and dear to his heart.

HOLLIS TURNHAM



Hollis Turnham, a 1973 graduate, passed away Aug. 5.

Growing up in East Texas, Turnham attended Nacogdoches public schools, which launched her legal and public service career as an advocate for elderly Americans. After graduating from SFA in 1973 with a bachelor's degree in English and history, she graduated from The University of Texas School of Law in 1977 with a Juris Doctor.

Turnham was a towering figure in advocacy for older adults in Michigan for decades. She chaired the Elder Law and Advocacy section of the State Bar of Michigan and worked with numerous federal agencies on rights for elders. She also was named the John Heinz Senate Fellow in Aging and continued her work in that role in Washington, D.C. The National Association of State Long-term Care Ombudsman established the Hollis Turnham Advocacy Award in her honor.

In Memoriam

Marilyn J. Ashby '87 of Tomball, Dec. 3
 Margaret Baldwin '66 of Sapulpa, Oklahoma, Jan. 28, 2023
 Juanita Barbosa '73 of Tyler, June 5
 George S. Barham III '70 of Nacogdoches, Sept. 22
 Yondell C. Barr '87 of Center, Sept. 2
 J.L. Beaird '50 of Waco, Dec. 3
 Timothy Begley '83 of Longview, June 30
 Albert Billingsley '49 & '70 of Waco, July 30
 Bobby Bittick '59 & '63 of Kilgore, Dec. 12
 James Branham '66 & '71 of Troup, Dec. 29
 Clarence Brazil '61 of Lufkin, June 12
 Ada Brooks '90 of Pollok, Sept. 30
 Dr. Ray D. Burkett '61 of Germantown, Tennessee, Sept. 1
 Kevin John Butler '83 of Houston, Nov. 18
 Fredora Byrd '63 & '71 of Nacogdoches, Dec. 26
 Nancy Carlow '66 of Texarkana, Jan. 13
 Margie Centers '79 of Longview, Sept. 29
 Yvonne Chaney '68 & '72 of Nacogdoches, Sept. 6
 Harold Clark '70 of Highlands, Jan. 10
 Ronald Compton '69 of Cumming, Georgia, Aug. 26
 Susie Crafton '84 of Houston, Aug. 16
 Robert "Bob" Crump '59 of Timpson, Dec. 30
 Evelyn Dailey '66 & '72 of Chandler, Oct. 3
 Phyllis Daniel '95 of Jackson, Tennessee, June 29
 Jerome Davis '62 of Colleyville, Dec. 11
 Patricia Davis '72 of Colleyville, July 18
 Randall Dowling '85 of Alto, Dec. 10
 Sally Eaves '74 of Tomball, July 17
 Charles Farrell '77 & '99 of Longview, Dec. 8
 Cynthia Freeman '68 of Shreveport, Louisiana, Oct. 12
 Cody Wayne Garza '07 of Galveston, June 29
 Deborah "Debbie" Sue Gober '73 of Dallas, Feb. 27, 2023
 Felicita Emma Good '67 & '71 of Jarrell, Feb. 15, 2023
 Wallace Courtney Goodman '69 of Austin, Aug. 25
 Dixie Goolsby '58 & '61 of Bryan, July 10
 Mark Goolsby '82 of Nacogdoches, Oct. 26
 Loretta Goree '84 of Longview, Dec. 10
 Charles "Bill" Gribble Jr. '66 & '68 of Houston, March 11, 2023
 Brenda Haigwood '84 of Waskom, Jan. 4
 Daniel Hanrahan '90 of Dallas, Oct. 1
 David Harkness '72 of Mesquite, Sept. 18
 Emily Harris '49 of Nacogdoches, Dec. 4

Kathryn Hauk '69 of Franklin, Tennessee, Aug. 13
 Linda G. Herring '81 of McKinney, Dec. 3
 Vicky Hewitt '79 & '83 of Trinity, Oct. 12
 Robert Hough '70 of Nacogdoches, Aug. 28
 Alice Sue Koonce Howard '80 of Center, July 8
 Thomas Hughes '99 of Newton, Aug. 26
 Dr. John Johnson '72 of Quitman, Oct. 2
 Wilbur Johnson '70 of Houston, Dec. 28
 Rene Jones of Lufkin, SFA English instructor, Sept. 5
 Lisa Jordan '89 of Rowlett, Aug. 6
 Charles Kent '67 & '68 of Crockett, Oct. 22
 William James King '15 of Garrison, Sept. 28
 Mary C. Koroscik '85 of Kingwood, Sept. 5
 Jerry Landrum '62 of Nacogdoches, Nov. 16
 T Lang '60 of Dallas, Sept. 23
 Marilyn H. Lee '56 & '64 of Nacogdoches, Sept. 3
 Stephen Weldon Lee '76 of Boones Mill, Virginia, June 12
 Dan Longacre '67 of Lufkin, June 11
 Frances Diann Maxey '78 of Lufkin, Sept. 10
 Vicki Maxwell '72 & '73 of Tyler, Aug. 26
 Sandra "Sandy" May '73 & '76 of Lufkin, Nov. 14
 Leslie Paige Green McFadden '86 & '87 of Austin, July 31
 Delton Ray McGuire '91 of Abilene, Jan. 25, 2023
 Elizabeth Hope Walker Means '57 of Cuero, Dec. 9
 Thomas Miller '80 & '99 of Nacogdoches, Dec. 7
 Kandice Rhena Stotts Montelongo '06 of Lufkin, July 22
 Julie Anne Moore '04 of Whitehouse, Aug. 4
 Timothy Morgan '79 of Spring, July 5
 Margie Nell Morrison '57 of Hemphill, Dec. 13
 Earl Mouton '77 & '80 of Nacogdoches, Dec. 18
 Genie Bird Naff '75 of Katy, Nov. 1
 Philippe David Nave Jr. '85 of Broomfield, Colorado, Aug. 20
 Barbara Bates Neff '54 of Nacogdoches, June 3
 Timothy Wynn Nesbitt '83 of Lewisville, July 15
 Mary Adele Oden '87 of Kilgore, Aug. 21
 Denis Gerry Olson '71 of Stamford, Oct. 22
 Mary Pass '60 of Carthage, Jan. 12
 Margaret Peacock '49 of Tyler, July 9
 David Pennington '90 of Plano, Dec. 8
 Angela "Angie" Pittman '92 of Nacogdoches, June 12
 Lisa Hagens Pitts '81 of Shreveport, Louisiana, Aug. 27
 Walter Plumhoff '69 of Port Neches, Oct. 7

Kaye S. Poe '75 of Anahuac, Feb. 16, 2022
 Judith Rhodes Popejoy-James '76 & '91 of Jasper, Aug. 30
 Hollis D. Powell '55 & '60 of Pasadena, Jan. 25
 Norleine Power '78 of Rusk, June 18
 Becky Hudgens Raudebaugh '75 of Hurst, Nov. 15, 2022
 Marian Richardson '63 of Kilgore, Aug. 16
 Melton Roberts '70 of Brenham, Dec. 8
 Antonio "Tony" Santana '22 of Diboll, Dec. 8
 Johnny Horace Savage III '70 of Livingston, Aug. 10
 Richard Scott '77 of Pasadena, Oct. 29
 Patricia "Pat" Simmons '73 of Neches, Aug. 6
 Laura Smiley '66 of Tyler, Jan. 2
 Barbara Alford Smith '76 & '84 of Tenaha, July 2
 Elliot James Soeder '06 of The Woodlands, May 15
 Rachel Sorrells '77 of Winters, Nov. 22
 Malcolm Spruell III '69 of Jefferson, Oct. 20
 Benjamin Stewart Jr. '71 of Colmesneil, Dec. 11
 Marion Tutts Stoddard '68 of Garrison, Dec. 21
 William "Larry" Stradt '69 of Lufkin, Aug. 14
 Carol Guinette Tell '61 of Tyler, Oct. 30
 Linda Torres '75 of Lindale, Oct. 28
 Richard Trujillo Jr. '02 of Hearne, Oct. 30
 Mary Uresti '01 of Nacogdoches, Sept. 23
 Vernon Wade Jr. '72 of Henderson, Aug. 23
 Bobby Wadsworth '01 of San Augustine, Dec. 27
 Kenneth D. Ward '06 of Tyler, July 18
 Roger Wareing '83 of Zavalla, Aug. 30
 Morgan "Brooke" Watson '10 of Longview, June 12
 Jon Weidman '70 of Longview, Aug. 11
 John Whitten '80 & '83 of Kilgore, Jan. 5
 Jacqueline "Jackie" Williams '98 of Sugar Land, June 22
 Victor Ray Williams '77 of Dallas, July 9
 Teri Wilson '99 of Nacogdoches, Dec. 6
 Gary Wood '75 of Weatherford, Nov. 13



SFA students

Eli Perrin of Arkadelphia, Arkansas, Aug. 15
 Timothy Emborgo of Nacogdoches, Jan. 10

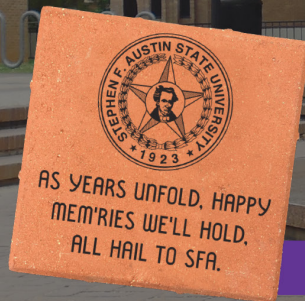
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