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SAWDUST

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

INTRODUCING PRESIDENT NEAL WEAVER



A close-up photograph of a lowball glass filled with a dark amber liquid, likely whiskey. A large, clear ice cube is partially submerged in the liquid. A thin slice of lemon, twisted into a spiral, is perched on the rim of the glass. The background is a dark, textured surface, possibly a wooden bar top.

*the
Fredonia
Hotel*

CALL ME

OLD FASHIONED



President's Letter



Dear Lumberjacks,
I'd like to start my first letter to you by saying how honored Kristi and I both are to join your vibrant SFA family. I am filled with a deep sense of gratitude and commitment to continuing the legacy of

excellence that defines our institution, which has an incredible 100-year history we are excited to help build upon. We look forward to meeting you, our dedicated alumni, whose contributions and achievements have shaped the dynamic history and promising future of our university.

It's already been an active summer. Since officially taking office in May, we have traveled across the state to meet many of you at events like SFA Ballpark Days, visiting with alumni and students along the way. And we loved being able to attend our summer Showcase Saturday, which saw a 40% increase in attendees! It blew us away to see so much excitement for SFA, both at Showcase and our summer Orientation. We anticipate another strong incoming first-year undergraduate cohort, which we will continue to build on as we grow enrollment.

There are many exciting things going on around campus that I want to make you aware of. Construction of our new dining facility is making great progress, and we look forward to opening it in 2025. Early next year, we will break ground on a new \$80 million building to house the Arthur Temple College of Forestry and Agriculture.

This spring, two SFA faculty members received the prestigious honor of being named Fulbright Scholars for the 2024-25 academic year — congratulations to Dr. Roslyn Fraser, associate professor of sociology, and Candace Hicks, associate professor of art! SFA's Nelson Rusche College of Business successfully achieved the extension of its accreditation by AACSB International, one of only 6% of business colleges globally to receive the accreditation, placing SFA in an elite category of business colleges worldwide.

Our nursing program continues to be one of the best in the state: our Master of Science in Nursing, family nurse practitioner program

had a 100% pass rate for their national certification exam while our Bachelor of Science in Nursing has the highest pass rate for first-time test takers of the NCLEX-RN exam among all Texas four-year public universities with more than 100 graduates. Soaring into the future of aviation sciences, SFA became the first institution in the nation to fly the Tecnam P-Mentor two-seat trainer airplane, equipping Lumberjacks with the most advanced training platform available in the country.

Effective July 1, we joined the Southland Conference for all sports, with the exception of bowling, to restore our regional rivalries and give so many of you the opportunity to watch more games that feature our student-athletes, spirit team members and the Lumberjack Marching Band. SFA's return to the Southland Conference will dramatically decrease the amount of travel for student-athletes; the number of class days student-athletes will miss; and travel expenses, which will be reinvested in the student-athlete experience and provide a greater economic impact for Nacogdoches and East Texas. The move will allow us to strengthen our position in Division I athletics and prepare us for the future.

This fall, we will begin work on three key initiatives to chart the course for SFA's future:

1. Strategic Plan
2. Campus Master Plan
3. Long-Range Financial Plan.

In addition to the work of setting our vision for this institution, we will continue our work for the 89th Legislative Session.

We have an exciting semester ahead, and I hope you will take the time to make a trip back to Nacogdoches — there is no better time to get involved with SFA than now as we enter boldly into our new future. We need your support and input as we chart the course for the next 100 years. Our alma mater says, "Oh future bright, 'neath the Purple and White," and there is no doubt that the future for SFA is indeed bright.

Axe 'em!

Dr. Neal Weaver
President
Stephen F. Austin State University



STEPHEN F. AUSTIN STATE UNIVERSITY PRESIDENT'S CABINET

Dr. Neal Weaver
president

Dr. Lorenzo Smith
*provost, executive vice president
for academic affairs*

Jane Ann Bridges '87 & '91
chief audit officer

Michael Coffee '94
*vice president for information technology
and chief information officer*

Dr. Michara DeLaney-Fields
interim vice president for student affairs

Damon Derrick
vice president and general counsel

Dr. Lee Furbeck
*vice president
for enrollment management*

Judith Kruwell '85
vice president for finance

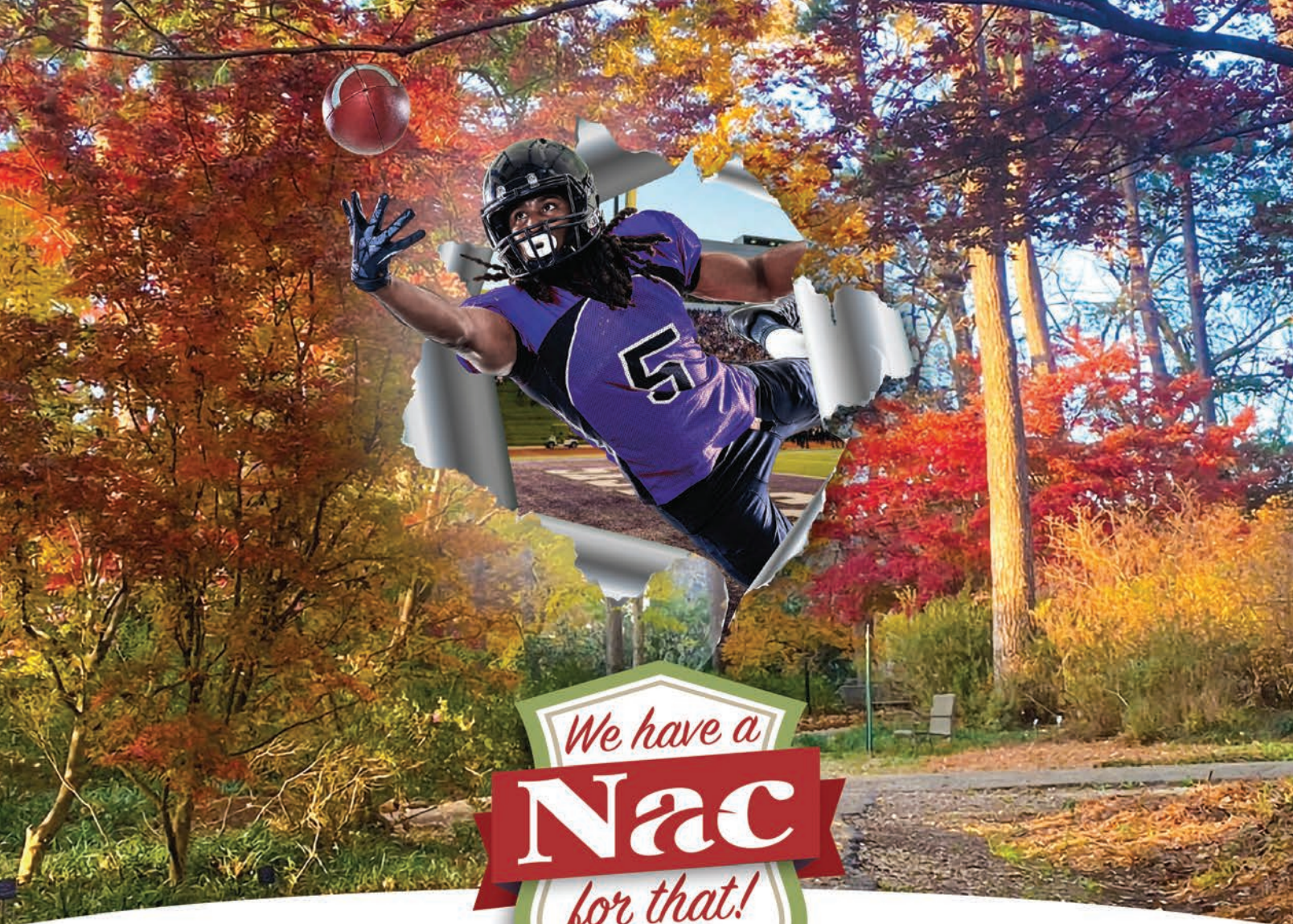
Michael McBroom
director of athletics

Gina Oglesbee '11
*senior vice president
for organizational effectiveness*

Jill Still '00
*vice president
for university advancement*

Dr. Charlotte Sullivan
director of governmental relations

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.



Fall Foliage and Football

Nothing says autumn like football and falling leaves. Take in a full serving of both on college football Saturdays in the Garden Capital of Texas. Plan your fall fun weekend with the VisitNac app or at VisitNac.com



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On the Cover



Lumberjack Orientation attendees. Already a regular presence at SFA events, the president shares his vision and hope for the institution's future. *Photo by Lizeth Garcia*

Sawdust

UNIVERSITY MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS

Korbin Pate '12 & '22
*interim executive director for
university marketing communications*

Misty Wilburn
*assistant to the executive director and
coordinator for advertising and public relations*

Robin Johnson '99 & '19
*Sawdust editor and art director
assistant director for publications and design*

Christine Broussard '10 & '20
*Sawdust deputy editor
assistant director for strategic communications*

Sarah Kouliavtsev '09 & '21
*Sawdust web developer
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director for web services

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assistant director for visual media

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Kubs Sabrsula-Mendoza '17
Meagan Rice '12

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Ricky Kennedy '10 & '14
James McMahan '17

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Roni Lias
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Nathan Wicker '19

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

SFA students become first in nation to fly Tecnam Aircraft's newest plane



SFA is the first institution in the United States to fly the Tecnam P-Mentor two-seat trainer airplane, equipping Lumberjacks with the most advanced training platform available in the country.

"SFA graduates will have a high-tech experience, and we'll be the first ones to have it," said Jack Gainer, chief instructor pilot for SFA's aviation sciences program. "Our students will be very notable when they begin searching for a career. They can say, 'I was a Flying Jack,' and the industry will know they are hiring graduates with experience."

Tecnam Aircraft is an Italian aircraft manufacturer and the oldest manufacturer in the world. The Tecnam P-Mentor is a state-of-the-art training plane created for flight schools that is affordable to maintain and uses less fuel than other training airplanes.

Offered through the James I. Perkins College of Education's School of Human Sciences, SFA's aviation sciences program is a partnership with HCH Aviation, a specialized aviation training school.

UT System affiliation allows SFA to partner with virtual well-being provider

Through funding made available as a result of SFA's affiliation with The University of Texas System, SFA has partnered with trusted virtual health and well-being provider TimelyCare to offer students free access to mental health and basic needs assistance.

"TimelyCare allows students to access a large pool of highly trained and diverse mental health professionals at no cost to them," said Clare Fite, director of Counseling Services in SFA's Health and Wellness Hub. "In addition to therapy, students can access crisis resources, self-assessments, peer support and education on a variety of topics that pertain to their overall well-being."

McBroom named SFA's director of athletics



Michael McBroom, former director of athletics at West Texas A&M University in Canyon, officially joined SFA as the director of athletics May 15.

"This is a dynamic time in college athletics, and our job is to set the stage so that we can achieve an unprecedented level of success across the board," he said. "SFA is going to carve out a niche that results in record numbers of championships, graduates and support

for all teams and all student-athletes."

During his 18 years as athletics director at WTAMU Athletics, WTAMU earned nine national championships and over 100 Lone Star Conference and NCAA Regional Championships, spearheaded initiatives that resulted in a 37% improvement in the academic success rate and GPAs of student-athletes, and set new attendance and ticket sales records across all sports.

SFA accepts bid to join Southland Conference for 2024-25 season

SFA's Department of Athletics accepted an invitation to join the Southland Conference as a full-time member effective July 1.

"The SLC is a conference on the rise, with visionary leadership and a strategic plan that aligns with our own goals for our athletics program and the university," said Michael McBroom, SFA's director of athletics. "This affiliation puts us in an incredibly competitive and historic athletic community, aligns us with regional peers in Texas and Louisiana, and allows us a greater opportunity to engage with our alumni, fans and prospective students across the entire region."

CARRI hosts groundbreaking ceremony for new research facility

SFA's Center for Applied Research and Rural Innovation hosted a groundbreaking ceremony June 18 for its new research facility at SFA's former Science Research Center at 7308 U.S. Highway 59 N. in Nacogdoches, Texas. Covering approximately 15 acres, the facility will serve as a hub for SFA resources to the Deep East Texas region when its reconstruction is completed in spring 2025.

News Briefs

Two SFA students accepted into Joint Admission Medical Program



Perla Tovar (right), junior biochemistry major from Lufkin, Texas, and McKenna Dillard, junior biochemistry major from Stephenville, Texas, were accepted into the Joint Admission Medical Program. This undergraduate pipeline program was created by the Texas Legislature

in 2001 to close gaps between participation and success for Texans pursuing their dreams of becoming doctors.

Every year, JAMP accepts two students from each participating university who are highly qualified but economically disadvantaged and want to pursue careers in medicine. Students participating in JAMP who meet eligibility requirements are guaranteed admission to a Texas medical school and awarded scholarships to support their educational journey.

Nelson Rusche College of Business celebrates extension of accreditation

SFA's Rusche College of Business has successfully achieved the extension of its accreditation by AACSB International — the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business. Globally, only 6% of business colleges have achieved accreditation by AACSB, which places the Rusche College of Business in an elite category of business colleges worldwide.

"In the world of higher education in business, AACSB accreditation is the highest mark of excellence," said Dr. Tim Bisping, dean of the college. "Our exceptional faculty and staff provide our students with business experiences and knowledge rivaling those of the best business schools in the world."

Two faculty members selected for Fulbright Scholar fellowships

This spring, two SFA faculty members received the prestigious honor of being named national Fulbright Scholars for the 2024-25 academic year.

As part of the program, Candace Hicks, associate professor of art in SFA's School of Art, will complete a research and creative project in the Hauts-de-France region from January to July 2025. Dr. Roslyn Fraser, associate professor in the Department of Anthropology, Geography and Sociology, will spend 10 months beginning this August in Port Louis, Mauritius, researching and teaching at the University of Technology.

Arthur Temple College of Forestry and Agriculture partners with Temper Sealy

A newly formed partnership between global bedding manufacturer Temper Sealy International and SFA's Arthur Temple College of Forestry and Agriculture promises to make progress toward the company's goal of achieving carbon neutrality in its global operations by 2040 while giving SFA students access to hundreds of acres of living labs to reforest and manage. Partnership in the initiative also sets the college up to fund future scholarships, assistantships and professional development for faculty members.

"This initiative with Temper Sealy is a great opportunity to continue to expand SFA forestry's knowledge and capacity for carbon sequestration and reforestation while providing many other educational, environmental and financial benefits to SFA, Temper Sealy and society in general," said Dr. Hans Williams, dean of the college.

SFA's Coleman named Jess Hay Graduate Fellow



SFA's Jordan Coleman, a Master of Arts in public history student from Effingham, Illinois, has been named a Jess Hay Graduate Fellow by The University of Texas System for the 2024-25 academic year. Coleman was selected based on his research and thesis capstone project on former Congressman Charles Wilson's congressional papers housed in SFA's

East Texas Research Center.

"I feel incredibly honored to have received the Jess Hay fellowship knowing the amount of great research being completed throughout the UT System," Coleman said. "It is also wonderful to see research coming out of SFA's College of Liberal and Applied Arts recognized by not only SFA but also by the UT System."

As part of the program established by Hay, a former UT System regent, four annual graduate student research fellowships of \$15,000 each rotate among UT System institutions, benefiting two academic institutions and two health institutions each year. ★



Introducing
**Dr. Neal
Weaver**

SFA'S 11TH PRESIDENT SHARES HIS VISION FOR THE UNIVERSITY'S FUTURE

STORY BY
CHRISTINE BROUSSARD '10 & '20

“LIKE TO MAKE DESSERTS,” SFA President Neal Weaver says with a sternness I was not expecting from an admission of baking.

“Sometimes I say I like to cook, but I don’t like to cook. I like to bake,” he smiles. “There’s something interesting to me about taking these really random things — sugar, flour, cornstarch, baking soda, water, eggs — stirring them up in a bowl, putting it in the oven, and it comes out totally different.”

We both laugh as Weaver, SFA’s newly appointed 11th president, follows that sentiment up with “I’m sure some scientist is going to tell me I’m ridiculous for thinking that’s spectacular.” Then, we launch into a five-minute conversation about our mutual awe of the number of evolutions in human history that have allowed something like a simple cake to exist.

As Weaver describes the reasons for his love of baking, the memory of an earlier part of our conversation tugs at my mind. In it, he was describing his firm belief that “SFA is not just in the education business — we’re in the individual development business.”

He went on to explain that “when students come here, it’s not just to go sit in a classroom. It’s also to be engaged in activities, events, service and a community where they develop skills beyond knowledge of a specific discipline.

“By participating in a group, they learn accountability. They learn they have to show up on time, so they learn dependability. They learn to get along with people who may not think like them, look like them, talk like them, so they learn teamwork and conflict management. And all those things you develop here — coupled with an incredible discipline-specific education — now make you a Lumberjack.”

It becomes clear to me then, as the memory recedes, that Weaver’s love for turning disparate and disconnected parts into a comprehensive and impressive whole doesn’t only apply to baking.

It bleeds into other parts of his life, like his belief that college isn’t a single-ingredient recipe that produces immaculate cakes. It’s the collective efforts and lessons accumulated over years, stirred together with some heat applied, that allow a Lumberjack to walk the graduation stage prepared for what comes after. ➔



TOP: President Neal Weaver at the Texas Rangers’ SFA Night with wife, Kristi, and son and daughter-in-law, Blake and Alexis.

MIDDLE: Weaver, middle left, during the groundbreaking ceremony for SFA’s Center for Applied Research and Rural Innovation facility.

BOTTOM: Weaver joined SFA forestry students during their final activity at field station this summer. While there, he learned about the sawing and grading process students engage in during harvesting and processing week.

That concept of holistic development and support is a guiding principle in how Weaver said he plans to address his tenure as SFA president.

"Integrated learning is key. Let's say you're the treasurer for your fraternity and an accounting student. Wouldn't it be great if your faculty member knew that and could say, 'Hey, let's talk about what you're doing in that role'? And now I'm integrating my experiences with my academic discipline," Weaver said. "When we're asked how to get where we want to be, the first step is to understand we offer students the chance to engage in all these things that have purpose and value, and what everybody does all comes together to create what we love about SFA."

What Others See in You

Weaver's professional vision has been shaped by his own stirring collection of past experiences.

A 1986 graduate of Putnam City North High School in Oklahoma City, Weaver attended Oklahoma Panhandle State University, where he met his wife, Kristi, and received a Bachelor of Arts in speech and communication in 1990.

After a brief stint as a sports reporter for the McAlester News Capitol, Weaver was hired as assistant director of public relations and media coordinator at Southeastern Oklahoma State University.

Then he made a mistake.

"I left higher education," Weaver sighed. "And it was awful. I missed being on a college campus, and I knew I had to go back."

He returned to work at Northeastern State University and graduated from Southeastern Oklahoma State University with a Master of Business Administration in 1999.

Spurred by the support of his close friend and mentor, the late Dr. Larry Williams, who was then-president of NSU in Tahlequah, Oklahoma, Weaver was later named the university's director of public relations. He worked his way up through the department and was named vice president of university relations in 2004.

The irony is that up to that point, "I wanted to be an athletic director — that's all I wanted to do," Weaver said.

"And when the athletic director's job came open, I told Dr. Williams I was going to apply, and he said, 'I'm not going to hire you for that.

You're going to be a president someday.' And I was surprised, but that's the thing — my whole life has been the result of other people seeing more in me than I see in myself."

In 2005, Weaver graduated from the University of Oklahoma with a doctoral degree in organizational leadership and a newfound interest in pursuing a career in university administration. Then more than a decade later, one fateful day in 2017, he proved Williams right when he was named president of Georgia Southwestern State University.

"I had a great time at my old school — seven awesome years that shaped me and helped me, and I'm so grateful for that," Weaver said. "But I've admired SFA for many years, and this is exactly where I want to be."

Moving Quickly but With Purpose

Before his first fall semester at SFA even began, Weaver became a regular presence at university events.

He popped in to Showcase Saturday and Orientation sessions, shoveled dirt at the Center for Applied Research and Rural Innovation's groundbreaking, and socialized with Lumberjacks at the Alumni Association's Ballpark Days games.

The immediacy with which Weaver, in some cases quite literally, got his hands dirty as university president supports his repeated message that "we're going to move quickly but with purpose."

"We as an institution have to be more ready and more willing to take the information that's available to us and act on it faster," Weaver said. "That doesn't mean act without knowledge or without purpose — it just means act on what's available to us because there's more available now. We ought to be able to make decisions faster and evolve faster because technology is driving evolution at a faster pace."

How does SFA do that? Well, we take a page from our own book developing those multi-faceted, multi-talented Lumberjacks who are prepared to adapt to life's changes.

"I tell incoming freshmen that I didn't know I was going to be a president. My life goal was to be a sportscaster," Weaver said. "And when I went to college, we didn't have the internet, so if I only took from college what I got inside the classroom or out of a book, I couldn't possibly function in today's world. It's all those other qualities that allowed me to adapt and evolve and grow as the world changed around me."

SFA has the ingredients needed to make that immaculate cake that is its future. There's just the matter of finding the right recipe and having someone apply the requisite heat.

Luckily, our president is an enthusiastic baker.

"I really honestly believe my job is not to tell everybody what to do. I don't ever want to tell a faculty member how to teach their class, and I literally couldn't tell offices like ITS or business services how to do their job," Weaver said. "My job is to unleash the talent that is within the institution — within its people, within its structure. The more of that I can turn loose, the more confident I am we'll do really amazing things." ★

A big fan of dad jokes, Weaver challenged Lumberjack Orientation attendees to attempt to out-dad-joke him, and one brave student is shown here stepping up to the challenge.





WHAT TO KNOW ABOUT PRESIDENT WEAVER

FAMILY

- Wife: Kristi
- Sons: Austin and wife, Christina, and their daughter, Leighton; Blake and wife, Alexis; and Brett

PETS

- Izzy, Labrador golden mix
- Koko, Labrador pitbull mix

HOBBIES

- Baking
- Playing golf
- Investing

FAVORITE BOOKS

- "Deep Change: Discovering the Leader Within" by Robert E. Quinn
- "The Obstacle is the Way" by Ryan Holiday

FAVORITE DESSERT TO BAKE

- Cupcakes



TOP: In what's already becoming a bit of a tradition, Weaver asked Lumberjack Orientation attendees to gather for a group photo and throw their best "axe 'em, Jacks" hand sign.

BOTTOM: Weaver and his wife, Kristi, met dozens of Lumberjacks during a student reception held as part of his first official trip to SFA's campus in the spring.

Former teacher and current SFA first lady Kristi Weaver reads "The Giving Tree" to children ages 4 to 6 at the SFA Charter School. Photo by Lizeth Garcia



A HEART FOR STUDENTS

Kristi Weaver on Becoming SFA's First Lady

WHILE HER OFFICIAL TITLE at SFA is first lady, Kristi Weaver would likely tell any student she ran across to call her Momma Weaver.

She acquired the nickname in her previous position as Georgia Southwestern State University's first lady when her husband, now SFA's 11th president Dr. Neal Weaver, served in his first university presidential role. And it's a nickname she takes to heart — so much so she put it on her car's license plate.

"I know they're students, but in my heart, they're all my kids," Kristi said. "I feel my role is to be there for the students. I love to have conversations with them. I love to hear their stories, why they're here, what they're doing, how they're doing in class, and what they need help with."

The catch about her new role as SFA first lady? Her family has suddenly more than tripled, growing from GSW's approximately 3,000 students to SFA's almost 11,000.

"Neal and I are very student-oriented. I loved my time at Georgia Southwestern because I knew so many of the kids. So I'm now a bit stressed thinking, 'OK, how am I going to reach all these SFA kids?' But we will figure it out," Kristi said. "This first year is going to be a big learning curve, but I'm hoping we can get to know the students and let them get to know us. We want them to approach us; we want them to talk to us — we're just people."

Kristi received her bachelor's degree in elementary education from Southeastern Oklahoma State University and taught kindergarten after graduation. Though she left teaching to raise the couple's three kids, all her pursuits continued to support education.

"Once the boys went to school, I started working back in the elementary school as a liaison between the parents and staff," Kristi said. "I became president of the Parent Teacher Association and really figured out that fundraising was my passion. So, I went on to serve as executive

director of the Tahlequah Public Schools Foundation, which would award grants for anything the teachers needed, and we raised about \$50,000 a year to put back into the classrooms."

Kristi's passion for helping nonprofits led her to sit on many boards for such organizations as United Way, Court Appointed Special Advocates, Books for Sumter County, Backpacks for Kids and chambers of commerce in communities in which the Weavers lived.

Much like her husband, Kristi believes in the role college plays in developing the whole person. Students may come for an academic program, but they'll leave having learned lessons in team building, patience and — of incredible importance to the Weavers — community support.

"We're going to work hard getting our students involved. Not making them do it but helping them realize how important it is to give back. It makes you feel good," she said.

Encouraging student involvement is a joint effort the Weavers hold near and dear. As they approach their first year leading SFA into its

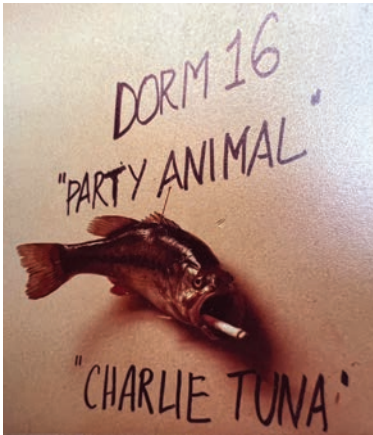
next century, Kristi and Dr. Weaver already have plans for creating opportunities, like a student ambassador program, that would open new avenues for student involvement and personal growth.

They'll also be there to support each other as they get to know SFA and settle into their new roles as SFA president and first lady.

"Kristi is amazing in her own right, and she has been a part of this career, profession, journey for 35 years," Dr. Weaver said. "She gave up teaching to raise our kids. She's moved seven times. She's a great partner and a great fundraiser. She believes in what we do. She helps me in any number of ways that people I think know and probably appreciate but that nobody ever talks about. So, I hope everyone will understand that we do this together." ★

"I know they're students, but in my heart, they're all my kids."

- Kristi Weaver



Spring 1983 - 2nd floor - RIP
Dorm 16

BARRY BARENTINE /
FACEBOOK



Four SFA grads (1979 and 1980) met in Nacogdoches and became lifelong friends, extraordinarily successful business owners and entrepreneurs, and world-wide travelers — forged by the power of friendship and driven by the search for new experiences.

Now, almost 50 years after leaving the home of the Jacks, we found ourselves at the bottom of the world. Together. In Antarctica. SFA lives in all of us, and that was on full display while exploring the seventh continent. We even flew the SFA flag.

JERRY GUMBERT '80



When your daughter chooses Stephen F. Austin as her historical figure. Reppin' SFA with a Surfin' Steve bobblehead!

JANICE CORDELL MURRAY /
FACEBOOK



Reppin' SFA while zip lining in Costa Rica!

PAULA REEG MCGUFFIN /
FACEBOOK



We had an awesome time this weekend at our SFA Ballpark Days in Arlington.

@SFAALUMNI / FACEBOOK

I tried my damndest to cross the finish line of the 2024 London Marathon yesterday with full "Axe 'em, Jacks" hands, but as you can tell the picture was taken just a few seconds too soon!

CASEY COX / FACEBOOK



Attending niece's graduation at OSU, but her uncle is representing SFA.

KENDRA PERRY RUSSELL / FACEBOOK

AN INVASIVE MYSTERY

Native fish **suffer** at the fins of invasive counterparts

STORY BY ALYSSA FAYKUS '19
PHOTOS COURTESY OF ERIN SHEPTA '22
ILLUSTRATIONS BY KUBS SABRSULA-MENDOZA '17



Invasive species of fish are detrimental to native fish populations, including inland Texas waterways like the Brazos and Red rivers. From competition for resources and predation to habitat alteration and ecosystem imbalance, invasive species, like the sheepshead minnow and Gulf killifish, are known threats in Texas.

A grant from the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department funding research for the origins of these invasive fish

drew Erin Shepta '22 to SFA. Arriving in August 2020 from Millersville University in Pennsylvania, her time at SFA as a graduate biology student was spent fishing, sampling, analyzing data and writing about invasive fish — a research quandary she is particularly invested in.

“I started studying invasive species in my undergrad and became very interested in it after I graduated,” Shepta said. “I was really entrenched in fieldwork with

invasive species. When I was browsing a job board, I saw this really cool project with invasive fish — I had never worked with fish before, but I liked the invasive species aspect of it and applied.”

Dr. Carmen Montaña-Schalk, SFA assistant professor of biology, develops and submits research proposals to different state and federal agencies to get grant funding for graduate research positions for her lab, Montaña Aquatic



Gulf Killifish
(*Fundulus grandis*)



Sheepshead Minnow
(*Cyprinodon variegatus*)

“THEY KNEW THESE FISH HAD IMPACTED OTHER BASINS, AND THEY WERE WONDERING WHAT’S GOING ON: HOW ARE THESE FISH BEING INTRODUCED? WHY ARE THEY BEING SPREAD? THEY WERE REALLY WORRIED ABOUT WHAT KINDS OF IMPACTS THESE FISH COULD HAVE IN THESE NEWLY INTRODUCED RIVERS.” - ERIN SHEPTA ’22

Ecology Lab. These grants attract outstanding graduate students like Shepta, according to Montaña-Schalk.

“Graduate students funded through research assistantships are paid to work on their thesis project while meeting the objectives of the project funded by these external partners,” Montaña-Schalk said.

These grants make it affordable for students like Shepta to not only pursue their dreams and build their portfolios but also build meaningful connections in the industry — all before walking the graduation stage.

INVASION OF INLAND WATERS

Shepta’s thesis, “Assessing the Live Bait Industry and the Ecological Status of Invasive Cyprinodontiformes in Texas Streams,” explores the possible ways these fish are introduced, as well as how they impact native populations of fish, like the Red River pupfish.

During her graduate program at SFA, the first question Shepta was asked to answer was how these invasive species of fish are entering inland Texas waterways.

“There were two smaller species of fish that had been introduced into inland rivers in Texas, and TPWD wanted to know why,” she said. “They knew these fish had impacted other basins, and they were wondering what’s going on: How are these fish being introduced? Why are they being spread? They were really worried about what

kinds of impacts these fish could have in these newly introduced rivers.”

TPWD’s theory was that the fish were being sold as baitfish, and that’s why they were being spread.

“That was the first chapter of the research — calling and visiting bait shops and trying to find these fish. We did not find them, which is good and bad,” Shepta said.

“The second chapter focused on the impacts, especially for the Red River pupfish,” she said. “That’s a native threatened fish. We used a lot of different techniques to find the different impacts on native fish. This proof shows invasive species are really affecting our native waters.”

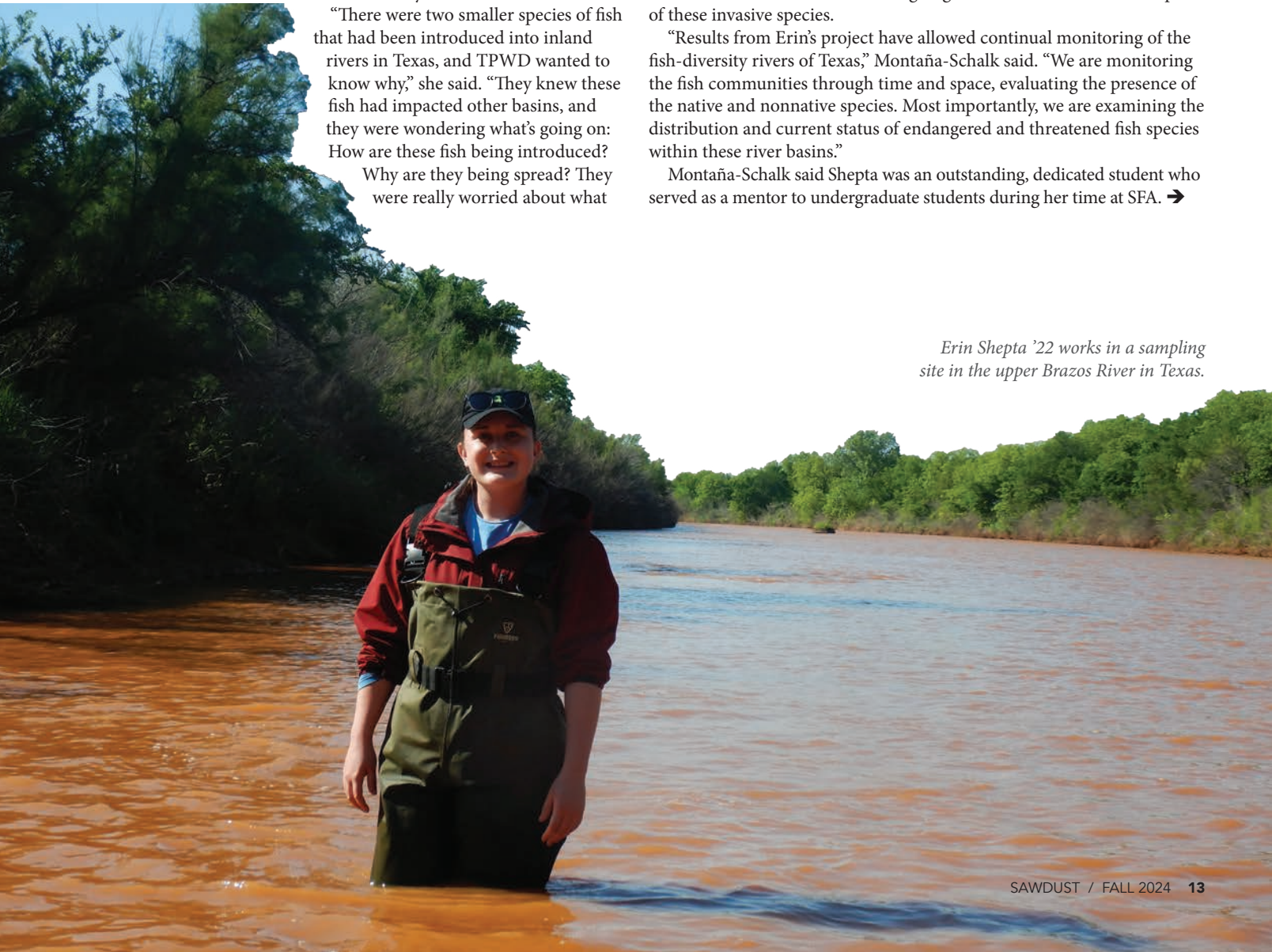
THE RIGHT MENTOR

Shepta’s research is one of the first studies conducted in Texas that investigates the potential pathways of two invasive coastal species introduced to Brazos River inland waters. Montaña-Schalk conducts research in the two rivers where Shepta also worked — the Brazos and Red rivers in Texas. Research is ongoing to determine further the impacts of these invasive species.

“Results from Erin’s project have allowed continual monitoring of the fish-diversity rivers of Texas,” Montaña-Schalk said. “We are monitoring the fish communities through time and space, evaluating the presence of the native and nonnative species. Most importantly, we are examining the distribution and current status of endangered and threatened fish species within these river basins.”

Montaña-Schalk said Shepta was an outstanding, dedicated student who served as a mentor to undergraduate students during her time at SFA. ➔

Erin Shepta ’22 works in a sampling site in the upper Brazos River in Texas.





Dr. Carmen Montaña-Schalk, right, conducts fish sampling with students in the upper Brazos River.

"[DR. CARMEN MONTAÑA-SCHALK] HELPED ME LEARN HOW TO CONDUCT SCIENCE AND FALL IN LOVE WITH RESEARCH AND SEE THAT THIS IS WHAT I WANT TO DO: WORK IN RESEARCH." - ERIN SHEPTA '22



Using a gillnet, SFA researchers capture fish to monitor their communities through time and space, evaluating the presence of the native and nonnative species.

Multiple habitats were sampled in the middle Brazos River in McLennan County, Texas, in December 2020. Fish found at these sampling sites underwent analysis of morphology, stomach contents and stable isotopes.



“Dr. Montaña-Schalk drew me to the program,” Shepta said. “A lot of times, how it works in the STEM fields is a professor will advertise a position. I had never heard of SFA — it’s very far away from where I’m from — but Dr. Montaña-Schalk posted [my research position] on the Texas A&M job board, which a lot of people in my field use for graduate positions, and it seemed like a really great opportunity to do this research project that drew me to the school.”

Arriving in Texas for the first time in her life, Shepta didn’t know what to expect. But Montaña-Schalk quickly introduced her to field research, and she fell in love with it.

“Texas is crazy with the different ecosystems that go across it,” Shepta said. “I had never been anywhere like the Brazos River. It was completely new, and I had to start learning about what fish were there, what different ecosystems were like and really, I just got thrown into it.”

The hands-on learning involved in fishing and collecting samples helped Shepta gain needed real-world experience.

“Montaña-Schalk is a very hard-working lady, and she loves being in the field,” she said. “She felt good about immediately taking me into the field with her, so it was a learn-on-your-feet experience. We started sampling in the river, and that was very valuable to me because I didn’t have much experience in the field before.”

Shepta is continuing her education at West Virginia University pursuing a doctorate in natural resource sciences — a path she discovered while at SFA.

“Dr. Montaña-Schalk pushed me to become a better scientist,” she said. “Going into SFA, I wasn’t sure what I wanted to do. I thought about academia or other fields, but by the time I left, I was certain that I wanted to pursue a PhD.”

“[Montaña-Schalk] helped me learn how to conduct science and fall in love with research and see that this is what I want to do: work in research.”

Shepta completed her 168-page thesis in under two years after four sampling seasons in the rivers.

“The first year, I was going into the river, getting fish and taking the fish back to the lab,” Shepta said. “We took measurements and tissue samples and stomach contents. Then I transitioned into writing. I wrote this whole thing over the course of six to seven months.”

CARPE DIEM

Sitting in a small office with no windows, illuminated only by the glow of her computer, Shepta had a sparkle in her eyes talking about her future career as a statistical analyst for invasive carp in the Ohio River, which is her next big project while pursuing her doctoral degree.

“I am two years into my PhD program, and it’s hopefully my halfway point,” she said. “I’m really excited about the research I’m doing here. I love statistics, and I dived head-first into that here.”

Shepta said she’s applying what she learned at SFA on a larger scale.

“There’s a lot of funding right now to help slow invasive fish spread,” Shepta said. “I’m so excited to take on a huge-scale project like this in the Ohio River, one of the biggest affluents to the Mississippi River, which is the largest river. I love the scale of it. I’m very interested to see what kind of results we get.”

After adding “Dr.” to her title, Shepta hopes to land a federal or state position and continue research through data analysis. ★



HONORING ROOTS AND BRANCHING OUT

Project Raíces strengthens East Texas communities through cultural exchange and educational success for all

STORY BY PARASTOO NIKRAVESH '18 & '23 / PHOTOS BY LIZETH GARCIA



During Project Raíces' Language and Literacy Academies, children participate in game-based bilingual literacy activities while parents receive information on how to connect with community resources.

At the end of the school day, children may bring home exciting stories of what they learned, toys and treats shared from friends or, not to be overlooked, folders full of important documents for parents, like field trip permission slips and Parent Teacher Organization sign-up sheets.

For some students, this is as easy as handing the folder to mom and dad. For parents whose first language is not English, however, the text on the page can present a frustrating barrier.

This is the reality for many East Texas families with English language learners, which is why local educators and students in SFA's educator preparation program are making a difference through Project Raíces. The project completed its first year providing bilingual resources and support to East Texas parents in May.

The grant-funded program facilitated through SFA's James I. Perkins College of Education is an initiative to enhance bilingual and multilingual education for school districts in Nacogdoches and Angelina counties. Its goals are to improve instruction for English learners; increase the number of East Texas teachers certified to teach English as a second language, or ESL; and engage parents and caregivers through workshops that focus on school readiness, emergent literacy and language acquisition.

Reaching All Individuals and Communities to Establish Success in Language Learning, referred to in short as Project Raíces, was made possible through a National Professional Development Grant of \$2.5 million funded by the U.S. Department of Education.

SETTING IMPORTANT GOALS

The 2023-24 academic year marked Project Raíces' first cohort, and with funding for three more academic years, Project Raíces is expected to prepare 50 public school educators each school year to support English language learners. In an increasingly interconnected world, Project Raíces aims to work toward a future where embracing cultural richness empowers not just students but entire communities.

"I am so grateful that I got to experience Project Raíces," said Kayleigh Moran '23, who received a Bachelor of Science in Interdisciplinary Studies and currently works for Broadus Independent School District. "I had been in a school setting as a paraprofessional for a year and could see the disconnect between ESL and a lot of the curriculum. Being a part of the project helped me open my eyes and understand how I can better help my students."

The five-year grant began with a planning year in 2022. In the 2023-24 academic year, Project Raíces provided ESL professional development, community engagement activities and children's literacy training. Leading the initiative are Carrie Wright-Davis, project director, and Darius Tubbs, project associate director. Wright-Davis graduated with her Master of Arts in teaching in 2022. Tubbs graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in English in 2013 and is currently working on a Master of Education in curriculum and instruction.

"I am so excited to make the vision of this grant team a reality," Wright-Davis said. "Seeing teachers, parents and SFA students working together as a community with the shared goal of improving literacy has been such an inspiration." ➔

"I HAD BEEN IN A SCHOOL SETTING AS A PARAPROFESSIONAL FOR A YEAR AND COULD SEE THE DISCONNECT BETWEEN ESL AND A LOT OF THE CURRICULUM. BEING A PART OF THE PROJECT HELPED ME OPEN MY EYES AND UNDERSTAND HOW I CAN BETTER HELP MY STUDENTS."

KAYLEIGH MORAN '23
BROADUS INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT



ABOVE: Each Project Raíces Language and Literacy Academia features a kermés, or carnival, where students, parents and teachers play bilingual language games. Additionally, musicians and artists present cultural performances and host classes for parents and children.

BELOW LEFT: Parents Jose, left, and Inmaculada Escobedo attend a workshop that included creating their very own piñata.

BELOW MIDDLE: Project Raíces hosted children's author Xavier Garza for back-to-school events at the Nacogdoches Public Library and Kurth Memorial Library in Lufkin in August 2023.

BELOW RIGHT: Musician Enrique Munguia performed for attendees during one of Project Raíces' kermés.

PROJECT RAÍCES' FIRST COHORT

This year, Project Raíces hosted four Language and Literacy Academies, which are workshops that provide interactive instruction for teachers and teacher candidates on ESL testing and strategies while parents receive information on how to connect with community resources and help children in school.

Additionally, visiting educators Dr. Burcu Ates and Dr. Mary Petró, professors of education at Sam Houston State University, facilitated the project's ESL exam instruction, which helps educators prepare to become certified ESL instructors.

"Every time we had an academia, I would go back to my ESL teacher and tell her all of the things I learned that day," Moran said. "As I was getting ready to take the ESL certification test, I realized a lot of my co-workers, who were

taking it as veteran teachers, did not really have an idea what they needed to study. They felt unprepared, but I was the complete opposite. I felt that I knew my content and had the tools to help me study."

During the academias, children in participating families enjoyed a kermés, or carnival, that included language and literacy activities as well as artists who presented cultural performances. Project Raíces coordinators also hosted Yuyi Morales, Mexican-American children's author of "Niño Wrestles the World" and "Dreamers," for an event.

Several departments in SFA's Perkins College of Education pitched in expertise and insights to make Project Raíces' first active year a success. Students of Dr. Deborah Buswell, associate professor in the Department of Kinesiology and Health Science, helped develop outdoor games for participants at the academias, while hospitality students of Dr. Gina Fe Causin, associate professor in the School of Human Sciences, staffed the events as part of an ongoing service-learning project.

"I was part of the convention and meeting planning class with Dr. Causin and worked at the registration table, signing in parents and their children before leading them to where they needed to go," said Belle Carrera, a first-year SFA hospitality administration major from New Braunfels, Texas. "I definitely learned how to better communicate with not only my peers but with guests as well. Initiating conversation has always been a problem for me, and working with Project Raíces has helped me with my communication skills."





WHAT COMES NEXT

The Project Raíces grant is the third of its kind for the Perkins College of Education, which was awarded \$1.4 million in 2007 and \$1.9 million in 2011. The grants were centered around English as a second language certification and English language learner education.

The application for the grant — one of 44 awarded nationally — was authored by SFA Department of Education Studies faculty members Drs. Heather Olson Beal and Lauren Burrow, professors; Dr. Chrissy Cross, associate professor; and Dr. Yuan He, assistant professor; as well as Dr. Marisol Diaz, faculty member at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona.

“We are always looking at new opportunities to involve the SFA student community in active learning,” Wright-Davis said.

For each of the remaining three academic years of the grant, Project Raíces will recruit 25 in-service teachers from Nacogdoches and Lufkin independent school districts, 25 pre-service teachers in SFA’s educator preparation program, eight SFA faculty members and 25 families of emergent bilingual students in East Texas to participate in the program.

Additionally, participants receive \$500 stipends for taking the ESL certification exam and providing Project Raíces with their scores. After attending the four Language and Literacy Academies, in-service teachers receive \$1,000 and pre-service teachers receive \$500. Classroom teachers also receive a \$1,000 implementation grant after they pass the test to implement ESL instructional practices learned through the Language and Literacy Academies. In total, SFA seniors earn \$1,500, and current teachers earn \$2,500.

“In five years, we are hoping to see an improvement in academic achievement from English language learners,” Cross said in a previous article about the initiative. “We are also hoping to build a community so that when people move here, those who have English language learners with them will be able to fit right in and understand what’s available to help them succeed. This will result in higher graduation rates, better jobs and a boost for the economy.”

Pictured during one of their workshops are members of the Project Raíces team, from left, Dr. Marisol Diaz, faculty member from California State Polytechnic University, Pomona; Dr. Lauren Burrow, SFA professor; Dr. Chrissy Cross, SFA associate professor; Carrie Wright-Davis, Project Raíces program director; Dr. Heather Olson Beal, SFA professor; and Darius Tubbs, Project Raíces associate program director.

“WE ARE ALSO HOPING TO BUILD A COMMUNITY SO THAT WHEN PEOPLE MOVE HERE, THOSE WHO HAVE ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS WITH THEM WILL BE ABLE TO FIT RIGHT IN AND UNDERSTAND WHAT’S AVAILABLE TO HELP THEM SUCCEED.”

DR. CHRISSEY CROSS, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR
SFA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION STUDIES

The grant addresses an important need in Nacogdoches and Angelina counties. According to Cross, 20% of students in the Nacogdoches Independent School District are English language learners. In the Lufkin Independent School District, that figure is 26%.

“Project Raíces brings educators and the community together,” Moran said. “We get to see each other’s points of views and opinions. We get to work through language barriers and overcome obstacles that can even be seen in the classroom. It’s a safe space to explore and share. It is something every teacher can benefit from.” ★

FRAME

BY



Jason Schwartzman as Max Fischer sits on his go-cart in Wes Anderson's "Rushmore." Photo taken by Van Redin '75

FRAME

Photographer Van Redin's journey from SFA to Hollywood

STORY BY NATHAN WICKER '19

PHOTOS COURTESY OF OR
TAKEN BY VAN REDIN '75

Life is all about timing.

Everyone has heard this in one fashion or another and, for most, such sayings often fall on deaf ears and are misconstrued as chance.

For Van Redin '75, a celebrated still photographer who has worked on more than 80 major motion films over four decades — including “Lord of the Rings: Return of the King,” “Rudy,” “Office Space,” “All the Pretty Horses” and “Secondhand Lions” — the motto spans far beyond timing for the right shot; it has guided his career.

A job that often goes unrecognized, Redin's role as a still photographer is to capture the essence of the film, immortalize moments and create a visual legacy. As such, Redin's illustrious career is predicated on his innate ability to be at the right place at the right time. Whether it be capturing Sir Ian McKellen wielding his sword as Gandalf in the Battle of Pelennor Fields, or Sean Astin's poised demeanor as he jogs on Notre Dame's football field for his culminating scene as Rudy Ruettiger, Redin is there with his finger fixed on the shutter button awaiting the perfect moment.

SNAP!

“It's always gratifying to see your work, especially when your shot makes the movie poster or when it makes the newspaper, magazine or billboard,” Redin said. “It makes you feel like you've accomplished something. That's why they hire you — to take photos that will excite people enough to get them in the theater.”

Redin's introduction to the film industry began in late 1981 with an invitation from Anne Rapp, a friend and script supervisor on the film “Tender Mercies,” to visit the set in Waxahachie, Texas. It wasn't long — almost immediately, in fact — that Redin spotted the still photographer, Ron Phillips. Redin met and observed his every move and immediately made a career decision that changed his life.

“I didn't know anything about still photographers on movie sets, but all the big movies have them,” Redin said. “I decided rather quickly that this was a career I wanted to pursue.” ➔



Still photographer Van Redin '75 stands on the Notre Dame Stadium sideline on the set of “Rudy” with his camera in tow. Redin credits “Rudy” as one of his favorite films to photograph.



The photo used on the “Rudy” poster was taken by Redin.



TOP: Van Redin's '75 studio pass for the film "Anaconda" by Columbia pictures.

TOP RIGHT: Billy Bob Thornton as Skip Caldwell on the set of "Jayne Mansfield's Car." Redin and Thornton are close friends and have worked on numerous movies together.

RIGHT: Stephen Root as Milton on the set of "Office Space."

RIGHT PAGE: From left, Doug Moreland, Shirley MacLaine and Jack Black are shot as their characters — chainsaw artist, Marjorie Nugent and Bernie Tiede, respectively — on the set of "Bernie."



A few months later, Redin received his first script for the film “Songwriter,” starring Willie Nelson and Kris Kristofferson. Receiving the script, which Redin identified as the definitive sign he had secured the job, marked the beginning of a whirlwind 40-year adventure.

“I knew I could do it, and it was exciting,” Redin said of his first film experience. “But I was a little nervous because you had to prove yourself, and people are looking at your work every day. You don’t necessarily have a chance to cut the bad photos. But it turned out OK.”

Throughout his career, Redin has learned the tricks of the trade: read the script to understand the scenes, familiarize yourself with the settings and their context, understand how the actor is supposed to interact with the set and other characters, and observe what the actor does between takes. Those moments often make the best shots, according to Redin.

Redin has worked on sets with such A-listers as Robert Duvall, Ryan Gosling, Kate Blanchett, Billy Bob Thornton, Julia Roberts, Tommy Lee Jones, Michael Caine, Luke Wilson and many others.

“When I’m photographing these actors, I try to flatter everybody — make them look as good as possible,” Redin said. “So, it’s important to know which angle to shoot them from. If you don’t flatter someone, there’s no need to use the photo.”

Over the years, Redin has had to adapt to the ever-evolving field of photography, such as transitioning from using a film camera to a digital single-lens reflex camera, and eventually to the silent and set-friendly mirrorless camera. While shooting “The Dukes of Hazzard” film in 2004, Redin shot and edited his photos digitally for the first time, finding the process far more streamlined compared to the laborious darkroom methods he had previously used.

The impeccable timing that guided Redin’s career traces back to his formative years at SFA.



While in college, Redin photographed on a freelance basis for The Daily Sentinel newspaper and The Pine Log and crafted photos in the darkroom at Lorelei Gallery, a studio and camera store located in downtown Nacogdoches. The gallery also was where Redin purchased his first camera, an Olympus OM-1.

“You learn to get along with all types of people, to have an open mind about things,” Redin said. “You learn more than just from books in college, and that’s the biggest lesson I learned from my time at SFA that has benefited me most in my career.”

After graduation, Redin began working as house photographer for the Texas House of Representatives in Austin. In the position, Redin was at the will of all 150 state representatives to photograph their various assignments and political activities, as well as covering sessions on the house floor, among other various tasks.

While house photographer, Redin worked with his close friend and fellow Plainview native, Pete Laney, who served as representative from 1973 to 2007 and speaker of the house from 1993 to 2003. Redin credits Laney for getting him the job, and they remain close friends.

After two terms as house photographer, Redin took a job in 1979 with the Glastron boat company, the largest boat manufacturing company in the world at the time. While there, Redin sailed up and down lakes and across oceans capturing marketing shots for the company. Later, Redin joined a private photography studio, Bradshaw and Company, with friend and esteemed photographer, Reagan Bradshaw, before diving into the film industry.

REDIN'S PICTURE-PERFECT ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Redin may have traveled 500 miles to find his passion in photography at SFA, but it was his photography that ultimately brought him back home.

Redin was inducted into the Plainview Walk of Fame in March 2024, next to his father, Harley Redin, who is one of the most influential individuals in the history of women’s college basketball coaching the Wayland Baptist University Flying Queens from 1956 to 1973.

“I was surprised to be notified of this honor,” Redin said. “I didn’t know why they picked me or if I was even worthy for them to pick me. But they assured me that I was. It was really fulfilling to be recognized in the place you grew up, and to have my plaque right next to my dad’s was truly special.”

Additionally, Redin’s work is set to be the inaugural entry in the Texas State University Wittliff Collections’ new movies and television wing. The showcase will display a selection of his most iconic images from his time in the film industry, offering a comprehensive look at his artistic journey.

To get a glimpse of Redin’s work throughout the years, including movie stills, photos of musicians and landscapes, visit vanredin.com. ★

A SNAPSHOT OF REDIN'S EARLY YEARS

A native of Plainview, Texas, Redin was drawn to the natural beauty of the piney woods and the 500-plus miles that separated him at SFA from his hometown. Seeking the stability of a business career and following a suggestion from his father, he began his educational journey majoring in finance. However, he soon found that he wasn’t excelling in the subject and lacked genuine interest.

Needing an elective in his second semester, Redin stumbled upon an introductory photojournalism course taught by Ben Hobbs, a retired professor and Stone Fort yearbook advisor. It was almost an instant connection — within the first few assignments, using the school’s Yashica-D camera, Redin realized photography was his true calling. He changed his major to photojournalism that semester.

According to Redin, SFA was one of three schools in Texas at the time that offered a photojournalism major; Sam Houston State University and East Texas State University, now Texas A&M University-Commerce, were the other two.

“As soon as I took a class and found out SFA had a major in it, I immediately changed my major,” Redin said. “I found out I could make A’s instead of unsatisfactory C’s and D’s in finance.”

Redin was immediately enthralled by the photography process of the time — snapping the photo, processing the photo in a darkroom and seeing the finished product. Along with Hobbs, Redin credits Dr. Francine Hoffman, retired journalism professor and The Pine Log student newspaper advisor, and, in particular, Dr. Michael Roach, retired professor of art, as prominent influences and inspirations for his budding photography career.

Redin still stays in contact with Roach and considers him a lifelong friend.

“Dr. Roach was really inspiring — he’d get you fired up and you just enjoyed being in class with him,” Redin said.

Q&A

with Dr. Roel Lopez

A force in the natural resource conservation realm in Texas and beyond

STORY BY CHRISTINE BROUSSARD '10 & '20

Dr. Roel Lopez '93, head of Texas A&M University's Department of Rangeland Wildlife and Fisheries Management and director of the university's Natural Resources Institute, is making a significant and lasting impact in the world of natural resource conservation.

After graduating from SFA with a Bachelor of Science in Forestry, Lopez went on to help write U.S. policy on military land sustainability for the Pentagon and study endangered species and the trends affecting farms and ranches in Texas and beyond. Lopez's efforts have led to meaningful recognitions, such as being named the Dallas Safari Club's Conservation Trailblazer.

He graciously sat down to share about how his time at SFA shaped both his research and his advocacy for a "learn by doing" style of teaching.

Q: What academic degrees have you received and from where?

A: Doctor of Philosophy, Texas A&M University, 2001
Master of Science, Texas A&M University, 1996
Bachelor of Science in Forestry, Stephen F. Austin State University, 1993

Q: Can you describe your initial inspiration for pursuing a career in wildlife conservation?

A: My involvement with the Boy Scouts of America and growing up hunting, fishing and spending time outdoors shaped my passion and interest in natural resources. These activities instilled in me a deep connection to the environment and inspired me to pursue a career in forest wildlife conservation. This allowed me to play a role in the stewardship of our precious natural resources.

Q: What were the most significant challenges you faced early in your career?

A: An accident that temporarily impacted my father (he was hit by a fire truck while voting; can't make it up!). This made it difficult for me to stay enrolled in school during his recovery. In approaching Danny Gallant, SFA's financial director at the time, for payment options, both Gallant and Betty Ford with the Alumni Association facilitated a small scholarship that allowed me to stay in school and complete my degree. Their unwavering support during that critical time was invaluable, and I am forever grateful for their assistance during a moment of need. I will never forget that small act of kindness and compassion. ➔



Q: How did your SFA education influence your professional path?

A: The hands-on approach and extensive field experiences in the forestry undergraduate program shaped and prepared me for a career in natural resources. The classroom and field experiences were practical and mirrored what I could expect in the profession upon finishing my undergraduate program. The experience also developed my interest in graduate research, which began a lifelong focus in learning and improving how we manage our natural landscapes. In addition, the mentorship and guidance of faculty like Dr. Monty Whiting really instilled a sense of professionalism and the importance of hard work in achieving my career goals.

Q: What motivated you to focus on each of your areas of expertise?

A: My current area of expertise and research includes research and management of threatened and endangered species, military land sustainability, and understanding the trends and relationships to changes in farms and ranches in Texas and beyond.

More than 1,200 people move to Texas each day, which adds pressure on our private working lands (i.e., farms, ranches, family forests) and ultimately impacts our natural resources. These impacts include fragmented and degraded wildlife habitat, which oftentimes includes species that are threatened and/or endangered. These changes in rural lands also impact other areas important to our state's economy, like maintaining our military installations and ranges.

The contribution of the U.S. Department of Defense to the Texas economy is ranked second in the state (behind the oil and gas economy) — private working lands are great neighbors for these military installations. Nearly 15 years ago, I had the opportunity to go to Washington, D.C., to work in the Pentagon and, while there, gained a deep appreciation and interest in military land sustainability, which is basically protecting and maintaining open space both inside the fence line and in surrounding areas to offer our men and women in uniform the opportunity to test, train and ensure readiness prior to engagement during wartime activity.

Thus, providing suitable habitats for our wildlife as well as compatible land uses surrounding our military installations has largely been driven by my passion and interest in conserving Texas' private lands. The three areas of focus are all connected and complement and support one another.

Q: Can you share a memorable moment or breakthrough from your research career?

A: Working in Washington, D.C., with military land sustainability was a life-changing experience and solidified my belief that research is most meaningful when it serves to inform and shape natural resource management and policy. It's putting science to work. Understanding the connection of science with policy and management really redirected my research and career. It instilled in me the idea that we can have a much more meaningful impact from a research perspective beyond the publishing of journal articles and journal impact factors — true impact is realized through improved conservation and land stewardship driven by the translation and application of discovery.

Q: What strategies do you use to engage and inspire the next generation of conservation leaders as a wildlife professor?

A: Much of my philosophy and classroom strategies stem from my experience as a student in the forestry program at SFA. My experience was exceptional, shaped by the idea of hands-on experiences and applied management strategies both in the classroom and in the field.

I apply these strategies not only in the courses that I teach but also to our entire curriculum at Texas A&M's Department of Rangeland Wildlife and Fisheries Management. Our job as educators is to give the next generation of conservation leaders the tools and skills they need to be successful.

Back in the day as a student in SFA's forestry program, we had 150+ student credit hours to obtain these experiences. The state now requires our undergraduate programs to have no more than 120 credit hours. Thus, preparing future natural resource professionals includes increased use of student opportunities, such as engaging with professional societies or getting involved with student internship opportunities. Student inspiration comes from illustrating that what they are experiencing is both relevant and needed for their success.

Q: What do you consider your most significant contribution to wildlife and natural resource conservation to date?

A: I believe our legacy and impact in conservation is realized through the preparation and development of future natural resource professionals. This is one reason I enjoy teaching and empowering the next generation of natural resource professionals. You really never know the

impact you may have on a student. Assume all you do, both small and big, can help and inspire others to learn and pursue a successful career with the goal of making our world a better place.

I don't mean to sound corny, but I believe that we each have a unique vocation. For me, a career in natural resources has been extremely rewarding. They say if you enjoy what you do, you will never work a day in your life!

Q: Can you explain the importance of the Conservation Trailblazer Award to you personally and professionally?

A: The Dallas Safari Club's Conservation Trailblazer Award was a surprise to me. I was truly humbled and honored by the recognition. The importance to me was being recognized by my peers and colleagues for the collective work that we have done over the years. I do not see this award as recognizing my efforts but instead the efforts of the folks with whom I have the distinct pleasure to work in making a difference. It's always good to know that perhaps you're on the right track.

Q: How has the Texas A&M Natural Resources Institute evolved under your leadership?

A: I assumed the directorship over a decade ago following another SFA alumnus, Dr. Neal Wilkins. Neal developed a solid foundation for the institute, and my effort has simply been the continued work and expansion in making a difference as a research and extension institute.

Texas A&M is the land-grant university in our state, meaning that we integrate teaching, research and extension (the translation of that work) to everyday people attempting to make the lives of Texans better each day. Being relevant also means being connected and understanding what is important and needed by all Texans, ranging from products derived from sustainable forests to providing clean water and air.

My work as the NRI director has been to hire the best team members, create opportunities for their success in improving our natural world and try to stay out of their way!



Dr. Roel Lopez '93 and a graduate student capture and take basic measurements of a young alligator. Photo by Courtney Sacco / Texas A&M AgriLife

Q: Can you discuss the importance of well-regulated hunting in wildlife management and conservation?

A: Aldo Leopold, considered the father of modern North American wildlife conservation, once described various tools used in the restoration and improvement of wildlife habitat. One of those tools was the “gun” or the use of hunting to regulate wildlife populations. Without such a tool, it is very easy for wildlife populations (e.g., white-tailed deer, feral hogs, etc.) to overpopulate and negatively affect the habitat’s condition.

A national trend we have seen is decreasing participation in hunting from the general public. In response, we developed a course at Texas A&M focused on introducing students to the basic principles and practices of hunting and its role in conservation. The focus of the course is not

necessarily to make them hunters but instead to illustrate the importance and value of hunting as a tool in wildlife management.

Q: How has collaboration with other state and national conservation organizations influenced your work?

A: Collaboration and partnerships with like-minded organizations are imperative to leveraging oftentimes limited resources and meeting common goals that otherwise would not be attainable individually. Collaboration and partnerships have really defined the work I’ve done in recent years. I have been involved in collaborative efforts that include drafting and implementing a longleaf pine restoration plan across its native range to developing habitat conservation plans for species, including Florida key deer and the dunes sagebrush lizard. Working together increases

the overall effectiveness of our conservation efforts, which otherwise would fall short of reaching our goals.

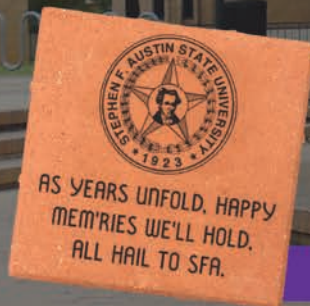
Q: What advice would you give to students aspiring to careers in wildlife conservation?

A: Students wishing to pursue a career in wildlife conservation should begin with coursework in subjects like biology, ecology, environmental science or similar fields. It’s also helpful to volunteer or do an internship with conservation groups to gain practical experience and make connections in the field. Developing good communication and problem-solving skills and having a strong passion for conservation can help students succeed in this challenging but rewarding career path. Students should get involved, work hard, be persistent and have passion for their career choice. ★

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SFA Alumni Association at (936) 468-3407.



From the Association



Greetings, Jack Nation!

As I sit in the Chicago O'Hare International Airport, reflecting on an adventurous summer of travel and change while transitioning into my new role as Imperative Logistics' senior vice

president and head of sales, guess what I see? Two SFA shirts boldly walking through a sea of people — we truly are everywhere, Jacks! Naturally, we exchanged the good old "Axe 'em!" with one another, and for just a moment, we were transported back to memories of our days at SFA. The pride our alumni have is so infectious — I get excited every time I see SFA swag proudly displayed. Don't you?

And what a time for us all to be proud indeed! Our university is truly transforming and growing under the new leadership of SFA President Neal Weaver. His vision, coupled with the excitement of a new fall semester, is driving renewed interest for and energy at SFA.

With six home football games this year, we invite you back to Nacogdoches to experience our reimagined SFA Alumni Corner in partnership with Axe 'Em Acres and SFA Athletics. We are leveling up our experiences so you all may enjoy the spirit of SFA when you visit. As we return to the Southland Conference, which brings with it the promise of games in areas where more of our alumni live, you'll have multiple opportunities to show your pride and support our athletic teams this fall as they dominate the SLC. Go Jacks!

Homecoming 2024 is set for the weekend of Oct. 25 and is already shaping up to be a weekend of fun you will not want to miss. Our highly anticipated SFA Homecoming online auction, filled with tons of exciting and unique

SFA items, memorabilia and experiences, kicks off Oct. 15 and concludes at 5 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 27. Be on the lookout for everything SFA Homecoming related at sfaalumni.com.

Finally, rounding out the fall of 2024, the annual SFA Alumni Awards ceremony takes place Nov. 15, where we will recognize our distinguished alumni award winners who are making an impact in the world and representing SFA to the fullest. Please join us in celebrating an incredible slate of 2024 award winners!

As my time as SFA Alumni Association board president comes to an end in December 2024, I am reminded of the distinct honor and pleasure it has been representing our SFA alumni community of 100,000+ (and growing every year!). My heart truly bleeds purple, much like many of you.

You will continue to find me on the sidelines of Lumberjack volleyball games cheering on my sisters in "The Pressure Cooker" of Shelton Gym, on the football field in my Purple Lights Patio tent cheering on SFA football, in the locker room, and in the Sawmill cheering on Ladyjack basketball. I'll be around in the Nelson Rusche College of Business working with students and faculty on experiential learning, and working alongside Dr. Weaver to ensure the spirit of SFA alumni support continues to grow. I'm here for it all and welcome each of you back to our SFA home in Nacogdoches, which we all share as SFA family — we hope to see you soon.

Axe 'em, Jacks!

Erika Tolar '02
Nacogdoches
President, SFA Alumni Association

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Amber Lindsay
recording secretary

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executive director of alumni relations

Amber Lindsay
assistant to the executive director

Derek Snyder '01
director of alumni relations

Samantha Mora '08
director of events and engagement

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*

Bob Sitton '60, Nacogdoches
director emeritus

Sawdust

SFA Box 6096
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(936) 468-3407
alumni@sfasu.edu ★ sfaalumni.com

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.

2024 Alumni Awards

Distinguished Alumnus

John H. Beall '65



John H. Beall received a Bachelor of Arts in mathematics from SFA in 1965. While attending the university, he was active in the Pi Kappa Alpha fraternity and most importantly met his wife, Nacogdoches native and 1966 SFA graduate Susie Ritterskamp, who is now a retired elementary school teacher. The Bealls have two children, Tracy Ferguson of Houston and Tim Beall of Vail, Colorado. They have five grandchildren.

After graduation, Beall began his career at the NASA Manned Spacecraft Center, now the Lyndon B. Johnson Space Center in Houston. During his early years, he took business and accounting courses at night and passed the certified public accountant exam.

Beall retired from Johnson Space Center after serving 10 years as chief financial officer. His path to the CFO office included increasingly responsible leadership positions, such as deputy CFO and financial management officer. Additionally, Beall served as the chief of the Central Budget Office, coordinating and facilitating the implementation of the integrated center-wide budget process.

In his role as Johnson Space Center CFO, Beall was responsible for financial planning, execution, control and reporting of all resources in the center's more than \$4 billion annual budget. Beall was also a member of an agency team that interfaced with its Russian counterparts. The purpose was to understand the Russian budget process as it related to the International Space Station. Over a series of four visits to Russia, the team developed a professional working relationship with the Russian team and successfully completed the mission.

Distinguished Alumnus

Bob Williams '70



Bob Williams was born and raised on a farm and ranch on U.S. Highway 84, eight miles from Cushing, Texas. He graduated from Laneville Sue Allen High School then attended SFA, where he graduated in 1970 with a Bachelor of Business Administration in accounting.

Williams was drafted into the U.S. armed forces immediately after graduating from SFA and is a Vietnam-era Army veteran.

He served in the 105th Finance Section in Augsburg, Germany. In 1971, his then-fiancée, Linda Lampkin from Nacogdoches, flew to Munich, Germany, where she and Williams were

married Sept. 6, 1971. They have one daughter, Nichola Williams, and two grandchildren, Nikolas and Abigail.

For 27 years, Williams worked as a commercial casualty underwriter and underwriting manager primarily for James S. Kemper. He started a financial advisory business in 1996 and partially retired after almost three decades in that business. He has served on the board of numerous charitable organizations, including for nine years on the SFA Alumni Association board. He is an elder at his church, an avid golfer and a proud Lumberjack.

To watch Williams recount details of his time at SFA for the university's Centennial Conversations video series, visit gosfa.com/centennialconvos3.

Outstanding Young Alumna

Amber Burda '09



As a student at SFA majoring in hospitality administration with a minor in general business, Amber Burda was a member of the Delta Delta Delta chapter Beta Xi, serving as secretary, reference chair and vice president of chapter development. The Pearland, Texas, native represented SFA in July 2008 at the 53rd Tri Delta bi-annual convention held in Chicago.

During her time at SFA, Burda worked as a front desk clerk at the Fredonia Hotel and Convention Center (otherwise known as her "second home"). Immersing herself in the town's and hotel's rich history brought her intimately closer to Nacogdoches.

Following graduation, Burda worked in the fast-paced event industry as an event coordinator with SMG (now ASM Global) at NRG Park. Passionate about events and helping one company succeed at sales in the fair and rodeo business, her move to Mattress Firm was a natural fit. Burda spent six years managing and growing relationships with over 300 events across the country, eventually becoming Mattress Firm's director

of multi-channel sales planning.

In January 2017, Burda joined the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo as the executive director of sponsorships, business and corporate development. In 2023, she was named chief revenue officer and currently oversees ticketing, corporate and business partnerships, and official sponsors. Under her guidance, the sponsorship program at the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo has experienced significant growth and expansion. Burda's contributions have elevated the program, fostering exceptional partnerships with numerous sponsors and establishing the organization as a leader in the industry.

Burda serves on the board of directors of the Sponsorship Marketing Association and is a member of the International Association of Fairs and Expositions, Texas Association of Fairs and Events, and Western Fairs Association. In 2023, Burda was honored with a Houston Business Journal's Women Who Mean Business award in the nonprofit category.

Outside of her professional endeavors, Burda prioritizes her family. She resides in Santa Fe, Texas, with her husband, Greg '07, and their two young children, Jase (10) and Anna Lee (5), where they are always planning their next trip to the Caribbean or fishing.

2024 Alumni Awards

Outstanding Young Alumnus

Dr. Joshua D. Rhodes '06



Dr. Joshua D. Rhodes is a research scientist at The University of Texas at Austin, a nonresident fellow at Columbia University, a founding partner and chief technology officer of IdeaSmiths, and a commissioner for the City of Austin's Electricity Utility Commission. His current work is in the area of smart grid and the bulk electricity system, including spatial system-level applications and impacts of energy efficiency, resource

planning, distributed generation, and storage.

Rhodes is also interested in policy and the impacts good policy can have on the efficiency of the micro and macro economy. He is a regular contributor to Forbes and an expert voice for Axios, an American news website. He also sits on the advisory board of Catalyst Cooperative.

Rhodes holds a bachelor's degree in mathematics from SFA and a master's degree in computational mathematics from Texas A&M University. He also holds a master's degree in architectural engineering and a doctoral degree in civil engineering, both from UT Austin.

He enjoys mountain biking, backpacking and a good cup of coffee.

Lumberjack Pride

Samantha McPhail '92



Samantha McPhail graduated from Klein Forest High School in Houston and enrolled at SFA to pursue her interest in early childhood development and speech-language pathology. She was attracted to the university's collegial community feel and the reputation of its James I. Perkins College of Education.

At SFA, McPhail was a proud Lumberjack, attending athletic events and participating in and supporting various programs, including the Special Olympics.

After receiving her bachelor's degree in speech-language pathology, McPhail returned to Houston and accepted a speech therapist position at Cedarbrook Elementary School in the Alief Independent School District. As the Cedarbrook "speech teacher," she was responsible for diagnosing and treating speech, language and learning disabilities for pre-K through fifth-grade students. McPhail gained great satisfaction from working with

her students to address their challenges and observe the advancements they made.

In 1996, McPhail married her long-time friend, Terry, and together, they moved around the world as part of Terry's career in the oil industry. While she was unable to work in some foreign locations, including Malaysia, Angola and Indonesia, McPhail took the opportunities to get involved in the communities and support various local cultural programs.

After moving back to Houston, McPhail reengaged with SFA and quickly stepped up as a Lumberjack. Despite living in Houston, she makes frequent trips to Nacogdoches and is often seen on campus supporting the university and its programs. She also initiated a scholarship program and provided support for the Perkins College of Education.

McPhail has been a lifelong animal lover. She supports animal rescue programs and has taken in and adopted numerous dogs and cats, including their current dogs, Holly and Penny. She and Terry are active members of St. Luke's United Methodist Church in Houston.

Lumberjack Pride

Natalee (Newton) Kelaher '96



Born in Ohio, Natalee (Newton) Kelaher moved to Houston at age 5 and has called Texas home ever since. She grew up in Sugar Land and earned a Bachelor of Arts in sociology with a minor in communications from SFA.

During college, Kelaher demonstrated her self-starting nature by supporting her education through various roles, including stints in the library, as a resident assistant, and as a tour guide in the Office of Admissions.

Prior to becoming a real estate agent in 2010, Kelaher spent 15 years with Texas Medical Center, initially in human resources and later as an academic administrator for surgical residency programs.

Since obtaining her real estate license, Kelaher has continually expanded her expertise through professional designations, aiming to better serve her clients. She also actively gives back to her community through involvement in local charities and volunteer initiatives.

As a proud SFA alumna, Kelaher remains engaged with her alma mater, volunteering with the Alumni Association and serving on the College of Liberal and Applied Arts board. She has established a scholarship fund and participates in various alumni events.

Kelaher and her husband, Jim, reside in Houston, where they enjoy exploring the city's diverse restaurant scene and pampering their rescue dogs. In her free time, Kelaher enjoys travel, baking, wine tasting and cherishing moments with family and friends. ★

STEPHEN F. AUSTIN STATE UNIVERSITY HOMECOMING



For full and the most
up-to-date event info, visit
SFAAlumni.com/events

HOMECOMING SCHEDULE HIGHLIGHTS

OCT. 15

Homecoming Auction Kickoff Celebration
5 - 7:30 PM
Tracie D. Pearman Alumni Center

Homecoming Online Auction
Oct. 15, 6 p.m. - Oct. 27, 5 p.m.
Visit SFAAlumni.com/Auction

If you have an item you'd like to donate,
please visit SFAAlumni.com/Homecoming or
call (936) 468-3407.



OCT. 25

"Back in Nac" Social
Oct. 25, 4 - 7 PM
Nine Flags Bar
The Fredonia Hotel



Bonfire and Concert
8 PM

Intramural Fields (Concert to follow)

SFA Alumni Association Membership Meeting
4:30 - 5 PM
Multimedia Room (across from Starbucks)
Baker Pattillo Student Center

OCT. 27

Homecoming Flap "Jack" Breakfast
7:30 - 10 AM
The Fredonia Hotel Convention Center

Alumni Corner Tailgate & Fall Fest
3 PM - Kickoff
Corner of Raguet and Hayter streets

Homecoming Parade
10 AM
Downtown Nacogdoches

Homecoming Football Game
6 PM
Homer Bryce Stadium



We're looking forward to seeing you and your friends at the parade, tailgate, game and other events!

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IN LOCAL NACOGDOCHES STORES



**CONTINENTAL LIQUOR
LIQUOR MART**

Class Notes

1960s

Sen. Kenneth “Kim” Brimer ’67 was selected by the Arlington City Council as the namesake for a bridge in the heart of the Entertainment District located near the intersection of Nolan Ryan Expressway and AT&T Way. The bridge is slated to open in March 2025. Brimer served as state senator for the Arlington area from 2003-09 after seven terms in the Texas House of Representatives from 1989-2003. Brimer earned a Bachelor of Science in general business.

1970s



Charles Johnson ’76 received the Realtor Emeritus award from the National Association of Realtors. He is a member of the Waco Board of Realtors and Texas Association of

Realtors, and he also is a broker and property tax consultant with jäGROUPcompanies in Waco. Johnson received a Bachelor of Business Administration in marketing with a minor in computer science.



Christi Harlan ’78 wrote the book, “Mr. President, the Class is Yours,” which focuses on President Jimmy Carter’s stints as a Sunday school teacher while serving as president of the United States of America. The book features 14 known transcriptions of Carter’s Sunday school lessons and introduces historical context of the issues he had to confront during his presidency. Harlan will be a featured author at the 2024 Holiday Book Festival organized by the White House Historical Association. She is a former editor for The Pine Log newspaper at SFA and earned a Bachelor of Arts in journalism.



Col. Linda Harkness ’79 retired after 30 years with the U.S. Army. She held multiple duty stations, positions and assignments. Her last assignment was as human resources director with the 321st Civil Affairs Command, Joint Base San Antonio. Harkness received a Bachelor of Fine Arts in art.

1980s



George A. Faber II ’80 was presented with the Arts in Education Icon Award from the Young Audiences of Northeast Texas. He earned a Bachelor of Arts and Master of Arts in music and administrative education.

Patricia Boniface Williamson ’82 & ’85 retired from JPMorganChase in January 2023 after serving as director of human resources for more than 30 years. Williamson received her Bachelor of Arts and Master of Arts, both in psychology.



Dr. Karen Brooks ’83 was named director of general surgical services and director of quality of DHR Health Brownsville. Brooks earned a Bachelor of Science in biology.



Johnnie Cotton ’83 was named director of bands at Carthage Independent School District. Cotton earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts in music.

Dr. Louise Fincher ’83 was named interim president of Emory & Henry College. Fincher earned a Bachelor of Science in physical education.



Sidney Evans II ’85 was one of two people chosen out of NRG Energy’s 19,000 employees to receive the Impact of the Year Award — the company’s highest level of customer experience awards. Evans earned a Bachelor of Business Administration in management.

Craig Goodman ’86 was named chief of police for Waco Independent School District. Previously, Goodman served as deputy chief of police at SFA and earned a Bachelor of Business Administration in finance.

Lisa Renee Canales ’87 was named principal of Jenks Elementary School in Katy Independent School District. Canales earned a Bachelor of Business Administration in marketing.

Robert Belt ’88 developed a unique career providing trusted audit services to local governments, and the firm he helped found

recently joined one of the nation’s premier accounting firms, Crowe LLP. Belt earned a Bachelor of Business Administration in accounting.

Bob Murray ’88 retired from The University of Texas at Austin. Murray earned a Bachelor of Science in forestry recreation management.



Tim Pareti ’88 recently published the coming-of-age novel, “Ernie’s Bleachers.” An award-winning journalist, Pareti worked as a reporter and editor for Scripps newspapers

and was a freelance writer for the Chicago Tribune. He’s currently a real estate agent and Illinois-certified residential appraiser in Chicago. Pareti received a Bachelor of Arts in English.

1990s



Gathering at a Dallas Arts District after-party celebrating a performance

by **Jill Grove ’90** in the Dallas Opera presentation of “Elektra” where she portrayed Klytämnestra are, from left, David Zimmerman; **Shirley Watterston**, retired SFA music faculty; Grove; **Kevin Roberts ’90**; **Deborah Dalton**, SFA associate professor of voice; and **Matt Hardman ’06**. Grove received a Bachelor of Music, Roberts a Bachelor of Music, and Hardman a Bachelor of Applied Arts and Sciences.

Joe Cauthen ’90 was named a defensive analyst for the University of Memphis football program. Cauthen earned a Bachelor of Science in physical education.

Dr. James Hockenberry ’91 & ’99 was named superintendent of Lufkin Independent School District. Hockenberry received a Bachelor of Science in biology and Master of Education, both in educational leadership.

Jae Gaskill ’94, principal at McKinney North High School, will serve as McKinney Independent School District’s director of career and technical education. Gaskill earned a Bachelor of Science in biology. ➔

Class Notes

Walter “Mack” McKee III ’94 retired from the Nacogdoches Police Department after more than 28 years of service. McKee is a U.S. Army veteran and received a Bachelor of Arts in criminal justice.



John K. Streeter IV ’94 was elected to the City of El Lago Council Position 5. Streeter received a Bachelor of Business Administration in general business.



Brad Milam ’95 & ’99 was named assistant principal at Carthage High School. Milam earned a Bachelor of Science in physics and a Master of Education in educational leadership.



Richard Robichaux ’96, a professor in Texas State University’s Department of Theatre and Dance, has roles in the latest streaming sensations “Hit Man,” directed by Richard Linklater, and “The Long Game,” directed by Julio Quintana. Robichaux earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts in theatre.



Dr. David Scott ’96 was named special projects director at the East Texas Council of Governments. Scott earned a Bachelor of Arts in criminal justice.



Denise (George) Hollis ’97 was named science department chair at Allen High School. Hollis earned a Bachelor of Science in biology.

2000s

Jackie Zimmerman ’00 was named executive director of Lufkin Creative. Zimmerman earned a Bachelor of Applied Arts and Sciences in journalism.

Jennifer Putman ’01 was named principal of Curtis Elementary School in Northwest Independent School District. Putman received a Bachelor of Science in elementary education.



James Reyes ’01 was named athletic director and head football coach for Palestine Independent School District. Reyes received a Bachelor of Science in kinesiology.

Jerrod Campbell ’02 & ’15 was named superintendent of Tenaha Independent School District. Campbell earned a Bachelor of Science in kinesiology and a Master of Education in educational leadership.



Matthew Seale ’02 was ranked No. 39 in the 2024 Forbes Top Best-in-State Wealth Advisors in Texas. This is the sixth time he has been ranked. Seale earned a Bachelor of Science in kinesiology.

Wes Hightower ’03 was elected to Van Independent School District’s board. Hightower received a Bachelor of Science in speech communication.

Dr. Lee Payne ’03 recently completed his novel, “The Pack.” A professor in SFA’s Department of Government, Payne earned a Bachelor of Science in political science and government.



Dr. Elaine Howard ’04 was named superintendent for Sharyland Independent School District. Howard earned a Bachelor of Science in biology.

Eric Finley ’05 was named principal of McRoberts Elementary School in Katy ISD. Finley earned a Master of Education in educational leadership.

Paul Gray ’05 & ’10 was named director of Growlite at Barron Lighting Group. Gray earned a Bachelor of Science and a Master of Science, both in biology.



Craig Haynie ’05 was awarded the Art Teaching Excellence Award in the high school division from the Young Audiences of Northeast Texas. Haynie earned a Bachelor of Music.

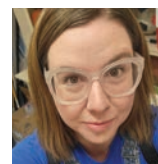
Matt Mizell ’05 & ’14 was named superintendent of Trinidad Independent School District. Prior to the appointment, Mizell served as a principal in the district for 10 years. He received a Bachelor of Science in

health science and a Master of Education in educational leadership.



Katie (Freelove) Nelms ’05 launched “Broadcast Made Easy,” a company that creates content for elementary schools with video announcements. Nelms received a Bachelor of Arts in radio/television.

Joanna Huckabee ’08 was named director of institutional advancement at Panola College. Huckabee earned a Bachelor of Arts in radio/television.



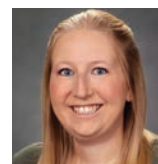
Shawna Lynch ’08 was awarded the Art Teaching Excellence Award in the elementary school division from the Young Audiences of Northeast Texas. Lynch earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts with an emphasis in performance.

Nathan Hague ’09, sports editor with The Daily Sentinel in Nacogdoches, was named the Texas Managing Editors’ Celeste Williams Star Sportswriter of the Year. Hague earned a Bachelor of Arts in journalism.

Dr. Betsy Mijares ’09 & ’17 was named program officer for education and economic mobility at the TLL Temple Foundation. Mijares earned a Master of Education in secondary school administration and a Doctor of Education in superintendency and educational system administration.

2010s

Sean Doyle ’10 was recognized as one of Independent Community Bankers of America’s 40 under 40. Doyle is senior vice president of sales management at Texas First Bank and received a Bachelor of Arts in communications.



Jessica Davis ’11, a teacher at Redwater High School, was named campus teacher of the year. Davis earned a Bachelor of Science in hospitality administration.

Ashley (Felts) Perry ’11 was named director of nursing at the Joint Replacement Center of Louisiana. Perry received a Bachelor of Science in Nursing.

Class Notes

Adam Tate '11 was named the Oregon Department of Land Conservation and Development's first-ever renewable energy planner. Tate received a Bachelor of Arts in theatre.

Alex Morcom '12 was named head of marketing at Ridley Block Operations. Morcom earned a Bachelor of Science in animal science with a minor in agriculture business.



Nana Ankamah '14 was named head boys basketball coach at Arlington Martin High School in Arlington and is the first African American male head coach in the school's history. A former basketball student manager, Ankamah received a Bachelor of Science in kinesiology.

Glen Croll '14 was named principal of Downing Middle School in Lewisville Independent School District. Croll earned a Master of Education in educational leadership.

Mary Lynn Gawryszewski '14 has been named principal of Robert M. Shoemaker High School in Killeen Independent School District. Gawryszewski earned a Master of Education in educational leadership.



Jacob Hines '14 is director for clinical applications at Premise Health. Hines and his team ranked 32nd in the Training APEX Awards. Hines graduated with a Bachelor of Business Administration in marketing.



Marina McLerran '14 received a doctoral degree in music education from the University of Miami. McLerran received a Bachelor of Arts in music education from SFA.

Kendrick Harrison '15 was named athletic director and head football coach at Liberty High School. Harrison earned a Bachelor of Science in kinesiology.



Demi Stillinger '15 was named Student Support Personnel of the Year for Katy ISD. She serves as the college and career facilitator for Jordan High School. Stillinger received a Bachelor of Science in child development and family living.

Deanna Anders '16 was named director of technology at Elysian Fields Independent School District. Anders earned a Bachelor of Science in Interdisciplinary Studies.



Dr. Johnny Walker '16 is the first Milken Educator Award recipient in Winona Independent School District history. The award comes with a \$25,000 cash prize. Walker received a Master of Education in elementary education.

Jimmy Friday Wright '17 was named superintendent of Wells Independent School District. Wright earned a Bachelor of Science in Agriculture with a concentration in agriculture development production.



Mahayla (Kissman) Atkinson '18 announced the April 2 birth of Evelyn Leanne Atkinson, a future Lumberjack. Atkinson received a Bachelor of Arts in theatre.

Eric DeJesus '18 was named head baseball coach at Nacogdoches High School. DeJesus earned a Bachelor of Science in kinesiology.

Kylie Altier '19 was named 2024 Louisiana State Teacher of the Year. She is a first-grade teacher at McKinley Elementary School in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Altier received a Master of Education in elementary education.

Jeff Martin '19 was named director of basketball operations at Rice University. Martin served as a graduate assistant for SFA men's basketball and received a Master of Business Administration.

Dr. Ryan Stewart '19 was among 131 students recently awarded a Doctor of Optometry from Southern College of Optometry in Memphis, Tennessee. Stewart earned a Bachelor of Science in cellular and molecular biology.

2020s

Kiara Hawkins '20 was awarded the Art Teaching Excellence Award in the middle school division from the Young Audiences of Northeast Texas. Hawkins earned a Bachelor of Arts in educational theatre.

Mason McCarty '20 was named director of technology for Lufkin ISD. McCarty earned a Bachelor of Arts in information technology.



Trace Horger '21 began an IT cybersecurity specialist role at the U.S. Department of Labor in Washington, D.C. Horger received a Bachelor of Arts in information technology.

Jared Belz '22 was named industrial designer with the Boss International Group. Belz earned a Master of Business Administration.

Dayven Coleman '22 joined the Valparaíso University football staff as nickelbacks coach. Coleman earned a Bachelor of Science in human sciences.

Colby Jackson '23 was named the Western Athletic Conference's assistant director of communications. Jackson earned a Bachelor of Business Administration in sports business. ★

Life Members

The SFA Alumni Association thanks the following alumni who recently became life members:

- 8669. Nelson Omar Ibarra '20 & '23, Nacogdoches
- 8670. Susana G. Ibarra, current student, Nacogdoches
- 8671. Natalee L. Dunn '23, Nacogdoches
- 8672. Robert H. Hobbs '82, Austin
- 8673. Ann Hobbs '82, Austin
- 8674. Billy H. Cordova Jr. '83 & '08, Nacogdoches
- 8675. Bridget S. Vilas '21, Bryan
- 8676. Jenna M. Easley '93, Mount Pleasant
- 8677. Brandi M. Hernandez '10, Douglass
- 8678. Wester D. Couch '23, Nacogdoches
- 8679. Abigail H. Bolding '23, Nacogdoches
- 8680. Kyler A. Heigley '24, Brookeland
- 8681. Shelby M. Curtis '24, Mineola
- 8682. Reese T. Turner '24, Nacogdoches
- 8683. Kallie A. Menard '22, Arlington

In Memoriam

MARK BURROUGHS SR.



Mark Burroughs Sr., a 1979 graduate, passed away May 2. Burroughs attended SFA for three years where he earned degrees in history, business and political science, and served as student body president.

He went on to attend The University of Texas at Austin School of Law and received a Juris Doctor in 1982. Burroughs exemplified the highest standards of professionalism and dedication to his clients and his vocation as an attorney.

From 2008-14, Burroughs was elected mayor of the City of Denton. He was, at the time of his passing, board chair of the Medical City Denton Hospital board; Solutions of North Texas; Denton State Supported Living Center Volunteer Services Council; and Denton Public School Foundation. In his lifetime, he served on numerous boards and committees in North Texas.

ANNE COMMANDER



Anne Commander, former staff member, passed away Feb. 9. Commander retired from SFA where she was director of postal services and served as president of the National Association of College and University Mail Services. She enjoyed painting and learned to crochet and quilt from her mother and grandmother. She leaves behind numerous handmade quilts and Christmas stockings for her children and grandchildren.

DR. ROBERT EANES



Dr. Robert Eanes, former staff member, passed away Feb. 25. Eanes served twice in the Commissioned Corps of the U.S. Public Health Service in Atlanta, held teaching positions at the Medical College of Virginia in Richmond, and finally returned to Texas to “retire,” only to return to work as a staff physician and later as director of SFA’s medical services, from which he retired in 2007.

DR. MICHAEL FOUNTAIN



Dr. Michael Fountain, a 1970 and 1972 graduate and former forestry professor, passed away May 4. Fountain transferred to SFA in fall 1968 and completed his bachelor’s and master’s degrees in forestry. In 1977, he completed his doctoral degree at West Virginia University.

Inspired by his experience as a graduate teaching assistant at SFA and WVU, Fountain subsequently devoted his life to teaching forestry. He arrived at SFA in 1981 as an assistant professor, was promoted to associate professor in 1987 and to professor in 1993. He was eventually honored as the Laurence C. Walker Distinguished Professor in 2000. From 2000-09, he served as associate dean of the Arthur Temple College of Forestry and Agriculture, eventually retiring from SFA in 2010 after serving a final year in 2009 as the interim dean.

Fountain’s proudest accomplishment was serving as faculty advisor to the Sylva Forestry Club at SFA from 1981 until his retirement in 2010.

TERRY GUINN



Terry Guinn, former professor of social work and 1962 graduate, passed away March 21. Guinn played a major role in the development of the Bachelor of Social Work and Master of Social Work programs at SFA. He was one of a few social workers in the area with a master’s degree in social work and was a pioneer in social work practice and education in East Texas.

Guinn taught in the field education program for the department, providing knowledge and skill development while students completed their semester internships in a variety of agency-based settings. He was instrumental in the advocacy efforts to establish the MSW program and the pursuit of accreditation. For his support and involvement in developing the School of Social Work, Guinn was recognized for his leadership and commitment in advancing social work education and practice in East Texas and SFA with a service award.

BOYD HERNDON



Boyd Herndon, a 1972 graduate and former professor, passed away Feb. 8. Herndon received a Bachelor of Business Administration in general business from SFA and a Juris Doctor from The University of Texas at Austin School of Law in 1975. He was an instructor of business law at SFA from 1975 to 1977.

DR. VICTOR HOFF



Dr. Victor Hoff, former professor of biology, passed away March 21. In 1966, Hoff accepted a position in the Department of Biology at SFA and remained until his retirement in 1993 when he moved to Crockett with his wife.

Hoff designed his and his wife’s computer software as needed, never purchasing from an outside source and also became very interested in astronomy, even building his own telescope. Over the

In Memoriam

years, he became a stamp collector, a HAM radio operator, and avid fisherman. Hoff was a kind man who kept his mind active, never losing all that knowledge until his death.

DR. JANIE KENNER



Dr. Janie Kenner, a 1963 and 1982 graduate and former faculty member, passed away June 7. Kenner received both her bachelor's and master's degrees from SFA in home economics education. She earned a doctoral degree in textiles and clothing from Texas Woman's University in 1990.

Her career at SFA spanned 30 years. Kenner received the College of Education Teaching Excellence Award in 2004, and the School of Human Sciences Teaching Excellence Award in 1997 and 2004. She was a member of the Phi Upsilon Omicron and Phi Kappa Phi honor societies and the SFA University Women's Club.

DR. GARY MAYER



Dr. Gary Mayer, former professor of mass communication, passed away March 18. After 27 years of teaching at SFA and more than 50 years of full-time teaching in total, Mayer retired at the conclusion of the spring 2019 semester as professor emeritus.

In 2018, the readers of the student newspaper, The Pine Log, named him the Best Faculty Member at SFA. In 2003, he was the recipient of the College of Liberal and Applied Arts Teaching Excellence Award.

He loved being in a classroom teaching future media professionals and having a captive audience to share his stories and jokes. After retirement, he continued teaching part-time. His legacy will live on in the thousands of students he taught and mentored over more than half a century.

MARY ANN MILES



Mary Ann Miles, former staff member, passed away Feb. 26. Miles worked at SFA for over 30 years, working in various departments and eventually retiring as assistant to the dean of the College of Sciences and Mathematics. An avid supporter of SFA's Ladyjacks, she was the 2005 Woman of the Year for University Professional Women at SFA and received the President's Achievement Award at SFA in 1998.

DR. HERSEL REEVES



Dr. Hershel Reeves, former forestry professor, passed away April 3. Reeves retired as professor of forestry after 25 years of teaching and conducting research at SFA. He is the author of one book and a co-author of two books as well as numerous publications in professional journals.

Reeves received many awards and honors from professional and civic societies during his academic career, including being elected as fellow in the National Society of American Foresters.

NANCY SPECK



Nancy Speck, former faculty member and vice president of advancement, passed away March 31. Her career at SFA began in the James I. Perkins College of Education. After earning her Doctor of Education from the Texas Woman's University in 1978, she returned to SFA to teach in the Nelson

Rusche College of Business and eventually moved into the SFA's administration arena.

She was director of development and rose to the rank of vice president of university advancement. She had a successful career representing the university in political and public affairs across the state and in Washington, D.C.

Her civic activities included serving as a member of the Deep East Texas Mental Health and Mental Retardation board, now known as Burke Mental Health Services; president of the Nacogdoches County Chamber of Commerce; a founder of both The Texas Lyceum and the Nacogdoches Heritage Festival; and a member of various historical societies in Texas. Among her many honors, she was named the Nacogdoches Citizen of the Year and East Texan of the Year.

PAT SPENCE



Pat Spence, a 1987 graduate and long-time advisor for The Pine Log student newspaper and Stone Fort yearbook at SFA, passed away June 15. Spence, who also taught classes in the Department of Mass Communication, was revered by many past and present students as the matriarch of SFA's student publications department. She led the award-winning publications to tremendous heights for 28 years.

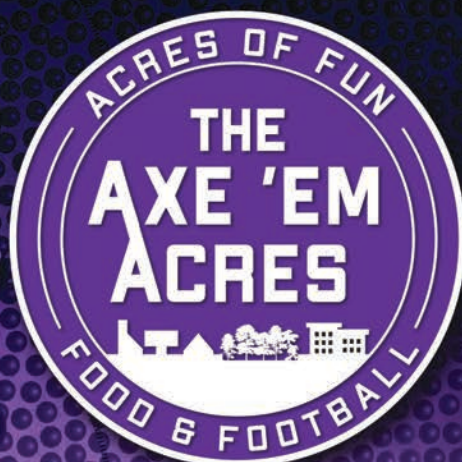
The Pat Spence Scholarship for The Pine Log was established in 2014 as she neared retirement. Funds for the scholarship are being raised by friends and former students. The scholarship is awarded to currently enrolled Pine Log staff members who are mass communication and/or art majors.

In Memoriam

Mary L. Abney '90 of Diboll, May 11
Phillip Allen '79 of Lufkin, March 2023
Dr. O.R. (Rudy) Allred '54 of Beaumont, March 24
Floyd Ray Anderson '64 of Longview, Nov. 7
Sheila Anderson '69 of Tomball, June 5
Horace "Bud" Askins '06 of Lufkin, Jan. 29
Tommy Barton '60 of Kingwood, May 7
Retha Bigham '66 of Ennis, May 26
Linda Broesche '74 of Fort Worth, Feb. 28
Melba Bryant '69 of Tyler, May 10
Angela Burt '92 of Georgetown, April 30
Dr. Nancy Lynne Cain '78 of Johnson City, May 17
Jaime Cardenas '99 of Rockwall, June 16, 2023
Jane Cernosek '91 of Katy, Feb. 15
Edward Chavez Jr. '70 of League City, May 7
Mary Cheney '02 of Houston, March 26
Thomas Cobb '99 of Beaumont, March 26
Kristine Copeland '93 of Bellaire, April 1
A.D. Courtney '55 & '57 of Lufkin, March 26
Dr. David Curry '91 of Plano, Feb. 3
Malcolm Deason '01 of Lufkin, April 10
Jean Dodge '66 of Marshall, June 9
Bobby Dodson '64 of Plano, April 28
Carol Dodson '78 of Bonham, Dec. 29
Larry Ferguson '80 of Longview, Feb. 16
Joe Fiedler '52 & '53 of Chesapeake, Virginia, March 28
Patricia Florey '76 of Mount Pleasant, March 3
John Frame '67 of Killeen, March 23
James Francis '93 of Spring, April 12
Mary Janell Franks '70 of Bay City, April 23
Anita Garner '60 & '63 of Nacogdoches, March 19
Gary Gartner '69 of Houston, March 22
Dr. Misty Mitchell Germaine '86 of Fort Worth, April 1
Virginia Goodrow '67 of Palestine, May 31
Daniel Graham '74 of White Oak, May 20
Wanda Gray '59 & '78 of Henderson, Jan. 26
Dr. Kenneth Griffin '60 & '66 of Coppell, Feb. 25
Preston Hairgrove '63 of Thornton, Oct. 31
Charles Harding '80 of Dallas, April 12
William Harrison Sr. '64 of San Antonio, Jan. 7
Ernest Haynes '68 of San Marcos, April 16
Dr. Thomas Heap '70 of Houston, March 27
Dr. Hervy Hiner Jr. '75 of Beaumont, March 11
Rebecca Hulgán '06 of Winnie, Oct. 16
Robert Hutchins '62 of Crockett, Feb. 21
Betty Johnson '53 of Longview, March 11
Esthermay Johnston '41 of Timpson, April 28

Noelle Kanady '66 of Houston, Dec. 20
Judith Keiss '69 of Carthage, April 24
Dana Kirkland '70 & '76 of Hughes Springs, March 19
Sara-Ella Collins Kurth '49 of Lufkin, May 11
Dr. David Lenhart '61 of Nacogdoches, March 14
Michael Lum '83 of Spring, March 9
Janice Markus '67 & '72 of Katy, April 12
Gerald McClure '53 & '54 of Etoile, March 28
William McDaniel '79 of Johnson City, June 2
James (Jim) McGhee '77 of Plano, Aug. 19, 2021
Joseph McKay '80 of Midland, May 29, 2023
Sherlida McGahey '78 of Houston, May 28
Eleanor McMillan '65 of Dallas, Nov. 3
Judy McNeil '71 of Lufkin, April 9
Linda Milford '81 of Nacogdoches, May 21
Bertha Miranda '69 of Lufkin, April 21
The Rev. Bobby Moore '63 of Longview, May 5
Sandra Moore '86 of Cypress, April 10
John Morris '76 of Minden, May 8
Mary Montgomery '68 & '77 of Hemphill, Jan. 26
Ronda "Rennae" Null '82 of Beaumont, May 24
Orville Odom '60 of Beaumont, April 30
Jimmy Palmer '61 of Longview, March 2
Kenneth Parmley '48 & '52 of Waco, Jan. 23
Genell Permenter '48 & '84 of Corsicana, March 26
Ladeen Pluss '76 of Lufkin, March 3
Betty Preston '96 of Lufkin, April 29
Leroy "L.D." Rumfield III '71 of Corpus Christi, May 28, 2023
Sheila Scogin '64 of Huntington, Feb. 17
Robert Shamburger '61 of Lindale, April 20
Diana Shytles '77 of Athens, Feb. 4
Laronnda Berry-Simpson '02 of Houston, April 25
Terry Steele '74 of Henderson, May 14
Mary Stewart '63 of Chandler, April 20
Richard Stofer '71 of Plano, Feb. 7
Lewis Summers '59 of New London, April 10
Kenneth Swirczynski '80 of Gainesville, April 16
Leslie Howard Thomas '69 of Jefferson, April 20
Dr. Jackie Thompson '07 of Gilmer, May 11
Albert Tidwell '77 of Alto, May 17
Betty Walden '69 of Huntsville, March 18
Philip Wayne Walker '92 of Allen, April 10
Charlie Waller '51 & '52 of Pasadena, March 14
Dorothy Ward '52 of Corpus Christi, Feb. 3
Gary Ward '72 of Hope, Arkansas, May 28
Brent Wood '69 & '70 of Carrollton, Nov. 30

GO! FIGHT! WIN!



PREMIER PREGAME TAILGATING

A **WINNING** *combination!*

2024 HOME FOOTBALL TAILGATING SCHEDULE



AUG. 29 (THURSDAY)
4 P.M. / 7 P.M.
VS. NORTH AMERICAN UNIVERSITY



SEPT. 21
3 P.M. / 6 P.M.
VS. UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO



OCT. 5
1 P.M. / 4 P.M.
VS. NORTHWESTERN STATE UNIVERSITY



OCT. 26 (HOMECOMING)
4 P.M. / 7 P.M.
VS. HOUSTON CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY



NOV. 16
1 P.M. / 4 P.M.
VS. UNIVERSITY OF INCARNATE WORD



NOV. 23
1 P.M. / 4 P.M.
VS. ABILENE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY

VISIT [SFATICKETS.COM](https://www.sfatickets.com)

Alumni Corner starts 3 hours prior to game time.

[SFAALUMNI.COM/EVENTS](https://www.sfaalumni.com/events)

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On Sept. 18, the Lumberjack community will work to build a brighter future together during SFA Giving Day.

This 24-hour fundraising event celebrates the generosity of Lumberjacks near and far with one day full of activities, opportunities and surprises. Join us by making a gift to the cause between midnight and 11:59 p.m. Sept. 18 and become one of the many community members celebrated for their philanthropic impact. Our goal this year is to reach 500 donors all across the U.S. and world.

Join in Building a Brighter Future, Together! Your contribution will help us reach our goal and make a lasting impact on higher education. **Donate \$30 or more and receive an exclusive Giving Day T-shirt as a thank you for your support!**



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givingday.sfasu.edu

