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SAWDUST

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



THE PAST AND FUTURE
OF SFA'S ARTHUR TEMPLE
COLLEGE OF FORESTRY
AND AGRICULTURE

the Fredonia Hotel



POOL VIEWS &
PURPLE HUES

President's Letter



Dear Lumberjacks,

As I approach the end of my first year as president of Stephen F. Austin State University, I am filled with gratitude and excitement for all we have accomplished

together. It has been a remarkable journey, witnessing the dedication and passion of our students, faculty, staff and alumni, all working tirelessly to take SFA to new heights. The enthusiasm and commitment to excellence within our community have led to significant milestones and set the stage for a bright future.

Since my arrival in May, I have seen tremendous momentum building for SFA's future, particularly in our enrollment trends. This positive shift underscores the growing confidence in our institution and highlights the promising path ahead. Last fall, SFA welcomed its largest first-time undergraduate class since 2017, and undergraduate semester credit hour production for the 2024-25 academic year rose by 4%, marking the first increase in a decade. We expect these positive trends to continue with the return of SFA alumnus Dr. Kent Willis as the inaugural senior vice president of enrollment and student affairs. Among numerous strategies already implemented, his team has launched the Lumberjack Transfer Alliance, a partnership with East Texas community colleges offering guaranteed admission, scholarships and enhanced student services.

Thanks to additional investments from The University of Texas System Board of Regents in November, we are pleased to announce the expansion of our Purple Promise program. Starting this fall, the program will cover the cost of tuition and fees for eligible students from families with an annual income of \$100,000 or less. Prior to joining the UT System, our program was only available to families with an annual income of \$30,000 or less. This initiative creates a transformative opportunity for students and their families to access higher education in East Texas.

Earlier this semester, production crews from the Amazon Prime television series "The College Tour" spent a week on campus filming our episode, set to premiere later this year. Ten outstanding students from various programs will be featured, showcasing our incredible institution to prospective students and alumni. The episode will be available for streaming on multiple platforms, including Amazon Prime Video, Google TV, Niche and Nearpod, and will be shared with 60,000 high school counselors nationwide.

In February, the Board of Regents approved an additional \$5 million to supplement the nearly \$80 million already allocated for new forestry and agriculture buildings. This funding will support the construction of the Agricultural Engineering and Technology Building adjacent to the Forestry and Agriculture Building site. The investment will benefit future students, strengthen SFA's leadership in forestry and agriculture education, and advance vital environmental research. Over the next five to seven years, we anticipate investing nearly half a billion dollars in campus construction projects, transforming the experiences of students, faculty, staff and the broader community.

Our students achieved remarkable success in competition this year, showcasing their dedication and talent while bringing both regional and national attention to SFA. The women's soccer team captured both the regular season and tournament championships in the Southland Conference, qualifying for the NCAA Tournament for the fourth time in program history. Elkana Kipruto won the individual Southland Conference title in men's cross country, setting a school record and finishing 13th at the NCAA South Central Regional. The men's track and field team also took home first place at the 2025 Southland Conference Indoor Track and Field Championship. Meanwhile, the women's basketball team won the Southland Conference Basketball Tournament, marking their 19th appearance in the NCAA Women's Basketball Tournament. Their game against Notre Dame was the first SFA game ever broadcast on ESPN's primary linear television channel. Lastly, the SFA Sylvans timber sports team won the 66th annual Association of Southern Forestry Clubs Conclave, clinching their 19th title and extending their winning streak to seven consecutive conclaves, tying a historical record.

There is no better time to get involved with SFA than now as we boldly step into our new future. In the coming months, we will share the results of our campus master plan and strategic plan committees' work. Your support and involvement are vital to our success. I hope you have a terrific summer, and I look forward to seeing you back on campus soon!

Axe 'em!

Dr. Neal Weaver
President
Stephen F. Austin State University



STEPHEN F. AUSTIN STATE UNIVERSITY PRESIDENT'S CABINET

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*interim provost, executive vice president
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director of governmental relations

Dr. Kent Willis '08
*senior vice president for enrollment and
student engagement*

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.



“The most beautiful college campus in Texas.”

When the governor honored SFA with that lofty status, other institutions were a little ruffled. But, with a campus nestled into the state's largest azalea garden, who could argue? If you're trying to decide the best time to get back to Nac, times awastin'. Plan your roadtrip back with the Visit Nac app or VisitNac.com



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On the Cover



Over the last eight decades, SFA's Arthur Temple College of Forestry and Agriculture has cultivated a legacy of excellence in natural resources. Now, as SFA and the college prepares for the construction of a new state-of-the-art building, we reflect on the nearly 80 years that shaped this prestigious reputation.

Sawdust

UNIVERSITY MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS

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

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*Sawdust editor and art director
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*Sawdust deputy editor
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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 to be featured on Amazon Prime Video's 'The College Tour'



SFA will be featured this fall on an episode of the Amazon Prime television series "The College Tour," which highlights colleges and universities across the country and showcases campus life through stories told by current students.

Hosted by Alex Boylan, winner of CBS's "The Amazing Race," each episode of "The College Tour" focuses on a single

institution, providing an in-depth look at academics, campus culture and student experiences.

SFA appoints Dr. Kent Willis inaugural senior vice president for enrollment and student engagement



SFA announced the appointment of Dr. Kent L. Willis as the institution's inaugural senior vice president for enrollment and student engagement. A 2008 graduate of SFA, Willis brings a wealth of experience in student affairs and enrollment management, most recently serving as vice president of student affairs and enrollment

management at California State University, Fresno.

"Dr. Willis' innovative approach to enrollment management and his dedication to student engagement make him an exceptional addition to our leadership team," said Dr. Neal Weaver, SFA president. "We are confident his vision and experience will significantly enhance our efforts to recruit, retain and support SFA students."

SFA ranked No. 1 regional public university in Texas by U.S. News & World Report

SFA was ranked the No. 1 regional public school in Texas and No. 18 in the Regional Universities West category in the 2025 U.S. News & World Report Best Colleges rankings. SFA tied for the top state spot with the University of North Texas.

In 2023, SFA was ranked No. 20 in the Regional Universities West category, making its two-spot rise a noteworthy achievement for the university and reflecting a commitment to ongoing academic and institutional growth. The western region encompasses 14 states, including Alaska and California, highlighting SFA's continued excellence on a broad geographic scale.

"This prestigious ranking is a testament to the dedication of our faculty, staff and students," said Dr. Neal Weaver, SFA president. "Being named the top regional public school in Texas and advancing to 18th in the western region demonstrates the strength of our programs and our unwavering focus on student success. We are honored to be recognized in this way and will continue to work toward fostering an exceptional educational environment at SFA."

SFA achieves record-breaking success on 2024 Giving Day

SFA celebrated unprecedented success with its fourth annual Giving Day, raising a total of \$192,545 from more than 3,400 donors across the nation. The funds, which will benefit various academic and other programs, athletics, and academic initiatives, far surpassed the initial goal of 500 donors and last year's results.

Held Sept. 18 on SFA's 101st birthday, last year's Giving Day saw a staggering 1,200% increase in donors, leaping from just 259 participants in 2023 to over 3,400 in 2024. Online contributions alone surged by 117%, with \$152,000 in online gifts compared to \$70,000 last year.

Sylvans win seventh-straight Southern Forestry Conclave, set new record in women's crosscut

The SFA Sylvans timbersports team has once again claimed victory at the 66th annual Association of Southern Forestry Clubs Conclave, marking the Sylvans' 19th overall Conclave title and extending their winning streak to seven consecutive Conclaves, tying the University of Arkansas at Monticello's historic run from 1987 to 1993 as the longest ever.

Hosted this year by the Alabama A&M University's Forestry Club, the event brought together 13 universities to compete in a series of rigorous technical and physical forestry-related events.

The Sylvans secured first place in physical events and fourth place in technical events, earning a total of 263.5 points. The competition remained intense, with North Carolina State University finishing second with 245.5 points, Virginia Tech placing third with 209 points, and the University of Arkansas at Monticello taking sixth with 190 points.

A highlight of this year's competition was the record-setting performance in the women's crosscut event. SFA's Holly Parkin and

News Briefs

Maddie Sweeten set a new Conclave record, completing their cut in an astonishing 4.69 seconds — the fastest time recorded since the event's inception in 1979.

Student vote names new SFA dining hall slated for 2025 opening

In a campuswide vote, SFA students selected Pineywoods Dining as the official name for the new dining facility currently under construction at the corner of Wilson Drive and East College Street, which is set to open this year.

Pineywoods Dining emerged as the top choice, beating out two other contenders: Pine Grove Eatery and Timber Pines.

"Our Student Government Association did a great job choosing the final three names to present to students, and it was incredible to see such strong student engagement in a vote that will leave a lasting mark on our university," said Dr. Hollie Smith, executive director of Student Life. "We hope years from now when these students return to campus as alumni, they'll remember fondly the part they played in the naming of this new building."

SFA breaks record, celebrates positive spring enrollment and retention trends

Preliminary data for SFA shows encouraging trends across multiple areas, including enrollment, retention and student interest. With record-breaking prospective student engagement, improved fall-to-spring retention rates, and an anticipated increase in semester credit hour production, the university is experiencing positive momentum.

Last fall, SFA welcomed its largest first-time undergraduate class since 2017 — a milestone that contributed to the university's highest fall-to-spring retention rate since 2016 at 92.3%. Additionally, early projections indicate total undergraduate semester credit hour production for the 2024-25 academic year is expected to rise by approximately 4% after the summer session, marking the first undergraduate SCH increase in a decade.

SFA faculty awarded \$1 million TxDOT grant for conservation research

Drs. Jessica Glasscock and Cord Eversole, assistant professors of forest wildlife management at SFA, were awarded a grant of over \$1 million

from the Texas Department of Transportation. This funding will support their research project focused on the conservation and ecology of the alligator snapping turtle, a vital yet at-risk species in East Texas.

The five-year project that began this spring will evaluate the effects of road construction and maintenance on the habitats of alligator snapping turtles. The research aims to help conservationists understand how these activities influence turtle populations and to develop conservation strategies that can mitigate negative impacts on the species.

SFA aviation sciences students make strong debut at national flying competition

Thirteen aviation students from SFA competed at the National Intercollegiate Flying Association's SAFECON 2024 competition, held in Waco. This prestigious event included ground and flying challenges against top collegiate flight programs from across the nation.

"We are incredibly proud of our students for stepping up and competing for the first time," said Dr. Chay Runnels, director of SFA's School of Human Sciences. "This is a significant achievement, and I am confident that the team will continue to grow stronger as they gain more experience. We had several top 10 placements in events, which speaks to the talent and potential within our aviation program."

SFA recognized for improving experiences, advancing outcomes for first-generation college students

FirstGen Forward, formerly the Center for First-generation Student Success, named SFA one of 80 new members of the FirstGen Forward Network for 2024-25. To be selected as a FirstGen Forward Network member, SFA displayed a demonstrated commitment to improving experiences and advancing success for first-generation college students.

"I am so excited SFA was chosen as a FirstGen Forward Network member," said Raquel Skidmore, director of SFA's Student Success Center. "Approximately 5,000 SFA students, over 40% of our student body, are first-generation, meaning their parents or guardians have not graduated with a bachelor's degree in the U.S. As a first-gen student myself, I experienced many of the same barriers SFA's first-gen students face today, and I am passionate about empowering them to stay here and become the first in their family to graduate from college." ★

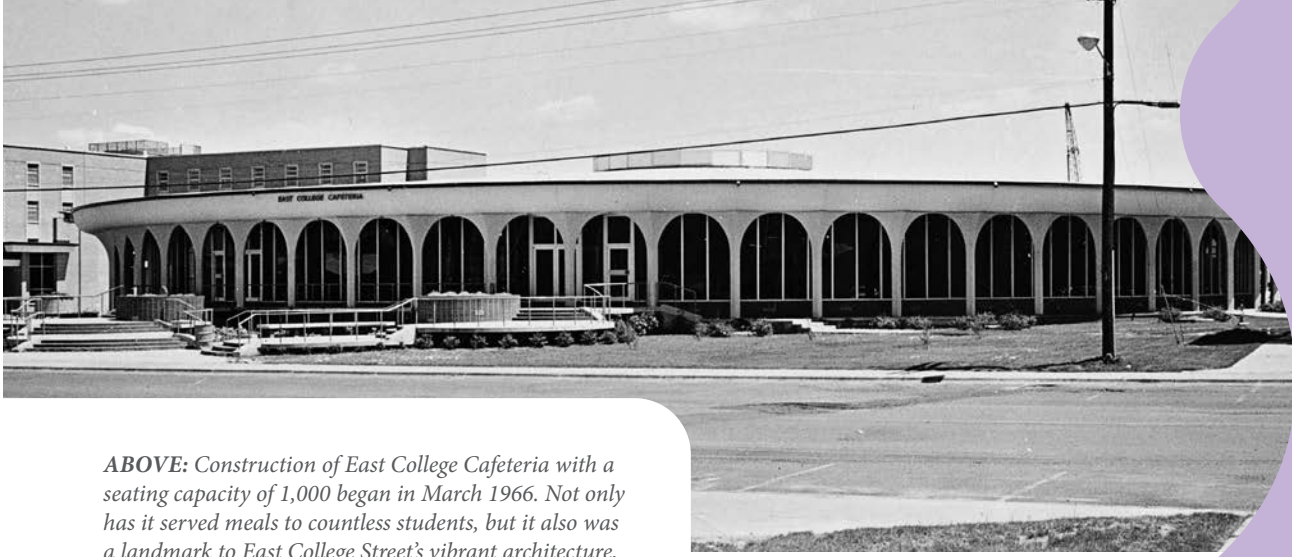


MEALS, MEMORIES AND MILESTONES

A heaping
serving of SFA's
dining history

STORY BY NATHAN WICKER '19

PHOTOS CURATED BY CHRIS COTTON '21
WITH THE EAST TEXAS RESEARCH CENTER



ABOVE: Construction of East College Cafeteria with a seating capacity of 1,000 began in March 1966. Not only has it served meals to countless students, but it also was a landmark to East College Street's vibrant architecture, at the time complementing nearby Steen Hall and Garner Apartments with a "modern architecture" style featuring elements of "streamline moderne" from the art deco/Works Progress Administration era.

RIGHT: The College Drug Store also became a pivotal chapter in Elmer Childers' (pictured) personal life. It was there, amid playful teasing and skits, he met his wife, Billie Jo Alexander. The couple married June 25, 1944, and shared 59 years together, raising three children, all of whom graduated from SFA. Photo from the 1946 Stone Fort yearbook.



Behind every type of SFA achievement during the last 60 years, from students acing exams to faculty and staff shaping futures, a fueling station has supported Lumberjack success: East College Cafeteria, most recently referred to as Eatery on East.

As the university evolves to meet the needs of a new generation of students and reflect the university's bold vision for the future of campus life, the dining hall will soon follow in the footsteps of other iconic buildings like Mays Hall, Garner Apartments and its former neighbor, Hall 16. But before its replacement is complete and the dining hall is razed, one man's unique story that predates the hall itself offers a glimpse into the many evolutions of SFA's dining history.

A TASTE OF THE PAST: THE LEGACY OF SFA'S FIRST DINING DIRECTOR

Nearly every meal served throughout SFA's existence can find its origins in the heart and vision of Elmer Childers, SFA's first director of food services, who set the table for the vibrant dining culture students enjoy today.

Born Jan. 28, 1915, on a farm in Denning, Texas, Elmer got into the grocery business early in life. After his family lost most of their land during the Great Depression, Elmer graduated from

high school in 1933 and began working at his uncle's grocery store and then later at Partin Grocery in San Augustine, Texas, earning \$11 per week. These early jobs equipped him with valuable skills that laid the foundation for his entrepreneurial future.

In 1939, Elmer moved to Nacogdoches to manage the commissary at the Nacogdoches County Lumber Company. Then, in 1944, he journeyed out on his own, with the help of his sisters, and purchased the inventory of the College Drug Store at the corner of Wettermark and North streets.

In 1948, SFA began construction on the new Student Union Building, which was set to feature a snack bar, bookstore, post office, recreation room, ballroom and offices. Coincidentally about that same time, Elmer lost the lease on his drug store.

As the SUB neared completion, Dr. Paul L. Boynton, SFA's second president, approached him about starting and managing what would become the SUB's new snack bar, SFA's first official dining service. Elmer enthusiastically accepted.

Several months later, Boynton stopped by to share his excitement of the snack bar's success. Elmer accepted the compliment but made clear one glaring issue — he hadn't been paid. ➔



***ABOVE:** The former location of the Student Union Building was located roughly in the space between the current Boynton and Wright Music buildings. The building housed the snack bar, post office and bookstore at the time.*

***RIGHT:** Elmer Childers, pictured serving students, was paid \$400 a month to operate the snack bar, according to Elmer's son, Henry Childers. He especially enjoyed having the holidays off, a luxury he didn't have at previous jobs.*



Elmer was quickly given a salary and back pay, thus officially starting a 40-year journey with SFA.

Following a spike in enrollment in the late 1950s, SFA expanded again in 1960 with the construction of the College Center — now, following a handful of renovations, the Baker Pattillo Student Center. While managing the center's new and larger snack bar from 1961 to 1964, Elmer also participated in cafeteria management and planning, and helped establish the dining room in the center.

In 1964, he was appointed SFA's first director of food services.

"Elmer's lifelong lessons continued to pay dividends," said Henry Childers '69, Elmer's son. "His philosophy was to never take students for granted, feed them the best he could with the money they were paying, keep the cost of the meal plan as low as possible, listen to the customer and make changes as appetites and desires changed."

During his time as director, Elmer introduced open-concept dining with expanded entrées, salad and dessert bars, pizza, snacks, and other items the students requested. He also ensured a dietitian was on staff to help with menus and special diets.

"Our goal has always been to provide a variety of quality food in sufficient quantity, properly prepared, timely and well-presented in a pleasant, sanitary atmosphere at the minimum cost to the student," Elmer said in an article in the Nov. 27, 1977, edition of Nacogdoches' The Daily Sentinel.

Slowly, Elmer's influence and talents grew. He installed vending machines in the dorms and other locations around campus and made sure small refrigerators and coin-operated washers and dryers were available to students in the dorms. In addition, he oversaw the implementation of a computerized cafeteria check-in procedure, which was a rarity among universities in the 1970s.

According to Elmer, if the students were happy, the parents would be happy. And for many years, there were very few complaints.

In 1966, SFA built East College Cafeteria to shorten the commute for diners on the north side of campus while adding four serving lines to accommodate approximately 4,600 students on a meal plan.

Elmer retired in 1985 at age 70 following 41 years of unwavering service to SFA, including 21 years as director of food services.



ABOVE: An architectural rendering of Pineywoods Dining shows the front view facing Wilson Drive. Chartwells serves approximately 6,000 meals per day and over 1.5 million meals per school year.



LEFT: According to an article in the Nov. 27, 1977, edition of *The Daily Sentinel*, Childers implemented a food service committee with students from dorms and various campus organizations who would meet every week. Childers, pictured third from right in the back row, considered these meetings one of his most valuable tools.

In a 1986 interview with the late Dr. Bobby H. Johnson, professor emeritus of history, Elmer reflected on his time at SFA: “My stay at the university, as far as I was concerned, was great to me. I got nothing but good soft feelings for them because they allowed me a living and allowed me to educate my kids and allowed me to build this home.”

A HISTORIC FAREWELL AND A FRESH START

SFA is continuing Elmer’s drive to exceed student expectations and modernize services with the construction of a new dining hall set to open this year.

Though beloved by many, parts of the existing East College Cafeteria have become obsolete since opening under Elmer’s direction in 1966. Faced with a choice to patchwork fixes together or start fresh, administrators received approval to raze the dining hall and build a new structure that would still pay homage to the university’s history.

The newly christened Pineywoods Dining at the corner of Wilson Drive and East College Street marks

the beginning of an exciting chapter for SFA. The 20,000-square-foot dining facility is the university’s first mass timber building and will feature state-of-the-art equipment and other new offerings.

“The need for a new dining hall became apparent in 2018,” said John Branch, assistant vice president of facilities services and operations. “The current facility is outmoded and limited in its capability to serve today’s students. The new dining hall will provide students with modern amenities and food choices in a fresh new environment designed to make their dining experience a pleasant one.”

Along with the traditional dining hall fares, the new facility will feature a rotisserie, tortilla machine and purple hand-tiled pizza oven. The new facility also will boast a tailgating section and a new restaurant, Absurd Bird.

Despite so many campus changes, Elmer’s influence will remain in the smiling faces of food service staff members and the constant hope to create a truly great Lumberjack experience. ★



To read more about Elmer and his legacy at SFA and to view photos of Pineywoods Dining construction, visit gosfa.com/eccafeteria or scan the QR code.



FROM LANANA TO THE LUNAR SURFACE

HOW TWO SFA ALUMNAE CONTRIBUTE TO NASA'S ARTEMIS MISSION

STORY BY ALYSSA FAYKUS '19

PHOTOS AND IMAGES COURTESY OF NASA AND
JOHNSON SPACE CENTER

If an average person asked them what they do for work, Sarah Walton '21 & '23 and Kyla Gray '22 would likely tell you they are planetary geospatial scientists at NASA. What they actually do at the space and aeronautics agency is far more awe-inspiring than that.

"I usually say I look at pictures to help land people on the moon," Walton said of her job in simple terms. "We mainly work with lunar data on the team that does landing site assessments for future lunar landers. We provide geospatial and geologic consultation on geospatial data products. We do a lot of things, but that's the main goal."

Both women contribute to the Artemis III, IV and V campaigns. According to NASA, the goal of these campaigns is to explore the moon for scientific discovery, technological advancement, and increased knowledge of how to live and work on another world as NASA prepares for human missions to Mars.

The Artemis III mission, set to launch in 2027, has identified a set of nine potential landing regions near the lunar south pole. The selection of these potential landing regions is aided by research to which Walton and Gray are regularly contributing.

"My job duties include providing civil servants and various other programs with geospatial data and its interpretation," Gray said. "So that can include many different services. Landing site interpretation is one of those, and various other works with data science as well." ➔



NASA's mobile launcher, atop Crawler Transporter-2, pictured at NASA's Kennedy Space Center in Florida on Sept. 8, 2018. This is the first time the modified mobile launcher made the trip to the pad and the vehicle assembly building. The mobile launcher is the structure used to assemble, process and launch the space launch system rocket.

The lunar south pole, which has never been explored by a crewed mission, contains permanently shadowed areas that can preserve resources, including water. The future collection of samples and data from this region, which contains some of the oldest parts of the moon estimated to be at least 3.85 billion years old, will help scientists better understand fundamental planetary processes that operate across the solar system and beyond.



Kyla Gray '22, left, and Sarah Walton '21 & '23 are planetary geospatial scientists at NASA's Johnson Space Center, contracted through Amentum. They provide geospatial data and its interpretation of the lunar surface (bottom left) to aid the future Artemis missions to establish a presence on the moon (bottom middle). These missions will give scientists the opportunity to conduct research at the lunar south pole (bottom right). Photos and illustrations courtesy of NASA and Johnson Space Center

WRITTEN IN THE STARS

Floating around in her head from a young age, Gray had inklings of one day becoming a scientist.

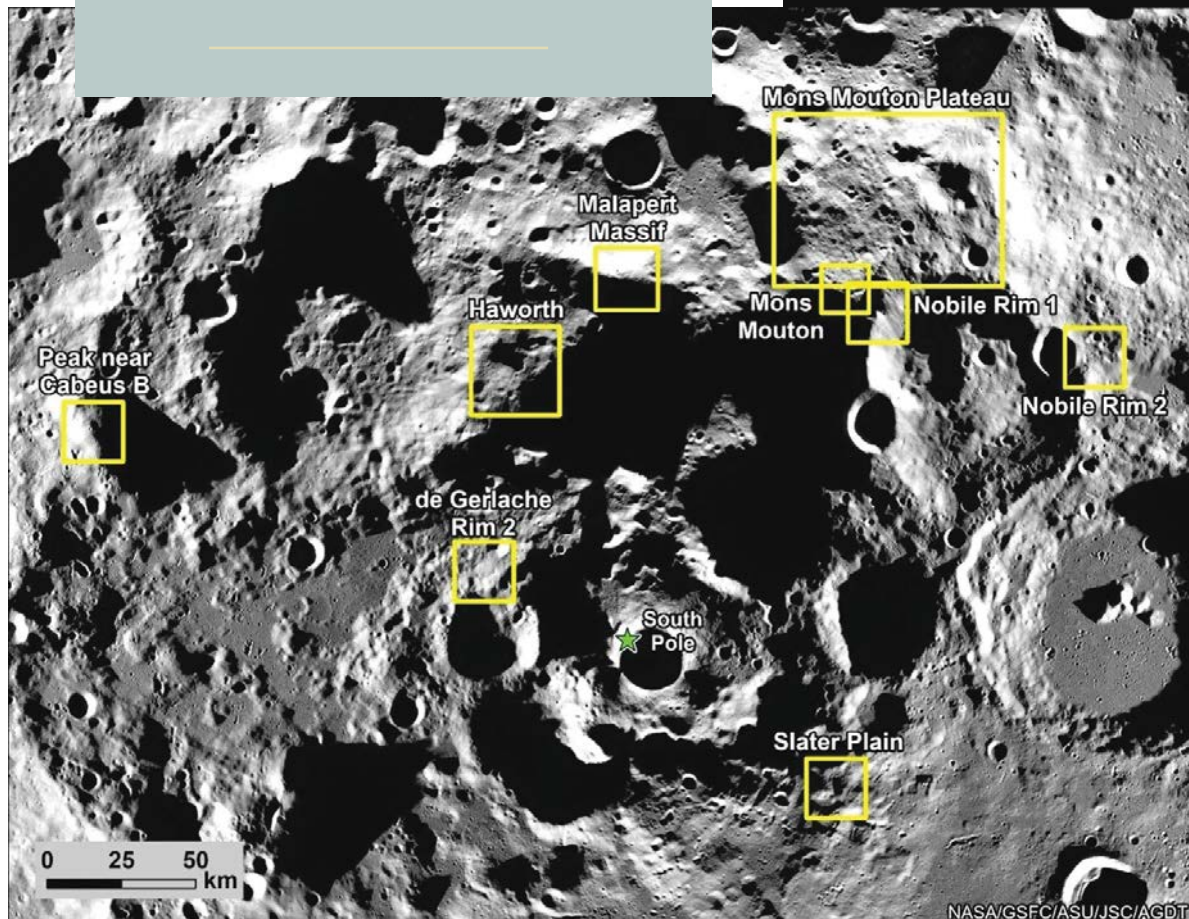
"Very early on, I really wanted to work in space. When I was in kindergarten, they put us on stage and told us to say what we wanted to be. I said scientist," Gray said.

With knowledge about her dad's career in oil and gas, she knew that field had potential for her start as a scientist. But geology, especially planetary geology, was always in mind.

"I knew that I wanted to do something in the discipline, and I knew a good way for me to be a scientist was in oil and gas, and my backup plan was geology," Gray added. "I knew what geology was and the different things that you can do engineering-wise, but then learning there was the field of planetary geology as well — that was what hit home for me."

Gray started her job with Amentum, a U.S. government and commercial services contractor, as a geospatial scientist at NASA's Johnson Space Center in June 2024 after stints as a mud logger in West Texas and working on oil rigs. She earned her Bachelor of Science in geology in 2022 from SFA.

"I have always very much loved planetary data. I remember my first class at SFA — Wesley Turner [lecturer of earth sciences and geologic resources] was my intro to geology professor, and he showed us the different types of geologists. One of those types was a planetary geologist," she said. "I always thought that was very interesting, and that was just my first semester."



When Gray was a junior, Dr. Mindy Faulkner, her advisor and an associate professor of earth sciences and geologic resources, encouraged her to pick a research topic that interested her if she could find the data. Gray found moon data made accessible to the public through NASA — data similar to what she uses in her job today.

“They let me run with it, so I’m very appreciative of SFA’s geology department for letting us follow our interests,” Gray said.

GOING BEYOND TEXAS PINES

Inspired by her mentors at SFA, Walton’s journey to geospatial space data exploration was sparked by research opportunities and supportive faculty members. Earning her Bachelor of Science in geology in 2021 and Master of Science in geology in 2023, she started her job with Amentum at NASA’s Johnson Space Center in May 2023.

Walton also credits Turner, as well as Faulkner and Dr. Kevin Stafford, associate professor of geology, with helping influence the development of her interests.

“Mr. Turner taught the introduction to planetary geology class I took and had really been a mentor for me on this journey,” Walton said. “[The class] combined my love for space science, which I knew I wanted to pursue, and my love for geology into this one big nebula of planetary geology.

“My graduate advisors, Drs. Stafford and Faulkner, really enabled me in grad school to do that independent research, to ask those important questions and really delve into a field. They knew I had that foundation and that I could go on and do great things.”

Walton found her career path through friends at SFA who researched internship opportunities during their master’s degree programs in hopes of finding their calling.

“I applied to an internship at NASA’s Jet Propulsion Laboratory, where I worked with Mars rover data doing geospatial analysis, and I really enjoyed it and really thrived,” Walton said. “That was the moment for me where dreams became a reality and I knew I could pursue that kind of career path.”

THE SCOPE OF THE MISSION

Space exploration leaves a lasting impression on the world through its scientific and cultural victories. The Artemis generation will see the first woman and person of color land on the moon with an international partner astronaut, according to NASA. This will be the first moon landing in more than 50 years, making history with every step.

“My favorite thing about my job is that every single thing is a historical contribution,” Gray said. “This is the second time we’ve tried to go back to the moon. It’s a completely different world than it was in the 1960s. It feels like every day when you interpret an image or finalize a landing site interpretation, you contribute to how we’re going to get to the moon.”

Walton enjoys having a hand in the “hundreds-, thousands-of-people effort” that is creating history. She encourages other women to take the leap, even when they’re scared.

“Seek out new opportunities,” she said. “My motto in life is do things that make you scared, do things that make you anxious because then you’ll do it and you won’t be so anxious about it. That was definitely my biggest hurdle coming into this position. I was scared of that imposter syndrome, scared I wouldn’t be good enough. But once you realize you are and once you actually do those things, you can do anything.

“Stay curious, take risks.” ★



Gala 2025: Donor Inductees

Teresa Jill Adams Fredonia Society Inductee



Jill Still, Gerald "Jerry" W. Schlieff, Teresa Jill Adams and Dr. Neal Weaver

Teresa Jill Adams came to SFA from Knott, Texas, as a passionate young artist in the spring of 1977. She received her Bachelor of Fine Arts in 1979, and during her time as a student, her original passion for

illustration and painting evolved to encompass studies in lithography, silk

screening and printmaking.

Adams obtained a master's degree in elementary education with a specialization in reading and taught general education, reading and fine arts to elementary students for more than 30 years. She has expressed love for art and art education through her involvement in numerous school art programs, most notably in her establishment of the Teresa Jill Adams Foundation, which primarily supports art education and other charitable organizations. She has set an outstanding example for SFA students and alumni through her career achievements, her generosity, and her manifest dedication and loyalty to SFA.

On Jan. 30, 2023, the former SFA board of regents expressed its admiration, gratitude and high regard for Adams by naming the art gallery in the Griffith Fine Arts Building the Teresa Jill Adams Art Gallery.

L.D. and Johnnie McWilliams Fredonia Society Inductee



Gerald "Jerry" W. Schlieff, Jill Still, L.D. McWilliams, Johnnie McWilliams and Dr. Neal Weaver

L.D. and Johnnie McWilliams both finished high school in Timpson, Texas, then received their bachelor's degrees from SFA in 1964 and 1965, respectively. They followed that with master's degrees in 1966, L.D. in

biology and Johnnie in education, and were married in August 1965.

As part of their continued investment at SFA, L.D. and Johnnie have endowed three scholarships over the years. Two were in the College of

Sciences and Mathematics, and the third was in the James I. Perkins College of Education. They also are involved in the SFA Alumni Association and serve as alumni ambassadors.

After graduating from SFA, L.D. worked as an instructor at SFA and Blinn Community College, and Johnnie taught in Redland, Brenham, Wells and Nacogdoches. They then moved to Lake Jackson, Texas, in 1969, where L.D. served as a professor and department chair for biology as well as division director for science and mathematics at Brazosport Community College for more than 32 years. Johnnie eventually served as an assistant principal and then principal at Bess Brannen Elementary School for a total of 20 years.

From the time of their graduation from SFA, the McWilliamses have invested in the education of students through their careers, giving and involvement. After retirement, they moved back home to East Texas in 2001 and have enjoyed traveling the world. They can also be found at Lumberjack sporting events supporting their alma mater.

Betty Oglesbee Fredonia Society Inductee



Gerald "Jerry" W. Schlieff, Jill Still, Forrest Oglesbee, Chris Oglesbee, Dr. John Oglesbee III, Betty Oglesbee, Dr. Neal Weaver and Vance Oglesbee

The Oglesbee family is thrilled to provide scholarships and resources for pre-health, culinary and history programs at SFA. Betty Oglesbee and her late husband, John H. Oglesbee Jr., have four sons, Dr. John Oglesbee III, Vance

gatherings. They both graduated from The University of Texas at Austin, as did their sons. While at UT, Betty was a scholar, graduating summa cum laude, and served as president of her 1955 graduating class.

Betty was involved in a variety of civic commitments over the years, including San Augustine County's Historical Society, Chamber of Commerce, Garden Club, County Historical Commission, public library, Boy Scouts, Main Street Advisory Board and independent school district foundation.

Betty and the San Augustine County Historical Society have been actively involved in saving and promoting the development of the 1721 Mission Nuestra Senora de los Dolores de los Ais, supported by Sen. Robert Nichols and Rep. Trent Ashby. Betty was honored by Gov. Greg Abbott with the Governor's Award for Historic Preservation in 2017.

An article in Texas Monthly stated that Betty is sometimes described as San Augustine's "matriarch." She is fondly known as "Mama Betty" by her family, which includes nine grandchildren, nine great-grandchildren and many others. She is a lifelong member of the San Augustine Methodist Church.

Oglesbee, Chris Oglesbee and Forrest Oglesbee.

Betty and John did not attend SFA, but they are long-time supporters of the university. Residing 35 miles away in San Augustine, Texas, Betty and John frequently visited the campus for historic presentations, research in special collections, fine arts events, athletic games and other

Gala 2025: Donor Inductees

The Charles and Lois Marie Bright Foundation

Stephen F. Austin Society Inductee



Gerald "Jerry" W. Schlieff, Jill Still, Dayna Stanaland, Wanda Russell, Greg Williams and Dr. Neal Weaver

The mission of The Charles and Lois Marie Bright Foundation is to provide assistance to duly-qualified public and private foundations and charities, as well as governmental organizations located primarily

in Nacogdoches County. Assistance to these foundations and charities provides relief for the poor and disadvantaged; helps maintain and build public buildings, monuments and works; and supports the advancement of education, science and combating community deterioration.

Graduating from Nacogdoches High School in 1945, Charles was drafted into the army to serve as a military police officer during World War II and as a driver and typist for editor and author William F. Buckley Jr.

After the war, Bright flourished as an inventive entrepreneur who crafted an outboard motor and boat business and was instrumental in developing and patenting the famous Loco Lure for avid anglers.

Later, Charles and his brother, N.G., formed Bright Coop Company, which revolutionized the manufacturing of poultry transportation equipment. University of Colorado's Dr. Temple Grandin, leading animal welfare advocate at the time and U.S. government-appointed auditor, approved the unique "Bright" cage unloading system as the predominant chicken coop system used in the United States. The Brights created a lasting legacy through their lifetime of hard work, kindness and integrity.

Over the years, the Charles and Lois Marie Bright Foundation has generously supported SFA through initiatives for capital improvements, as well as investments in academic programs and scholarships.

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McClure-Franklin Family Scholarship Endowment

Dr. GERALYN McClure Franklin, '82 and '85, established the McClure-Franklin Family Scholarship to honor the impact SFA has had on her family. Her parents, Gerald C. McClure, '53 and '54, and Marie Little McClure, '53 and '55, met while attending SFA and had long careers in public education.

Franklin graduated from the university and served as a faculty member and administrator for 15 years before retiring in 2014. She met Kenny Franklin while at SFA. The Franklins have one son, Tanner Gerald McClure Franklin, a Nacogdoches attorney.

The McClure-Franklin family hopes to benefit students pursuing a degree in the Nelson Rusche College of Business' departments of business communication and legal studies or management and marketing. Scholarship recipients must maintain a GPA of 3.0 or higher, and preference is given to those who graduated from one of the following Texas high schools: Central, Central Heights, Chireno, Cushing, Douglass, Garrison, Martinsville, Regents Academy, Tarkington and Woden.

The inaugural McClure-Franklin Family Scholarship was awarded in fall 2024 to Callie Palmer, a general business major from Woden.



The McClure-Franklin family established the McClure-Franklin Family Scholarship with the inaugural recipient declared in fall 2024. Pictured, from left, is Tanner Franklin, SFA President Neal Weaver, Dr. GERALYN McClure Franklin and Kenny Franklin.

"My parents always viewed SFA as the foundation for their professional and personal successes and have supported it over the years as life members of the SFA Alumni Association and through various donations," GERALYN said. "It was initially a dream and then their full intent for our family to provide an endowed scholarship to support students in achieving their hopes and dreams through higher education, specifically at SFA." ★

Life Members

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

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| 8684. Lisa Mozingo '24, Nacogdoches | 8700. Dr. Richard M. Reese '78 & '79, Benbrook | 8714. Cooper R. Slott '24, Nederland |
| 8685. Lana G. Calton '94, Dallas | 8701. Karla S. Reese '78, Benbrook | 8715. Leslie Greer Alexander '00 & '00, Houston |
| 8686. Jacob F. Beck '23, Nacogdoches | 8702. Horace Christopher Strong '11, Nacogdoches | 8716. Jenna D. Nix '24, Royse City |
| 8687. Kelsey E. Wigand '12, Nacogdoches | 8703. Shaina E. Strong '11, Nacogdoches | 8717. Alyssa A. Mauz '24, Center |
| 8688. Laurel A. Dickerson '24, Austin | 8704. Benjamin C. Idom '18, Nacogdoches | 8718. Amber S. Franklin '13, Nacogdoches |
| 8689. Dr. Lauren Burrow '24, Nacogdoches | 8705. Howard Wally Scoggins, former student, Seabrook | 8719. Laura L. Koehler '84, Brazoria |
| 8690. Troy Burrow, friend, Nacogdoches | 8706. Deborah L. Scoggins, friend, Seabrook | 8720. Nicholas Runnels '24, Nacogdoches |
| 8691. Clint J. Lopic '22 & '23, Dallas | 8707. Dr. Paul D. Dybala '94, Dallas | 8721. Grayson C. Golden '23, San Antonio |
| 8692. Cole A. Stephens '23, Nacogdoches | 8708. Trey R. Andrew '24, Bulverde | 8722. Walter Lee Kirk '95, Trophy Club |
| 8693. Amber E. Burda '09, Houston | 8709. Seth D. McCloskey '04, Red Oak | 8723. Taylor K. Martin '24, Silsbee |
| 8694. Gregory G. Burda '07, Houston | 8710. Amanda N. McCloskey '04 & '06, Red Oak | 8724. Lisa Balty, friend, Nacogdoches |
| 8695. Shelby M. Lindsey '24, Beckville | 8711. Maj. Harold Timothy Mathews '93, Dallas | 8725. Les Balty, friend, Nacogdoches |
| 8696. Paul E. Stallworth '07, Arvada, Colorado | 8712. Jimmy Day, friend, Nacogdoches | 8726. Aaron C. Bess '24, Diboll |
| 8697. Jimmy R. Stallworth Jr. '86, Austin | 8713. Joseph T. Romero '24, Carthage | 8727. Charles Frederick Cludius '87, New Braunfels |
| 8698. Nicholas J. Stallworth '12, Nacogdoches | | 8728. Dr. Ian J. Gilpatrick '04, College Station |
| 8699. Meghan M. Buchanan '24, Nacogdoches | | |



Reunion at Dorm 15. The five of us all met there in 1968; 55 years and still gathering to share our memories and dreams.

TERI LEE CERWINSKE KNOUSE /
FACEBOOK



Axe 'em, Jacks! from Glacier National Park.

TRAMPASS BASS / FACEBOOK



#AxeEm from Houston!

HANNAH ZÚÑIGA /
FACEBOOK



During our Homecoming visit back to Nacogdoches, I was able to return to my first dorm. Griffith Hall was good to me!

SHANTE MOORE / FACEBOOK



You know you went to SFA ... when your Halloween costume for the staff party is "THE" SFA Lumberjack!

DANIEL HANNON / FACEBOOK



Today I took my daughter and her friends on their first college tour. Some rando walked out of the Rusk Building and looked important. We asked what class he taught, and, with a laugh, he shared he was actually the president of the university. What a great memory!

CHRISTI RINN / FACEBOOK

LOCAL LUMBERJACKS MEAN BUSINESS

STORY BY JOHANNA GILMORE
PHOTOS BY LIZETH GARCIA

The entrepreneurial spirit is alive and well in East Texas, including at SFA. Through SFA's entrepreneurship academic program, Arnold Center for Entrepreneurship, Small Business Resource Hub and Piney Woods Entrepreneurship Network, students with big ideas are connecting with alumni and local business owners to help them turn their dreams into reality.

To honor that entrepreneurial spirit growing on SFA's campus, we're highlighting several Nacogdoches-based businesses that bleed purple and have seen great success locally and beyond. Self-described Type A personalities

who love to stay busy and constantly yearn to learn, these entrepreneurs know how to balance the corporate with the creative. All are owned by or employ SFA alumni and work hard to give back to their community and hometown university.

While we may not have the space to highlight all local, state and national businesses run by alumni on these pages, we have an online solution. The SFA Alumni Office is working to promote alumni-owned businesses around the globe through its new online business directory. Read more below and add yours today!

Pictured, from left to right, are Jeremy Niuman, general manager of Hill Country Restaurants; Richard DeWitt Jr., president of Hill Country Restaurants and Fredonia Hospitality; and Richard "Bud" DeWitt III, chief operating officer of Hill Country Restaurants and Fredonia Hospitality, in the Nacogdoches location of Clear Springs, which celebrated its 30th anniversary last year.

COMING SOON: ONLINE DIRECTORY TO HIGHLIGHT ALUMNI-OWNED BUSINESSES

The SFA Alumni Office is inviting all alumni who own businesses to submit their company's information for the SFA Alumni Business Directory.

"In conjunction with our alumni directory and data project with our partner, Publishing Concepts, our hope is that we can combine these two information sources to create the most comprehensive business directory possible," said Craig Turnage '00 & '05, executive director of alumni relations. "We will

look to expand the directory with business memberships and marketing opportunities to get your business directly in front of more than 120,000 living SFA alumni."

Complete the form at gosfa.com/alumnicompanies or scan the QR code and watch for an email from the Alumni Office about your business directory profile.



CREATE AND SELL SFA-BRANDED MERCHANDISE!

If you're a small business owner, artist or crafter, you also may want to participate in SFA's crafter license program known as CLC Community Connect. This online hub helps crafters communicate with SFA's licensing department on license requests, artwork approvals and sales reports.

The program is open to individuals producing domestic handcrafted items

featuring collegiate marks at home and selling/distributing to individual consumers through events or direct sales. This might include church, school, county, state, craft, holiday and Junior League events, as well as street festivals, gift marts or flea markets. For more information, visit gosfa.com/licensing or scan the QR code.





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OWNERS

Richard DeWitt Jr. '72
*President of Hill Country Restaurants and
Fredonia Hospitality*

Richard "Bud" DeWitt III '07
*Chief operating officer of Hill Country
Restaurants and Fredonia Hospitality*

The father-son team of Richard '72 and Bud '07 DeWitt is dedicated to providing the Nacogdoches community with delicious Italian food at Auntie Pasta's; comfort food at Clear Springs; and a boutique hotel and convention center featuring 1st City Café, Nine Flags Bar & Grill and Republic Steakhouse at The Fredonia Hotel.

When asked to name their favorite restaurant in their portfolio, the DeWitts zeroed in on menu items instead.

"Fried catfish, fried shrimp and onion rings at Clear Springs are a must," Richard said.

Bud agreed and followed up with, "The lasagna at Auntie Pasta's is great, and the Korean tacos at 1st City Café in the Fredonia are a favorite, but you have to save room for dessert at 1st City."

While earning his business degree at SFA, Richard began eyeing one historic building on Old Tyler Road next to the railroad tracks that served as part of the first refrigerated warehouse west of the Mississippi. He thought

it would make a great restaurant, and he wasn't the only one.

While Richard was establishing the first Clear Springs location in New Braunfels, Rossini's Restaurant opened in the Nacogdoches warehouse and served Italian cuisine as SFA opera professors and students serenaded the diners throughout the 1980s.

When Rossini's closed, Richard bought the building for the second location of Clear Springs, which opened in 1994. Later, he would renovate the back storage area into the Mexican restaurant Nacho Mama's. When the Mexican restaurant market in Nacogdoches grew oversaturated, the DeWitts opened Auntie Pasta's Italian restaurant in 2001 in the Nacho Mama's portion of the building. Luckily, Nacho Mama's queso and rice are still served at 1st City Café.

While earning his hospitality administration degree, Bud worked at Clear Springs and Auntie Pasta's as a dishwasher, server and bartender on his way to being promoted to

general manager at the Clear Springs location in Tyler. While he spent some downtime at Nine Flags Bar & Grill at the Fredonia, he had no inkling that he and his dad would later buy and renovate the hotel. They reopened it in 2017 with the help of John McLaren, the hotel's general manager (see "Labor of Love" in the fall 2017 issue of Sawdust).

Like the rest of the hospitality and restaurant industry, the DeWitts' businesses took a hit during the COVID-19 pandemic, said Jeremy Niuman '01, general manager of Hill Country Restaurants, the group of restaurants owned by the DeWitts, including Gruene River Grill and the original Clear Springs in New Braunfels.

But all three businesses continue to thrive and hire SFA students and alumni. Bud attributes the restaurants' and hotel's continued success to the general managers, staff and his dad.

"Dad's a perfectionist. That's one reason we've stayed consistent and successful, along with the hard work, blood, sweat and tears of our managers and employees." ★ ➔

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OWNERS

Clayton Collier '05
*President and senior
environmental scientist*

Trae Scarborough '00
Vice president and senior hydrogeologist

Glen Collier '05 launched Hydrex Environmental in 1994 to help municipal solid waste clients address stricter environmental regulations for landfills. Today, the company employs 32 people in a newly remodeled building that was previously home to J.E. Kingham Construction on Banita Creek. It also has a satellite office in Houston, and SFA alumni make up 90% of the company's workforce.

While at SFA, Glen's son, Clayton, explored majors in geology and business before landing on environmental science.

"SFA helped me figure out my calling in life," Clayton said.

He regularly returns to the Arthur Temple College of Forestry and Agriculture to help faculty and staff run labs, speak at events and attend the college's Drone Day. He also keeps an eye on a Shumard oak he planted in 2003 near SFA's North Street entrance.

At work, Clayton specializes in wetlands as well as drone and geographic information system, or GIS, mapping projects.

In 2015, the Hydrex Drone Division was established to provide lidar and topographic surveys of sand mines, volumetrics and inventory for aggregate production operations, thermal imaging inspections at industrial facilities, and fugitive emission leak detection and waste volume calculations at landfills.

The company's geologists, biologists and engineers measure the volume of waste at landfills by using drones and special photogrammetric software to stitch together aerial photographs and produce high-resolution 3D models of sites. From these models, the company's employees can measure how much airspace is consumed at a landfill during a certain period. They also monitor groundwater at 40 landfills in Texas.

After more than 40 years of combined service at Hydrex, Clayton and Trae Scarborough '00, vice president and senior hydrogeologist, bought the company from Glen in 2017 and continue to provide personal, accurate and fast service to clients in multiple states.

Clayton said he is particularly proud of his company's involvement in the 2.5-mile northern expansion of the Lanana Creek Trail in Nacogdoches.

The project was funded with a grant from the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and financial support from The Charles and Lois Marie Bright Foundation. The trail runs through an area of wetlands Clayton has been researching using his fleet of drones to create 3D images and map water flow.

"We've got more plans for this area, so stay tuned," he said. ★

Clayton Collier, president and senior environmental scientist at Hydrex Environmental, initially used a machete to carve out the north extension of the Lanana Creek Trail next to protected wetlands in Nacogdoches. Not pictured are the blue heron and coyote watching from a distance.



JACK BACKERS

SFA clothing and gifts

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OWNERS
Alan Fitch '98
Pam Fitch '93

Alan Fitch, who co-owns Jack Backers with his wife, Pam, offers 80 different styles of hats along with in-store discounts for students, faculty, staff, SFA Alumni Association members and more.

After working for the bookstore industry in Lubbock, Alan Fitch '98 decided to return to his hometown and serve his alma mater with his own business. He and his wife, Pam '93, opened Jack Backers College Bookstore in 2008.

"Being a fifth-generation Nacogdoches boy and an SFA alum, this town was the best place for me to start my business," Alan said. "I had already worked in the college bookstore business for 23 years, so I thought to myself, 'Do what you know best.'"

Alan grew up attending SFA athletic and other events, so "I knew very early in life that SFA was for me. I am purple pride through and through. Pam and I love giving back to SFA and the community."

Jack Backers phased out its physical textbook business a year ago to focus on

e-books, per the higher education trend. The store is also known for its SFA clothing and gifts as well as its customer service.

"We emphasize customer service," Alan said. "As a small business, we have the flexibility to do what is necessary to meet customers' needs. We maintain competitive pricing on e-books, college apparel and gifts, so there's less hardship for students on strict budgets to buy items and show their school pride."

Alan and Pam also support Lumberjacks by providing discounts on in-store purchases. Jack Backers offers a 15% discount to all SFA faculty and staff, and 10% discount to all law enforcement officers, veterans and military members. In addition, the store offers a 10% in-store discount on SFA clothing and gifts to all alumni who are members of the SFA Alumni Association.

Though he knows he shouldn't play favorites with the store's inventory, Alan said, "I love to sell hats."

A good portion of Jack Backers' west wall is dedicated to the store's baseball cap collection comprising 80 different styles. Clothing featuring the university's script logo and plush Twiggy squirrels with super-fluffy tails are flying off the shelves, as well.

Starting a business is always a challenge and a risk, but working closely with SFA faculty and staff was one of the best ways to ensure Jack Backers succeeded, Alan said.

"I cannot say enough how numerous faculty, staff and alumni have helped us along the way. We are forever thankful for the many amazing relationships we have built within the SFA family." ★ ➔

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OWNER

Olivia Kiritsy '06 & '11
Sole proprietor

As a Nacogdoches High School graduate, Olivia Kiritsy '06 & '11 knew SFA well but attended her first year and a half of college elsewhere.

"I returned to Nacogdoches and SFA as quickly as possible."

Kiritsy earned a bachelor's degree in finance and political science and a master's degree in public administration from SFA to prepare for her next steps: job stints on Wall Street and at a financial company in Los Angeles. Then she returned to her Nacogdoches and SFA roots to launch her business.

"I knew I could take all the busy, fast and corporate lessons of New York City and LA and put an East Texas spin on them to provide a new take on real estate brokerage services."

To compete with the established local real estate firms, she created a strong brand named for the loblolly pine tree, a term she learned from her friends who took dendrology during her undergraduate years at SFA. A graphic designer and fellow alumna who worked on The Pine Log student newspaper created the Loblolly Properties logo. Kiritsy opened the Nacogdoches location of the business in 2018 and will open a satellite office in Lufkin soon.

"We work to provide personalized real estate services to our customers and clients, helping better the community one homeowner at a time. We help everyone."

ABOVE: Loblolly Properties LLC sole proprietor Olivia Kiritsy draws inspiration from a painting of the Charging Bull and Fearless Girl statues, which were temporarily paired in New York City's financial district. The painting reminds her of her stint on Wall Street and the glass ceiling women have to break through to be successful in the real estate industry.

RIGHT: Kyle Sanders, manager of University Rental, began working at the business while attending SFA. Now he owns it along with three other SFA alumni: Autumn Sanders, his wife; Katy Lanmon, Autumn's Alpha Chi Omega sorority sister; and Katy's husband, Patrick Lanmon.



The company, which serves as a referral partner and network to other Texas Realtors and National Association of Realtors members, offers listings ranging from \$10,000 lots to \$2 million homes.

Kiritsy said her SFA mentors and alumni friends have contributed greatly to her success over the years.

"My greatest success is not only building a recognizable brand but also building a company culture known for hard work, success, professionalism and a commitment to community." ★



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OWNER
Dr. Aaron Polk

POLK DENTAL ASSOCIATES

The fourth-generation representative of a long line of dentists, Dr. Aaron Polk grew up in Nacogdoches and always knew he wanted to establish his practice there.

“A small town is a great place to practice, and this is home,” he said.

In 2002, Polk purchased the practice from another SFA alumnus who was also his mentor: the late Dr. Robert Smith. Dr. Ryan Smith (no relation to Robert) joined the practice in 2023, and Polk Dental Associates moved to its new building in 2024.

The practice provides comprehensive preventive care, restorative treatments and cosmetic enhancements to its several thousand customers. It features an in-house lab and a milling machine so custom crowns can be created on-site, Polk said. “This helps us cut costs, which makes our services more affordable for patients.”

To stay up to date with the latest dental treatments, Polk said he and his team are “constantly learning. We’ve invested a lot of time, money and education in providing state-of-the-art, comprehensive care.”

As a dentist and business owner, Polk said he has to think like an entrepreneur as well as a health professional.

“There are a lot of moving parts in a dental practice. You have to have a really good team like I do. Working with insurance companies can be challenging, but we’re successful when we can meet the needs of a patient medically and financially. If you need us, we’re here. We don’t have patients or clients. We treat friends.”

Polk spent 3.5 years majoring in biology and minoring in pre-dentistry at SFA before being accepted early to dental school in 1997. He graduated with a Doctor of Dental Surgery from The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston School of Dentistry, where he now serves as a clinical assistant professor teaching third- and fourth-year students.

Polk is also the dental care provider for SFA’s student-athletes as part of the university’s sports medicine team.

“We help not only with injury treatment and prevention — mouth guards, splints, etc. — but also with dental health issues like tooth abscesses at no cost to students. That helps them focus on their studies and the competition instead of finances.” ★



Fourth-generation dentist Dr. Aaron Polk owns Polk Dental Associates, serves as the dental care provider for SFA’s student-athletes as part of the university’s sports medicine team, and teaches third- and fourth-year students as a clinical assistant professor at The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston School of Dentistry.

UNIVERSITY RENTAL

*Party and tool/equipment rentals,
permanent external illumination*

When not studying during his college years at SFA, Kyle Sanders ’07 worked at University Rental for former owners Jim and Nancy Elder. That eventually led to his purchase of the business in 2017 with three of his SFA buddies: Autumn ’05, now his wife; Katy Lanmon ’04, Autumn’s Alpha Chi Omega sorority sister; and Katy’s husband, Patrick ’01. All four earned their bachelor’s degrees from the Rusche College of Business.

Nearly 40 years before, Susan and Don Moon established University Rental on University Drive. In 2000, the Elders purchased the business and moved it to its current location in downtown Nacogdoches in 2005. Since the Sanderses and Lanmons purchased University Rental in 2017, the company has seen a 13% increase in revenue.

“We’ve learned over the years to take care of the people who take care of you,” Kyle said. “We have a lot of repeat customers.”

University Rental offers supplies for weddings, conventions, company picnics, parties, climate-controlled outdoor events and festivals. Party services include delivery, setup, breakdown and pickup for an area that starts at Crockett in the west, stretches up north to Henderson, extends down to Toledo Bend and circles back

through Diboll.

“We have a wedding or party every weekend nine months out of the year,” Kyle said. “Our top five rentals are tables, chairs, tents, linens and bounce houses, but we also offer tools and equipment, like dollies, augers and pressure washers.”

In 2024, the Sanderses and Lanmons launched the UR Lighting division of the company that provides homeowners and businesses with permanent, custom accent lighting they can adjust from anywhere through an app.

The company’s biggest challenge since the Sanderses and Lanmons took over has been the COVID-19 pandemic, Kyle said.

“Our business dropped 50% as clients canceled social engagements.”

Luckily, Patrick’s day job at Commercial Bank of Texas in Nacogdoches helped University Rental obtain a Paycheck Protection Loan from the federal government.

Current challenges include keeping up with party trends and making sure they have enough inventory to meet customer demands, Kyle said.

“Our inventory is always growing with the latest trends in designer décor, food service, games and entertainment.” ★

universityrentalnac.com
(936) 560-0800
universityrental75961@gmail.com
510 East Main St.

OWNERS
Kyle Sanders ’07, manager
Autumn Sanders ’05
Patrick Lanmon ’01
Katy Lanmon ’04



*Photo courtesy of
Brihem Johnson with
Vi3ions Photography*

Hitting the High Notes

How a chance discovery at SFA led Amanda Sheriff to some of opera's biggest stages

STORY BY ROBBIE GOODRICH '82

Becoming an opera singer was never Amanda Sheriff's goal when she left her Houston home and came to SFA to major in music education.

In fact, she didn't know what opera was until she performed in one as an SFA student. And yet, Sheriff has made an impressive, albeit demanding, career that's taken her to stages across the nation.

"Opera found me," Sheriff said, "which is a blessing that I can never take for granted in the midst of rejection and long hours. I am so grateful that SFA saw my potential and for Debbie Berry (SFA voice instructor) for giving me such a strong vocal foundation."

Since graduating from SFA — twice actually, in 2016 and 2018 — Sheriff has performed at more renowned venues and in more inspirational productions than she could have imagined, like the Atlanta Opera, Glimmerglass Festival, Opera Philadelphia and more. And finding her voice at SFA translated into swift successes.

Within just four years of graduation, Sheriff was awarded first prize in the prestigious and highly competitive 2022 Lotte Lenya Competition in New York City. She debuted her first Musetta role in Giacomo Puccini's "La Bohème" at Opera Montana last April. She will conclude her residency at Atlanta Opera this summer.

She's accomplishing all this while balancing the demands and rewards of having a family in Smyrna, Delaware, and a career in the spotlight on stages across America.

Among her favorite performances was the role of Miss Lightfoot in "Fellow Travelers" by Gregory Spears at Des Moines Metro Opera, an opera that addresses the Lavender Scare during the McCarthy era.

"The career is nothing like I thought it would be," Sheriff said. "SFA told me that it would be challenging and fulfilling, but similarly to marriage, you can't understand the complexities — good or bad — unless you are actively in it."

Sheriff decided to come to Nacogdoches and SFA "mainly by luck." As a first-generation student, applying to college was a little mystifying. "I applied merely on a whim and then realized my favorite high school choir director, Deidre Douglas, was an SFA alum, and that sold it for me."

With an initial intent to major in music education, Sheriff learned that she would have to take classical voice lessons as part of the curriculum.

"I didn't even know what opera was! I had never seen an opera until I was in one at SFA," she said. "My voice teacher, Debbie Berry, believed that I had something special. I couldn't see my potential, and if it wasn't for her support in me (and the entire music faculty), I would not be an opera singer."

Sheriff said the most enjoyable part of her job is creating humanity on stage and sharing that vulnerability with audiences. ➔

"When I am on stage, I try to be as vulnerable as possible, and I know that vulnerability speaks to the audience," she said. "There is nothing better than finishing a show and hearing how touched the audience felt! In a way, they are getting to experience my vulnerability as much as I do."

It's also a job that keeps her from living at home. "I spend most of my year on contracts far away from home, and while my husband and stepson fully support my career, I miss a lot while I'm gone," she said.

A typical day for Sheriff depends on if she's fulfilling a contract, or if she's fulfilling her roles as wife and stepmom.

"It is very rare for me to be on a contract and simultaneously at home," she explained. "When I am home, I do not work, which is a huge privilege. I am usually prepping music for my upcoming contracts, taking much-needed relaxation, and being a full-time wife and stepmom."

"When I am on contract, I usually have around eight hours of rehearsals spaced out throughout the day. I do that six days a week for about four weeks, and then on the fifth week, I will have between two to four performances on alternating days."

Sheriff admitted the career is not an easy one — that it can be lonely and sometimes infuriating.

"But all of that disappears when I walk on stage," she said. "It's still worth it, but the day it's not, I will quit. I thank God for guiding me in this career and thank my husband, James, for being my No. 1 cheerleader. Without him, I would not financially or emotionally handle the business."

She credits SFA for making her "a smart musician and a reliable colleague."

"Those are crucial skills and the attributes that will get you hired back," Sheriff said. "SFA showed me how to be an artist and not just a singer, which I don't think is a priority for many colleges and conservatories."

Giving her best advice to young students studying opera, Sheriff suggested "understand that this is a business, and you're selling your voice as a product. The rejection and criticism are not personal, and you don't have to 'people please.' They will either love the product or they won't; and regardless of opinions, you are valuable! The second thing I would suggest is to have a team of people who support you and not just your product."

For more information about Sheriff's career, visit amandasheriff-soprano.com. ★

Sheriff's favorite modern opera, "Fellow Travelers," explores the complex issues surrounding the Lavender Scare in America during the 1950s, a period in the United States when thousands of gay and lesbian people were forced out of the government. Singing the role of Miss Lightfoot, Sheriff said it was a character who stands in dark contrast to the "girlish roles" she typically plays. "It was a different kind of performance for me, and I relished the opportunity to break from my usual character types and dive into the darker side of the story," she said.

Photo courtesy of Duane Tinkey with Des Moines Metro Opera





LEFT:
 Sheriff said she has “never felt more beautiful in a costume” as in the role of Countess Ceprano in “Rigoletto” with The Atlanta Opera, adding the role is “rather small, but she makes an entrance!”

Photo courtesy of
 The Atlanta Opera

BOTTOM LEFT:
 The role of Despina in “Cosi fan tutte” aligns closely with types Sheriff typically portrays — “young, feisty and full of cleverness,” she explained. Despina is a witty and resourceful maid, and in this scene, she advises two noble ladies on how to get men “wrapped around their fingers,” showcasing the character’s knack for outsmarting those around her.

Photo courtesy of
 Moonloop Photography
 with Opera Delaware



BOTTOM RIGHT:
 “The Magic Flute” is Sheriff’s most performed opera. While a voice student at SFA, she sang Pamina in “The Magic Flute,” and later as Papagena, the bird lady, for The Atlanta Opera.

Photo courtesy of
 The Atlanta Opera

RECENT ROLES

*Understudy

ROLE	OPERA/PLAY	COMPANY	YEAR
Iris*	"Semele"	The Atlanta Opera	2025
Zerlina	"Don Giovanni"	Opera Philadelphia	2025
Papagena	"Die Zauberflöte"	The Atlanta Opera	2024
Jess	"The Listeners"	Opera Philadelphia	2024
Ashley*	"The Listeners"	Opera Philadelphia	2024
Satirino	"La Calisto"	Glimmerglass Festival	2024
Aveline*	"Elizabeth Cree"	Glimmerglass Festival	2024
Musetta	"La Bohème"	Opera Montana	2024
Musetta*	"La Bohème"	The Atlanta Opera	2024
Helena	"Midsummer Night's Dream"	The Atlanta Opera	2024
Musetta*	"La Bohème"	The Atlanta Opera	2024
Soprano Soloist	"Frankenstein"	The Atlanta Opera	2023
Gilda*	"Rigoletto"	The Atlanta Opera	2023
Countess Ceprano	"Rigoletto"	The Atlanta Opera	2023

Seeing the Forest and the Trees

The past and future of SFA's Arthur Temple College of Forestry and Agriculture

STORY BY CHRISTINE BROUSSARD '10 & '20

To tell the story of SFA is to tell the story of the East Texas pine forest. It's hard to imagine where the university would be without it. For more than 100 years, the sprawling piney woods have provided a sanctuary to students and inspired, among many other things, the university's Lumberjack mascot, The Pine Log newspaper and the first official school song, "The Pine Tree Hymn."

And about 80 years ago, the mere presence of the majestic pine curtain on SFA's doorstep dealt the university a significant win: the establishment of the state's first department of forestry.

Over decades, the forestry program would grow into a school and then a college and was the first program of its kind in the state to be accredited by the Society of American Foresters.

Through a multimillion-dollar promise from The University of Texas System, SFA is gearing up to build a state-of-the-art forestry and agriculture building that will expand on its long-running tradition of providing the best natural resources education in the state — some even say in the nation. And as Arthur Temple College of Forestry and Agriculture alumni, employees and students look expectantly to the college's future, many are also looking back on the long road that led it here.



SFA's Forestry Building opened in 1970.

Texas' first forestry program

Before the Temple College of Forestry and Agriculture added geospatial and environmental science programs, before it built a multifocus agricultural center and soil testing lab, it found its humble beginnings in forestry.

Established in 1946, SFA's forestry program was borne in part out of a post-World War II need for lumber.



ABOVE: In addition to a camp located in Milam, Texas, a second summer camp in Mountainair, New Mexico, began in the 1960s to allow students to study forests in the American West. Though the year is unknown, the photo shows forestry students during one such annual silviculture trip.





TOP: Forestry students work on the sawmill at Milam Summer Camp, which closed in 1986 and was an earlier iteration of the popular six-week field station that provides current students with hands-on learning.

ABOVE: Dr. David Creech, agriculture professor emeritus and SFA Gardens director, holds the literal fruits of his labor as he displays the first golden kiwifruit crop harvested not only at SFA but in Texas. This first harvest was made in 2014.

BELOW: SFA's renowned six-week field station has students engage in the entire process of timber management and processing. As a recognition of this effort, students leave the station with a plank of wood they have fully processed themselves.



"The forestry program began in response to the great demand for forest products after World War II. The need for trained professional foresters to sustainably manage the nation's forests to meet that demand is why SFA's program and others were established," said Dr. Hans Williams, dean of the Temple College of Forestry and Agriculture, who's held that position since 2017 and has been at SFA since 1993.

This demand came on the heels of a practice in the northern U.S. forestry industry called "cut-out-and-get-out" logging that left huge swaths of land cut over and abandoned early in the 1900s, forestry historian James E. Fickle wrote in the 2004 book "Arthur Temple College of Forestry: The Story of Forestry at SFA."

"Thoughtful observers realized that things could not continue indefinitely in this way," Fickle added. As lumber companies began to look to the South's resources, "European-trained foresters arrived in the United States to establish professional forestry education" based around the concepts of preservation and forest management.

Multiple Texas lumbermen, including T.L.L. Temple and his East Texas Southern Pine Lumber Company, implemented progressive forestry policies on their lands, Fickle wrote. "Thus, the conditions and needs were ripe for the introduction of professional forestry education in East Texas, and Stephen F. Austin State [Teachers] College, 'the college in the pines,' was the place where it finally happened in 1946."

Also in "The Story of Forestry at SFA," the late Dr. Archie P. McDonald, former SFA history professor, noted that it was SFA's second president, Dr. Paul Boynton, who "decided to capitalize on the principal and most obvious resource provided by the region ... acres and acres, indeed miles and miles, of pine trees."

Boynton, who served as SFA president from 1942-58, quickly found that establishing the state's first forestry program wouldn't be a walk in the park. Financially strained by wartime demands, the state legislature said it would authorize only one department of forestry in the state, and SFA was competing against a Goliath: then-Texas A&M College was fighting fiercely to have the program established in College Station.

But SFA held an ace up its sleeve: "the trees in eastern Texas," McDonald wrote. "Texas' national forests, the Sabine, Angelina, Sam Houston, and Davy Crockett, all were located in East Texas, much closer to SFA than to A&M."

Once again, the pine curtain provided, and the bid for the state's first forestry program was awarded to SFA.

Taking root, growing up

SFA's natural resources programs would explode throughout the next eight decades.

A key part of that explosion was the forestry program's accreditation in 1966 under the direction of department chair Dr. Larry Walker.

During Walker's tenure from 1963-77 as chair and eventually dean, the college was upgraded to a school in 1965, enrollment increased dramatically, and it began to offer advanced degrees.

"In my opinion, Dr. Walker laid the foundation for where the college and forestry program are today," Williams said.

The school became a college in 1992; and in 2005, the Department of Agriculture was transferred from the James I. Perkins College of Education to the Temple College of Forestry, and agriculture was subsequently added to the college's name. Though offered in the curriculum for decades, agriculture became a natural fit within the college.

"All programs in the college address conservation and management issues facing natural resources, such as land, air and water," Williams said. "While there are unique issues addressed by agriculture, environmental science, forestry and geospatial science, there are significant overlaps, too. ➔"

“Good examples are soil conservation and enhancement or impacts of land use change. We have a 160-acre silvopasture demonstration area at the Todd Agricultural Research Center that is a good example of cooperation between forestry and agriculture.”

More achievements than can be recounted here occurred in the college over nearly a century, like the establishment of exchange programs with China and the Netherlands as well as the key role many in the college played in mapping the debris trail of the Columbia Space Shuttle’s crash over East Texas in 2003. But all of them helped strengthen the college’s place as a leader in cultivating industry-ready professionals.

It’s a truth Arthur Temple himself, grandson of the Texas lumber magnate T.L.L. Temple and longtime chairman of Temple-Inland, acknowledged during the Temple College of Forestry and Agriculture’s 50th anniversary: “We have found [SFA forestry graduates] to be the best qualified ... for the work we do,” Temple told the crowd. “They have

a good work ethic, and they’ve come through a school that, without question, is the best in the country.”

Planning for centuries

The Temple College of Forestry and Agriculture’s story is one of growth — growth achieved through the hard work of staying attuned to shifting industry demands and innovations.

And what comes next is, well — more growth and change.

“The next decade or two will continue to be dominated by ever-changing technology (e.g., artificial intelligence),” Williams said. “All of our programs, especially forestry and agriculture, will have to embrace and keep up with this technological change while at the same time making sure our graduates are technically sound in the fundamentals of their profession. As the present and past indicate, the college’s faculty and staff are up to the task.”

1946

- ▶ Department of Forestry established
- ▶ William R. Owens Jr. named department’s first chair
- ▶ Sylvans formed



1955

- ▶ Dr. Arne K. Kemp became head of the Department of Forestry
- ▶ Forestry summer camp in the Sabine National Forest established

1965

Department of Forestry upgraded to School of Forestry

1964

- ▶ Forest Laboratories dedicated
- ▶ Texas Water Commission collaboration resulted in installation of complex weather station on campus

1977

Dr. Kent Adair named School of Forestry dean

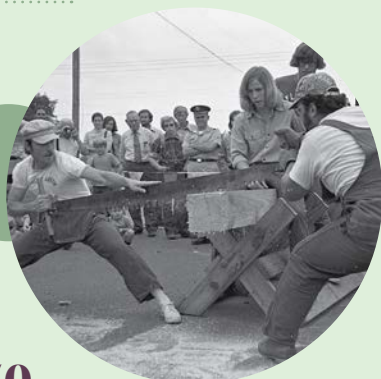


1966

School of Forestry’s programs accredited

1958

SFA Sylvans participated in first Southern Forestry Conclave



1950

Sylvans hosted inaugural field day April 28

1963

Dr. Laurence C. Walker named forestry chair



1969

Todd Agricultural Research Center established



1970

- ▶ Forestry Building dedicated
- ▶ Doctoral program established



Physical growth will match expected academic developments as a new modern building funded in large part through the UT System is expected to be completed in 2027. And like a growth ring on a tree, the story of SFA forestry comes full circle as the building's timberframe structure will pay homage to the East Texas lumber industry and the very forests that helped give life to "the college in the pines." ★



Several past and present faculty members participated in the creation of this story — their insights were invaluable. Read their memories as well as a longer version of the article with more historical images, at gosfa.com/forestrygrowth or scan the QR code.



SFA FORESTRY AND AGRICULTURE TIMELINE

1986

Forestry summer camp at Red Hills closes after 30 years



1998

Forest Resources Institute created through T.L.L. Temple Foundation grant

1992

- ▶ Dr. R. Scott Beasley succeeded Adair as school dean
- ▶ Six of SFA's seven schools designated as colleges, including the College of Forestry

2003

Space Shuttle Columbia exploded and FRI prepared map of debris field

2009

Dr. Steven Bullard succeeded Beasley as college dean



2023

- ▶ SFA joined The University of Texas System
- ▶ UT System pledged millions to construct state-of-the-art forestry and agriculture facilities



1985

Forestry exchange program with Northeast University in Harbin, China, established



1996

On 50th anniversary, college renamed Arthur Temple College of Forestry



2005

Department of Agriculture transferred from education to forestry; agriculture added to college name



2017

Dr. Hans Williams succeeded Bullard as college dean

1987

- ▶ Summer camp relocated to land near Sam Rayburn Reservoir
- ▶ Piney Woods Conservation Center constructed

1999

Pineywoods Native Plant Center launched on Tucker Estate



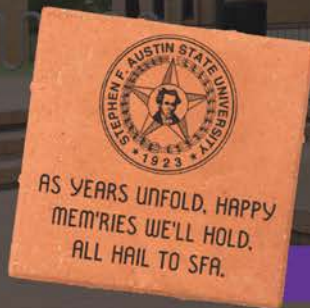
2014

Brundrett Conservation Education Building opened

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From the Association



I can't believe it's 2025 and has been 22 years since I walked across the stage at Johnson Coliseum. It is an honor to represent you and SFA's more than 120,000 living alumni as your

SFA Alumni Association board president.

As my dear friend Erika Tolar was ending her term as president with our final board meeting of 2024, and as the annual and always ace-ceptional Alumni Awards weekend took place, I reflected on my time on the SFA Alumni Association board and my pending tenure as board president. I kept coming back to a question Dr. Neal Weaver, SFA's president, asked when he visited our board meeting in October: "Where do we want to be in 2050?"

When he asked it, he was certainly speaking about the university as a whole, focusing on setting the direction of the institution. However, as those words stuck with me, they became even more relevant not just to what we do at the Alumni Association but to what we do and how we do it as alumni.

In December, I had the opportunity to assist in The Big Dip ring ceremony, Dr. Weaver's first. At each ceremony, he reminded recipients, "The ring does not make the alum; rather, the alum makes the ring." How we alumni conduct ourselves in our professional and personal lives reflects on us as Lumberjacks and thus on the institution. It also impacts the value of an SFA degree for those both before and after us.

I am proud of my time in Nacogdoches and proud to be a Lumberjack, just as I know all of you are. My first boss once told me he recruited at SFA because "y'all just have a certain grit about you, as if nothing was ever given to you, and you've had to work for everything you have." I am proud of that statement and proud to be associated with that perception.

As alumni, it is our duty to ensure the value of the degree we worked so hard for is more valuable than when we received it. Have you been back to campus? Have you visited Nacogdoches? Engaged with your college as an alum? Recruited a student or volunteered for an alumni event?

Dr. Weaver asked, "Where do we want to be in 2050?" So, I am now asking each of you: Where do you want your Alumni Association to be in 2050, and what can you do to help us achieve that vision?

The future is bright
'Neath the purple and white!

Axe 'em, Jacks!

Brian Dawson '03

Conroe

President, SFA Alumni Association

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president

Larissa Philpot-Brown '03 & '06
Nacogdoches
president-elect

Erika Tolar '02, Nacogdoches
past president

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Charlotte Ashcraft '80, Nacogdoches

Larry Brooks '01, Houston

James "Jim" Drennan '73, Pittsburg
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Bob Francis '78, Bullard

Devin Greer '07, Spring

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Jaclyn Partin '08 & '14, Tyler

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Class Notes

1960s



Sen. Kenneth "Kim" Brimer '67 was honored by the National Cutting Horse Association in recognition of

his leadership, service and dedication to the NCHA. Brimer and his family have donated approximately \$38 million through the years to the NCHA Futurity finals for prize purses and to keep the event in Fort Worth, Texas. Brimer served as state senator from 2003-09 after seven terms in the Texas House of Representatives from 1989-2003. Brimer earned a Bachelor of Science in general business.

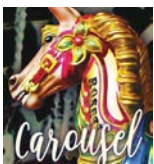
1970s



Robert "Bob" McCullough '70 retired from his communications role at Morgan's Wonderland after 15 years of service at the world's first theme park designed for those with special needs. McCullough earned a Bachelor of Arts in journalism.

Glenda Born '73 & '74 has been reappointed to the Rehabilitation Council of Texas. Born earned a Bachelor of Science in rehabilitation services and a Master of Education in counseling.

Robin Dawley '77 was recently elected to his third term as Nacogdoches County commissioner for Precinct 3. Dawley also served on the SFA Alumni Association board of directors from 2008-17. Dawley earned a Bachelor of Applied Arts and Sciences in criminal justice.



Patricia Taylor Wells '77 released her book "Carousel, Short Stories and Musings" in November. Wells earned a Bachelor of Arts in French.



Laurie O'Connor '79 received the Governor's Award for Excellence for her work as a compliance officer with the Utah

Occupational Safety and Health Division. The honor is awarded to 25 of approximately 23,000 employees. O'Connor earned a Bachelor of Business Administration in finance.

1980s



Bill Wachel '81 was named vice president of information services at Buckner International. Wachel earned a Bachelor of Science in computer science.

Larry Fields '82 was appointed Panola County criminal district attorney. Fields earned a Bachelor of Applied Arts and Sciences in criminal justice.

Robbie Goodrich '82 retired as director of arts information for SFA's Micky Elliott College of Fine Arts. Goodrich earned a Bachelor of Science in communication.

Deidre Douglas '86 & '88 was named the 2024 Texas Choral Directors Association's Texas Choirmaster of the Year. Douglas earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts in music/voice and a Master of Arts in music.



Dr. Elizabeth (Libby) Wallace '89 & '96 was named to the 1st University Credit Union board of directors. Wallace serves as the assistant vice president for the

Lozano Long Division of Global, Community and First-Gen Initiatives at Tarleton State University. Wallace earned a Bachelor of Business Administration in marketing and a Master of Business Administration.

1990s

Melissa Hunt '90 was named senior vice president and chief product officer of the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas. Hunt earned a Bachelor of Business Administration in general business.

Richard Boyer '91 was reelected to a second term as mayor of The Colony, Texas. Boyer earned a Bachelor of Business Administration in management.



James Willis '92 was named head tennis coach at Bullard Independent School District. Willis earned a Bachelor of Science in kinesiology.



Dr. Shelly Gehrke '93 was named associate provost for student success at Southern Illinois University Carbondale. Gehrke earned a Bachelor of Science in environmental science.

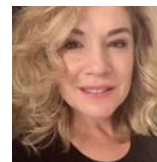
Dr. Roel Lopez '93 received the 2025 Conservationist of the Year Award from the Houston Safari Club Foundation. Lopez earned his Bachelor of Science in Forestry in forest wildlife management.



James Barge '95 retired from the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department as a Texas game warden with more than 27 years of service. He was the lead for the department's Peer Support Team for the eastern half of the state from its inception in 2004. Barge received a Bachelor of Science in environmental science.

Dr. Brent Hawkins '95, '01 & '11 was named superintendent for Copperas Cove Independent School District. Hawkins earned a Bachelor of Science in kinesiology, Master of Education in educational leadership, and a Doctor of Education in educational leadership.

Dr. Aaron Pierce '95 was reappointed to the Texas Council on Sex Offender Treatment. Pierce earned a Bachelor of Arts in psychology.



Ashley (Pasquier) Klamfoth '98 was named psychotherapist at Lamar University's Student Health Center. She continues to see clients outside the university at NewPath Counseling and Wellness. Klamfoth earned a Master of Social Work.

Jason Novak '98 was named head athletic performance coach for the University of California, Berkeley football program. Novak earned a Bachelor of Science in kinesiology. →

Class Notes



Sereniah Breland '99 was elected to the International City/County Management Association board of directors as vice president of the Mountain Plains Region

after serving as president of the Texas City Management Association. Breland earned a Bachelor of Business Administration in management.

Sarah (Symmank) Shearer '99 received Leonard Independent School District's Elementary Teacher of the Year award. Shearer earned a Bachelor of Science in Interdisciplinary Studies.

2000s

Garrett Foster '00 was named police chief of Jasper, Texas. Foster earned a Bachelor of Business Administration in finance.



Peyton Jones '00 was named Houston market president for Veritex Community Bank. Jones earned a Bachelor of Business Administration in finance.



Wes Moorehead '00 was named deputy director of the Texas A&M University Forest Service. Moorehead earned a Bachelor of Science in forest management.

Rebekah (Bear) Riemenschneider '01 & '07 was named Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service family and community health agent in Houston County. Riemenschneider received a Bachelor of Science in fashion merchandising and a Master of Interdisciplinary Studies.

Braeden Rountree '02 was named to Billboard's 2025 Power 100 List. Rountree earned a Bachelor of Music.



Dr. April Sanders '02 was named dean of the College of Innovation and Design at East Texas A&M University. Sanders earned a Master of Education in educational leadership.

Erika Tolar '02 was named chief of staff and senior director of government and commercial business development of Shipcom. Tolar earned a Bachelor of Business Administration in marketing.



Amanda (Windham) Horne '03 & '05 was named executive director of student engagement and operations at East Texas A&M University. Horne earned a Bachelor of Arts in journalism and a Master of Arts in communication.



Brandon Lockwood '04 established an independent wealth management firm, Lockwood Wealth Strategies, in Clear Lake, Texas. Lockwood earned a Bachelor of Business Administration in finance and served on SFA's Mast Student Investment Roundtable.

Cynthia Devlin '05 wrote the book "Texas Women Are on the Money: Three Centuries of Female Entrepreneurs in the Lone Star State." Devlin earned a Master of Arts in history and served as an adjunct faculty member.



Ryan Horne '06 was named program director of first-generation student success at East Texas A&M University. Horne earned a Bachelor of Science in kinesiology.

Adam M. Miller '06 was appointed district judge in Iowa's Judicial District 3A. Miller earned a Bachelor of Arts in psychology.

Voke (Gbemre) Ogueh '06 earned the U.S. President's Award for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching. Ogueh earned a Master of Science in mathematics.

Elaine (Temple) Williams '06 was named chief financial officer of Southwest Electric Co. in Oklahoma City. Williams earned a Bachelor of Business Administration in accounting.

Daniel '07 and Carissa Imrecke '07 welcomed their first child, Finn William Imrecke, Aug. 1. Daniel earned a Bachelor of Science in geology, and Carissa earned a Bachelor of Science in biology.



Dr. Kent L. Willis '08 was named SFA's inaugural senior vice president for enrollment and student engagement. Willis earned a Bachelor of Arts in communication studies.



Dr. Eralda Lameborshi '09, faculty member at East Texas A&M University, received the prestigious Fulbright U.S. Scholar Award. Lameborshi earned a Master of Arts in English.



Holly Mikesh '09 was named director of human resources at Lufkin Independent School District. Mikesh earned a Bachelor of Business Administration in general business.

Monty Pepper '09 was named superintendent at Sabine Independent School District. Pepper earned a Master of Education in kinesiology.

2010s



Jessica D. Winder '10 of Las Vegas has been named senior vice president of Human Resources at CoLab Software. Winder earned a Bachelor of Science in psychology.

PiPa McCollister '11 was appointed to Texas' State Independent Living Council. McCollister earned a Bachelor of Science in Interdisciplinary Studies.



Lance Treviño '12, an adjunct faculty member in SFA's School of Music, was invited to join the Recording Academy, the organization responsible for the Grammy Awards. Treviño earned a Bachelor of Music in music composition.

Class Notes

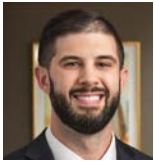


Adam Brinkley '13 was named vice president and chief claims officer of Berkley Financial Specialists. Brinkley earned a Bachelor of Arts in criminal justice and law enforcement.

Taylor Clonts '13 was named director of EIKON-X. Clonts earned a Bachelor of Business Administration in management.

Charlotte Mahar '13 was named manager of administration for Cetane Associates. Mahar earned a Bachelor of Arts in English and linguistics.

Aaron S. Williams '13 was named assistant basketball coach at East Texas Baptist University. Williams earned a Bachelor of Science in kinesiology.



Collin Weyand '14 was elected partner at Adams and Reese. Weyand earned a Bachelor of Arts in economics.

Macie Nicole Mattila '17 completed a master's degree at The University of Texas Health Science Center of San Antonio in cell systems and anatomy and attended Tufts University School of Dental Medicine. She also completed her intern year in Augusta University's Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery department and is currently in her first year of residency in this program. Mattila earned a Bachelor of Science in biology.

Andrew Alvarado '18 was named vice president of Weitzman. Alvarado earned a Bachelor of Business Administration in finance.

2020s



Victoria Quiroz '20 was named 2024 Rookie Teacher of the Year at Dueitt Middle School. Quiroz earned a Bachelor of Arts in psychology.

Isaiah Schreiber '20 was named account executive for the Houston Astros. Schreiber earned a Bachelor of Business Administration in sports business.

Kyle Smith '20 was named area manager II for Amazon Air. Smith earned a Bachelor of Business Administration in general business.

Jonathan Gassiott '21 was named health inspector for the City of Kilgore, Texas. Gassiott earned a Bachelor of Science in health science.

Rick Lowry '22 is broker and owner of Rick Lowry Properties. Lowry earned a Bachelor of Business Administration in general business.



Holly Schuh '21 and Liam Wolff '22 celebrated their marriage in Big Bend National Park Nov. 11. Holly earned a Bachelor of Science in

agriculture, and Liam earned a Master of Science in forestry.

Elena Bleicher '23 & '24 helped carry the Olympic torch to its final destination in Paris. Bleicher earned a Bachelor of Business Administration in sports business and a Master of Business Administration. She also was captain of SFA's tennis team.



Bailey (Cryer) Lee '23 and River Lee '23 got married June 15. Bailey earned a Bachelor of Business Administration in management, and River earned a Bachelor of Business Administration in marketing.

Matthew Morgan '23 was named group sales account executive for Houston Dynamo FC. Morgan earned a Bachelor of Business Administration in marketing.

Cameron Shepherd '23 was named legislative director for the Texas House of Representatives. Shepherd earned a Bachelor of Business Administration in management and is pursuing a Master of Public Administration.

Curtis Tran '23 was appointed as registered representative of NYLIFE Securities. Tran earned a Bachelor of Business Administration in finance.

Jacob Van Buskirk '23 was named sales academy representative for Orlando City SC. Van Buskirk earned a Bachelor of Business Administration in sports business. ★

HAVE A CLASS NOTE TO SHARE?

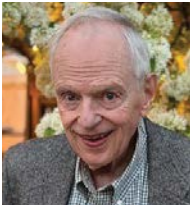
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In Memoriam



DR. FLAMEN "DAVID" BALL VI, former staff member, passed away Sept. 19.

Ball graduated from Baylor College of Medicine in 1966 before being drafted into the U.S. Navy in 1968. In 1978, Ball and his family moved to Nacogdoches where he practiced pediatrics for 27 years. He worked at Nacogdoches Memorial Hospital and served for five years on the Nacogdoches Treatment Center board of directors, including as board president for one year. After closing his private practice, Ball worked as a campus physician at SFA from 2006-11.



JOAN BRIDGES, a 1968 graduate of SFA and former Twirl-O-Jacks choreographer, passed away Dec. 10.

Bridges owned the East Texas Twirling Academy for more than 50 years, shaping countless young lives with her talent and enthusiasm. She served as the featured twirler for SFA's Twirl-O-Jacks and later served as the program's choreographer for 37 years. She received a Bachelor of Science in general business from SFA.



JO ELLEN CARLSON, former faculty member, passed away Oct. 7.

Carlson came to SFA to fill a temporary role for an art history professor who was on sabbatical. Soon after, the position became permanent, and she was able to settle in Nacogdoches. While teaching at SFA, Carlson met and married Robert Gruebel, a widower and professor of physics and art history at the university. They acquired and restored many old buildings in the city. Her friends and students enjoyed her large personality, replete with rings on every finger and fur coats.



JACQUELINE COKER, former staff member, passed away Nov. 10.

Coker served as the administrative assistant for the Department of Physics, Engineering and Astronomy at SFA for more than 17 years. She retired in 2003.



VIVIAN FUSILLO, a 1966 SFA graduate and former faculty member, passed away Aug. 19.

Fusillo received a Master of Arts in theatre from SFA. After holding positions at SFA, Florida Southern College and Western Illinois University, she spent the remainder of her career teaching at Winona State University. Fusillo directed more than 100 plays from every genre from 1968 to 2014, and her immense impact on the university led WSU to name its Performing Arts Center's main stage the Vivian Fusillo Theatre in her honor. With her creative flair and one-of-a-kind teaching style, she inspired countless students. She also was the inspiration for Ann-Margret's character in "Grumpy Old Men," which was written by a WSU student.



GEORGE HAMPTON JR., former staff member, passed away Jan. 10.

In 2007, Hampton took an opportunity to work at SFA as a building operator for Residence Life Operations. He retired in 2023 after 16 years of service. He could fix anything and everything that was broken. A jack of all trades, he helped to maintain and renovate many of the sorority houses in Nacogdoches.



WILL JENNINGS, a two-time graduate of SFA and accomplished singer-songwriter, passed away Sept. 6.

Jennings received bachelor's and master's degrees in English from SFA in 1965 and 1967, respectively. He was a Grammy- and Oscar-winning musician who wrote the lyrics for some of the best-known songs in pop music history. In 1980, he began a professional and productive relationship with English musician Steve Winwood. The two of them wrote many hits, including "While You See a Chance," "Back in The Highlife" and "Higher Love." He was a prolific and immensely talented songwriter with over 500 credits to his name, most notably "My Heart Will Go On," the theme of the 1997 movie "Titanic," written with James Horner.

Jennings collaborated with such stars as Dionne Warwick, Eric Clapton, Celine Dion, Whitney Houston, B.B. King, Emmylou Harris, Jimmy Buffet, Barry Manilow, Roy Orbison and Joe Cocker.

In Memoriam



DR. WILLIAM R. JOHNSON,

SFA's fourth president, passed away Oct. 23.

Johnson's leadership and vision shaped SFA's trajectory during his 14 years as president, from 1976-90, making him one of the university's longest-serving presidents.

During his tenure, Johnson was responsible for several transformative projects across the campus. He oversaw the construction of Dugas Liberal Arts North and the Bush Mathematical Sciences Building. Additionally, he spearheaded the renovation of what was then called the University Center, the Forestry Building, the Rusk Building and the Lehmann Chemistry Building, among several other construction and renovation projects. Built in 1974, the William R. Johnson Coliseum was named in his honor.

Additionally, Johnson oversaw the creation of the Regents Professors program, the University Scholars program, and the first fully funded academic chairs at the university.



ELVIN "BUDDY" LOWERY,

a 1959 SFA graduate and the namesake of the university's basketball court, passed away Sept. 15.

Lowery received a Bachelor of Science in history from SFA. During the 1957-59 seasons, he led the Lumberjacks with 391 points, was

named to the all-conference team in 1959, and received the Todd Memorial Award. He was inducted into the university's Basketball Hall of Fame in 1984 and recognized as a Jack of Honor in 2004.

After his collegiate career, Lowery went on to play professional basketball for the Detroit Pistons in 1959. He was SFA's first graduate to play in the NBA. The basketball court in SFA's Johnson Coliseum is named after him and his wife, Tommie Jan Lowery.



TERRI MORSE, a two-time SFA graduate and former SFA swim coach, passed away Aug. 12.

Morse received bachelor's and master's degrees in education from SFA in 1980 and 1983, respectively. She swam for SFA's team and later coached swimming at the university.

She moved to Pecos, Texas, in 1985, coaching the renowned Pecos High School swim team for 34 years. Under her leadership, the team won more than 70 regional- and state-level championships and placements. Morse received the Theron Pickle Outstanding State Swim Coach Award in 2006. In 2011, she received the State Coach of the Year Award and National Sectional Swim Coach of the Year Award from the National Federation of State High School Associations' Coaches Association.



ROLAND MUCKLEROY, a 1956 SFA graduate and donor, passed away Feb. 14.

Muckleroy earned his Bachelor of Science in agriculture from SFA and did post-graduate work at SFA and the University of Houston. After living and working in Houston for 35 years, then Kingwood for 12, he moved back to Nacogdoches in 2003. After retirement, he worked for Kingham Construction Company in Nacogdoches and was an ardent supporter of SFA's athletics and fine arts programs.



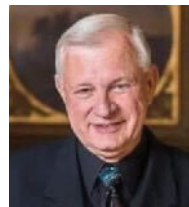
J.C. PATTON, former staff member, passed away Nov. 16.

Patton retired from SFA after 41 years of dedicated service to SFA's Physical Plant Department. Throughout his time at SFA, he made a lasting impact on countless SFA community members.



JO SPURLIN, former staff member, passed away Aug. 14.

Spurlin served SFA as an administrative assistant in the James I. Perkins College of Education's Title VII and dean's offices. She also worked as an administrative assistant for the vice president of university advancement, where she stayed until her retirement. Prior to her work at SFA, she owned The Haberdashery in Nacogdoches, a high-end men's clothing store that attracted a loyal following.



LARRY DEAN WARD, a two-time SFA graduate and donor, passed away Sept. 25.

Ward received a Bachelor of Fine Arts in music from SFA in 1974 and then received a Master of Arts in 1976. While pursuing his master's degree, Ward served as a graduate assistant and later as the assistant director under the esteemed Mel Montgomery, former director of bands at SFA and professor emeritus. During an inspiring 39-year career as a band director, Ward shaped countless young musicians, leading his bands to numerous awards and accolades. ★

In Memoriam

Peggy Albritton '77, Dec. 10
Richard Ames '77, July 4
Sonja Angelo '63, Aug. 17
Max Atkinson '70, July 16, 2022
Connie Axelson '73, Aug. 10
Mickey Barlow '63 & '72, Sept. 21
Dora Lee Barnes '72, June 19
Bob Barton '58, Jan. 15
Juanita Birdwell '70, Dec. 3
Angela Pacillo Blair '60, July 31
Helen Blount '07, Nov. 16
Charles Bond '73 & '74, Feb. 7, 2023
Cindy Bozeman '84, Nov. 24
Eleanor Charlotte Brady '76, May 30
Charles Brazil '57 & '57, July 27
Claudette Smith Brown '73, June 10
Juanita Vicki Brown '53 & '73, Dec. 31
Margaret Brown '84 & '90, Sept. 21
Tonnyna Brown '89, Oct. 11
Terrie Brummett '67, Dec. 17
Haroldlyn Pate Bryan '66 & '72, Oct. 31
Andrew Bryngelson '11, Aug. 11
Samuel Bradley Caraway '78, Jan. 20
Gordon "Diane" King Carr '76, Oct. 18
Dr. Marius Carriere Jr. '67, Jan. 9
Dr. James Carroll Jr. '69, Oct. 12
Emmaly Choice '12, Sept. 29
Ronald Chumley '70 & '76, June 16
Mark Clark '78, June 18
Betty Baker Colburn '76, Sept. 7
Candice Conger '04, Dec. 24
Francis David Conley '66, Sept. 12
Thomas "Tom" Cox '52, Feb. 15, 2022
Robert Cranshaw Jr. '80, May 30
Michael Crowell Jr. '90, June 24
Stuart Cureton '87, Jan. 3
Catherine Davis '78, Jan. 17
Janette Davis '87, Jan. 3
Doris Mixon Delafield '66, Nov. 3
Sharon "Sherrie" Dement '74 & '79, Sept. 9
Sue Dockery '75, March 14, 2024
Carol Rush Dodson '78, Dec. 29, 2023
Davie Downs '93, June 14
Dr. Jane Edwards '96, July 24

Dr. James "Kel" Ferguson '57, June 13
Kenneth Fortner '71, July 23
Jody Franks '00, Oct. 16
Dr. Paul Garcia '68, Aug. 5
Paul Phil Gilbert '55, Oct. 29, 2022
Jill Goad '90, Aug. 11
Sandra Goodwin '72, July 30
Keith Green '64, Nov. 19
Sharon Green '96, Dec. 11
Grace Grimes '69, Aug. 19
John Hafner '67, Aug. 16
Kathleen Hall '79, July 25
Michael Hasley '78, Dec. 5
Joan Hayley '49, Dec. 18, 2023
Dr. William Heeth '81, Aug. 16
John Hendrick '69, '91, '92 & '94, Dec. 26
Evelyn Hendrix '58, Nov. 30
Janice Darlene Henson '81 & '87, Aug. 4
Penny Horne '65 & '68, Dec. 7
Charlene Humphreys '78, Dec. 30
Sean Jennings '02, Dec. 19
Gary Jentz '81 & '82, Nov. 29
Elmer Johnson '71, Oct. 11
Mary Johnson '57 & '67, Dec. 7
Royce "Lynn" Johnson Jr. '87, Aug. 17
Cody Jones '18, Oct. 28
Tracy Kennedy '98, Aug. 20
Berry Kidwell '58, Nov. 28
Larry "Scooter" King '76, April 7, 2024
Larry Kosta '71, June 20
James Lacy Jr. '80, Aug. 26
Fleda Lambert '76, March 14, 2024
Ted Lankford '72, July 18
Malinda Lindsey '92, '99 & '02, Nov. 9
Meghan Lucas '16, Oct. 19
Betty Maldonado '79, Dec. 29
Robert "Bob" Marshall Sr. '84, Dec. 10
James Mayberry '77, Aug. 16
Billy McDaniel '53, Aug. 15
Michael McJilton '68, Sept. 29
Janice McKnight '67 & '71, Aug. 11
Dr. Tom Middlebrook '74 & '77, Sept. 17
Steven Miller '77, Jan. 3
Rachel Monahan '04, Oct. 5, 2016

Debra Moulder '73, July 6, 2022
Julie Muller '65, Dec. 5
Keith Neill '81, June 6
Donna O'Sullivan '95 & '97, Nov. 7
Jerry Parker '64, Nov. 12
Phillip Pate '62, Dec. 14
Lena Evalyn Prudhome Patterson '66 & '71, Dec. 13
Travis Phillips '70, July 21
Robert Poole '99, July 29
Kenneth Pye '57, Oct. 6
Hettie Analea Rawson '78, Sept. 6
Laura Reasoner '88, Aug. 10
Aleene Jackson Reid '52, Sept. 12
Barry Salmon '74, Dec. 2
Robin "Rob" Schill '86, June 5
Stephen "Stevie" Scurlock '74, Aug. 31
John Sepmoree '86, July 3
Kathleen Shelton '78, Nov. 16
Susan Danette Shoemaker '82, July 9
Garner Spring '61, Oct. 6
William Tannert '57, June 6
Kathryn Toon '07, Oct. 3
Mary Trimble '78, Dec. 25
Anita Walker '79, July 27
Allen Watters '66, July 11
Anne Weaver '02, Nov. 18
Marjorie White '62, June 25
Ken Wilbanks '73, Sept. 12
Melody Witt '90, July 11
Paula Woods '88, June 6
Lando Young '04, Jan. 9



SFA students

Brayton Barber, Jan. 1
Matthew Deluna, Nov. 8
Ryan Derr, Dec. 18
Katherine Heestand, Oct. 22
Deshun "James" Pham, Dec. 17

ALUMNI EVENTS

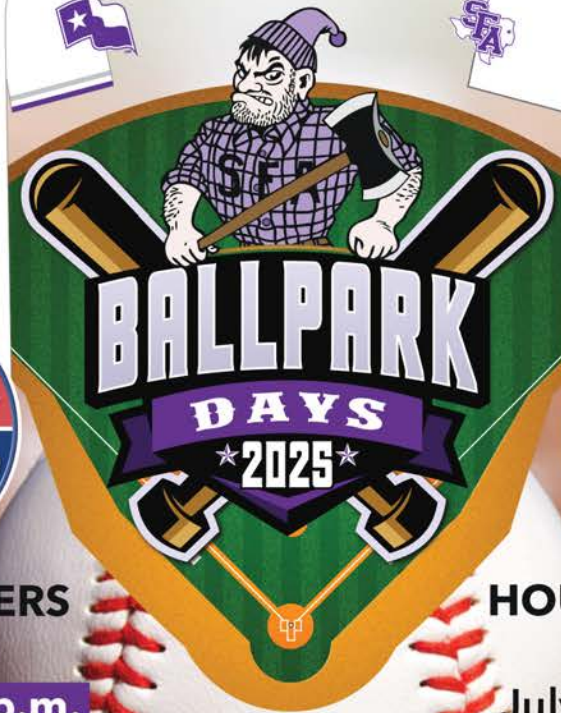
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July 19 **6:05 p.m.**



HOUSTON ASTROS
Saturday
July 26 **6:10 p.m.**



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