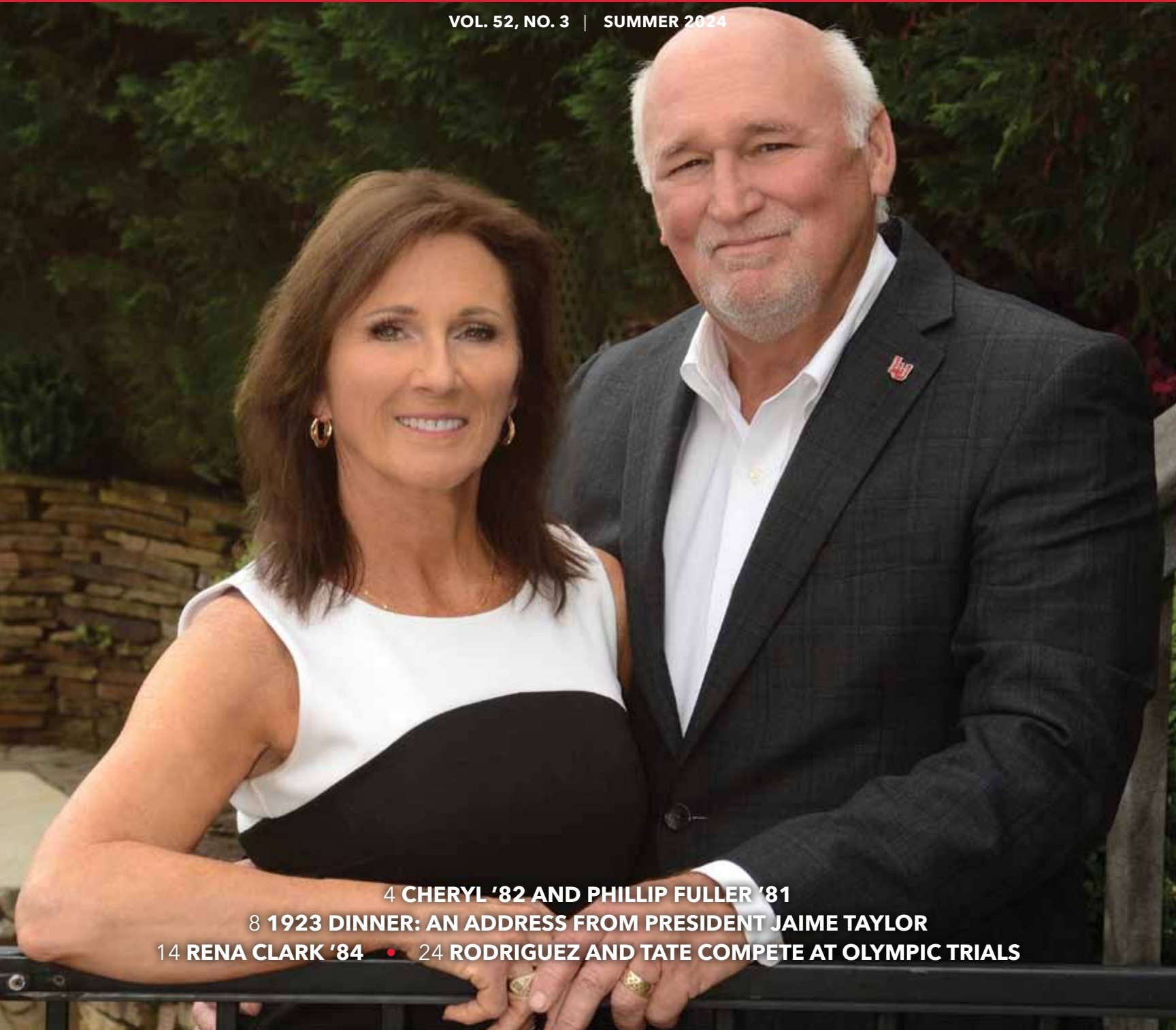


# CARDINAL CADENCE

THE MAGAZINE OF LAMAR UNIVERSITY

VOL. 52, NO. 3 | SUMMER 2024



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## | FROM THE **PRESIDENT** |



From left, Stephen Lee '89, Mike Jenkins '72, Phillip Fuller '81, President Jaime Taylor, Juan Zabala '07

**M**y wife and I just got back from vacation in Tennessee, and let me tell you, I made sure I packed my hiking boots. Hiking has always been a great way for me to relieve stress and connect with nature. Growing up in

Tennessee, I spent a lot of time exploring the trails that crisscross the state. Every summer and Thanksgiving, my family would also visit relatives in Confluence, Pennsylvania, and for me, that meant a whole new set of trails to conquer. The town, pronounced “CON-flahns,” gets its name from an actual confluence of two rivers and a large creek. There’s so much moving water everywhere in those mountains, and at the natural meeting points of streams, creeks and rivers, you can find some amazing waterfalls. I’m not surprised that Frank Lloyd Wright decided to build Falling Water nearby.

I see our university as a confluence of its own, where different backgrounds, ideas and experiences merge to form something quite powerful and awe-inspiring. Each of us brings something unique to the collective knowledge and spirit of Lamar University, and I think the alumni examples featured in this issue of *Cardinal Cadence* are no exception.

I hope you’ll read about Gail (Cawley) Showalter '70, who spent years working in education and Braille instruction before founding an organization that provides holistic support for single mothers. She also funded a substantial endowment that offers scholarships to students, including single parents at Lamar University. By focusing on both systemic barriers and personal empowerment, Showalter exemplifies how different streams of impact can come together to form a more powerful force for lasting change. Another notable alum featured in this issue is Jerry Dearing '81. His achievements in the energy sector extend well beyond the establishment of a multi-billion-dollar enterprise. What’s remarkable about his story is that he never let his commitment to innovation run ahead of his personal integrity. He brought the two together and ended up forging a remarkable path that benefited both his industry and his community.

At Lamar University, we are firmly guided by the principle of teamwork on a large scale, as our mission emphasizes. It is in this confluence of ideas and talent that our true power lies. By committing to a culture of collaboration, we can multiply our impact and tackle the enormous challenges of our second century head-on. So I hope you will always seek out new opportunities to connect with fellow supporters and alumni of Lamar University and work together to reach big goals. I am deeply grateful for everything you do.

With Cardinal Pride,

**Jaime R. Taylor**, President



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# IN THE NAME OF CARDINAL PRIDE:

PHILLIP & CHERYL FULLER

by Brooke Barnett

**A**mong those who support Lamar University athletics, it could be said that there are no bigger fans than alumni Phillip '81 and Cheryl (Spencer) Fuller '82. They are frequently spotted sitting near the court and in the stands, attending both home football and basketball games in Beaumont and regularly traveling to away games.

"They are ardent, consistent Cardinal supporters," says Juan J. Zabala '07, vice president for university advancement and CEO of the LU Foundation. "I think they have attended more LU athletic events than perhaps anyone else. I cannot remember going to an away football game when they were not there."

The Fullers have deep family connections to the University, so there is a rich tradition of support for LU. Phillip grew up in Port Neches and Cheryl grew up in nearby Nederland. Lamar was Cheryl's first choice for college after her graduation from Nederland High School in 1977. Phillip graduated from Port Neches-Groves High School, where he was a member of the 1975 4A state championship football team. He came to Lamar's campus after spending a year pursuing an athletic scholarship at Stephen F. Austin State University.

"We were two kids from Mid-County, from middle income families, so it was a logical choice," Phillip recalls. "As an adult, I have great memories of my days at Lamar and I am very proud of my Lamar degree. I would advise all high school seniors in Texas to consider Lamar."

During his time at LU, Phillip joined Pi Kappa Alpha fraternity. In the middle of his junior year, he became acquainted with Cheryl and the two started dating. His special interactions as a "Pike," his academic experiences and his blossoming relationship with Cheryl all had a profound impact on his future career and ongoing love of Lamar athletics.

"On campus, I met some very goal-oriented people that convinced me to try harder and opened my eyes to the possibilities in front of me," he reflects. "Cheryl and I also had a great time watching Alvin Brooks '82 and his teammates compete on the national stage during that successful era for LU basketball."

Phillip admits being something of a "late bloomer" in college, gaining his first professional office experience while working part-time at a law firm in downtown Beaumont.

"Like many accounting students at Lamar from that era, I was influenced by Dr. H.A. Barlow, though he was probably uncertain about me. After graduation, I took the CPA exam and passed all four parts on the first try. I called Dr. Barlow when I got my results. When I told him, there was a long silence," he laughs.

Phillip graduated in 1981 with a Bachelor of Business Administration in accounting and began working in the accounting department of a natural gas pipeline company. Cheryl earned a Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education, and the two were wed on Cheryl's graduation day in 1982.

"We started dating at Lamar, but we actually met in high school. I was just never able to get her attention," Phillip

explains. "We were married and she followed me to Houston to live in a tiny apartment in Sharpstown. I look back and wonder why she had such unwavering faith in me."

Cheryl taught elementary school in the Cypress-Fairbanks school district until the couple's first child, Melissa, was born in 1988. Two years later, their second child, Michael, was born and Phillip began taking night classes at South Texas College of Law. These early years strengthened their family bond and set the course of Phillip's career.

"I was gone all the time, and she took care of two babies by herself," Phillip explains.

"In 1992, I was promoted at work and began traveling to the East Coast extensively. Cheryl saw that I was thriving in my new career, and

I was too stubborn to quit law school. So, she endured for four more years, basically by herself most days, with two toddlers. Those six years were critical to the success I've had, and she never complained. She was every bit the contributor I was, if not more."

Phillip graduated from law school in 1996 and subsequently was hired by Union Oil Co. of California. He began selling natural gas and learned about natural gas futures and options. By 1999, he had risen to the rank of vice president. In 2005, he passed the bar exam on his first attempt and began consulting on futures trading and hedging.

"In 2007, the first company I consulted with, Genesis Energy, hired me full time to do their commodity hedging, and I am







“We encourage everyone to come and watch whatever sport you enjoy. Come to a series of games until you know some players by name, and you will get hooked. These kids are playing for the LU community and the love of the game.”

—PHILLIP FULLER

still here today as their Risk General Manager,” he said. “My accounting education and experience was a bedrock I leaned on throughout this unlikely journey. My experience at the Beaumont law firm spurred me to go to law school, and the fact I was in law school gave me credibility to my bosses and my customers.”

After the couple’s children went to college in the mid-2000s, the Fullers reignited their passion for Cardinal football and basketball. They are long-standing members of the Cardinal Athletics Fund (formerly Cardinal Club).

“We were there when Lamar won the basketball conference tournament in 2012,” he said. “We loved the return of football! That first season was magical with the band, our new team and the improvements to the stadium. We were also there in 2018 when LU blocked the other team’s kick and returned it for a

touchdown, and became a giant killer in that moment! We made the trip to Iowa in the FCS playoffs that year.”

In recognition of their unwavering support of LU athletics, the President’s Suite in LU’s Neches Federal Credit Union Arena at the Montagne Center will be named in the Fullers’ honor this fall.

“Cheryl and I are deeply honored and completely overwhelmed to have the President’s Suite named for us,” he said. “We encourage everyone to come and watch whatever sport you enjoy. Come to a series of games until you know some players by name, and you will get hooked. These student athletes are playing for the LU community and the love of the game.”

In addition to their support of LU athletics, the couple has endowed three scholarships at their alma mater. The James J. Spencer Memorial Scholarship, established in honor of Cheryl’s father, supports incoming freshmen

who graduate from Nederland High School. The Margie Hartsfield Fuller Scholarship in Education, established in honor of Phillip’s mother, is offered to upperclassmen in the Educator Preparation Program. The Phillip E. and Cheryl S. Fuller Scholarship in Business provides support to undergraduates and graduate students in the College of Business. They are also members of the Spindletop Society, and Phillip serves on the Lamar University Foundation Board of Trustees.

“Considering how fortunate we have been, we feel that giving back to LU was the least we could do. Our goal is to be helpful to Lamar and prospective students,” Phillip concludes. “We are very happy to be part of the Lamar community. It is a very exciting time, and we will always be ambassadors for Lamar athletics.”

JERRY DEARING:

# An Entrepreneurial Spirit

by Jeff Spoeri

**S**outheast Texans are known for their resilience in the face of adversity. They hail from a place where hard work and persistence are woven into the fabric of everyday life, and a place where the entrepreneurial spirit is valued and encouraged. Few people represent that, or advocate for that, more clearly than Jerry Dearing '81, who built a tremendously successful career in energy trading out of good old-fashioned shoe leather, handshakes, and keen business acumen.

Upon graduating from Port Neches-Groves High School, Dearing followed in the footsteps of his siblings, Anne Dearing Pollock '71 and Sidney Dearing '74, and enrolled at Lamar University. "If I was going to [college]," Jerry Dearing recalled, "Lamar was where I was going. That was kind of the beginning and end of the conversation back then." However, unlike his sister and brother, who studied English and engineering, respectively, Jerry Dearing followed what he called "a different path, to the business side of the equation." This proved to be a prescient and fateful choice.

Dearing frequently had his hands in one business venture or another, even as a high school student. He remembered being hired to deliver advertising circulars for a local supermarket, convincing the store owner that hand-delivering the flyers was more effective than inserting them in newspapers. "I hired a bunch of kids who effectively worked for me," Dearing explained, "and I would drop them off and have them walk through neighborhoods. It was kind of my first entrée into having employees." He would pay them out of his own earnings, keeping an appropriate amount for

himself, and thus he was bitten by the proverbial entrepreneurship bug. During his time at Lamar, Dearing sought work that resembled running his own business, even if it was not precisely the case. Installing cabinets in area homes on behalf of Sears and launching and managing a modest roofing and framing business were just two examples of these early business ventures. "I could do the work and set my own hours and make my own money, which was fantastic," Dearing noted.

Dearing's interest in business did not happen spontaneously, though – he came by it honestly through a work ethic that was expected in his family. "My dad was the youngest of 15 raised on a dairy farm," he related, "so the idea that you were going to work was just part of the nature of who you were." Dearing's grandfather played a role in his eventual business journey, too, as an avid coin collector whose buying and trading of coins motivated his grandson to pursue a similar path. "I was fascinated by the idea of buying and selling and trading, so years later I ended up starting a trading company," Dearing said. Before this, though, he made a few other professional stops. His first job out of Lamar was with a local pallet company, followed shortly thereafter by a position in a power plant in Port Arthur, where he was responsible for reporting on the plant's operations to headquarters in Houston. It was this opportunity that propelled him into the energy business once and for all.

Moving to Houston in 1986 to take on a larger role in the corporate office of this company, Power Systems Engineering (PSE), allowed Dearing to move up in the leadership ranks quickly. "The experience I had in the operating plant was a big

help for me there, because the people in the office didn't have any real plant experience," he explained. His know-how and expertise allowed the company to identify key efficiencies that saved both money and time, and increasingly he was brought into the decision-making for power purchasing contracts. "Eventually I was running the fuel side of the business," Dearing remembered, "and we ended up taking the company public in 1989, which was a fun thing to be a part of." PSE was purchased by Dow Chemical and its founders split up "about \$110 million," according to Dearing, who was inspired by this to pursue starting his own trading business. "I wanted to do what they did, so that was my model," he said.

With relationships in the midstream oil and gas space stretching virtually coast to coast, from his work along the Gulf Coast and in California, Dearing was well positioned to put his trading skills to use in his own company. The primary challenge at the time, though, was that he lacked the capital – the "balance sheet," in his words, and the credit line – to launch a new company in the sector. "People knew me from Dow – you had a company with a big credit rating [like that] and people wanted to do business with you," Dearing recounted. However, he added, "you go start something on your own and you have little or no financial wherewithal." It became a matter of applying the work ethic that Dearing had learned growing up in Southeast Texas and, later, studying at Lamar. He and a colleague managed to put together a couple of deals, but they still needed two key components: a dedicated pipeline and a balance sheet. They found both in a small company out of Corpus Christi, and by the time that company's owner





sold his side of the business several years later, Dearing and his partner were well on their way. They began building their own pipelines, negotiating their own long-term deals, and built their company “from literally a couple of guys at a card table,” Dearing said, to a multi-billion dollar enterprise when they sold it in 2015.

Ultimately, Dearing observed, his success in business was based on fair dealing, spotless integrity and the tradition of hard work that

was second nature for him and his family. He had to overcome the less-than-stellar light that some other small trading businesses brought to the industry because of their unscrupulous practices. “They’d file bankruptcy and wouldn’t pay their suppliers,” Dearing explained, “so people were leery of small trading shops. The only way to overcome that was when people really knew who you were.”

Dearing’s entrepreneurial spirit has motivated his philanthropy as



From left, Sidney Dearing '74, Colby Crenshaw '99, Juan Zabala '07, Roy Steinhagen, Jorge Quijano '73, Jerry Dearing '88 and Peggy Zabala at the Panama Canal

From left, Jerry Dearing '88, Myrna (Pirnack) '67 and Milton Dunnam, Karen Nichols '83, Juan '07 and Peggy Zabala, Cheryl (Spencer) '82 and Phillip Fuller '81, Johnnie (Criton) '00 and Vernon Durden '69, '04, and Pete Rossomando



well. A member of the Spindletop Society, Lamar University’s highest donor recognition level for those who have generously given over \$1 million, Dearing has directed significant financial support to Cardinal athletics, most notably through the establishment of the Jerry C. Dearing Athletic Innovation Fund. This fund has provided the Lamar athletics program with critically needed discretionary funds, including those used to purchase and install the beautiful artificial turf field currently in place at Provost Umphrey Stadium. Through his family foundation, which has distributed more than \$20 million to support Houston-based nonprofits that provide health, education and sustainability services, Dearing also funded two endowments at Lamar University in memory of his cousin Tom Dearing '73 and Tom’s wife Mona '78. These endowments provide a scholarship for students majoring in industrial engineering as well as resources for the prestigious Lamar University Ambassadors program. Giving back is central to Dearing’s perspective as he looks back over his life and career to date. “For me,” he said, “just to spend money is not enticing to me. What is enticing is to be able to do something really good with the blessings I have, and to try to make a difference.” There can be no doubt that Jerry Dearing has done – and continues to do – just that, and Lamar University is the better for it.

# 1923 *Dinner*

A 1923-2023 Centennial capstone and new annual tradition, marking achievements and celebrating the alumni and friends who build



**A**n address from President Jaime Taylor. As Lamar University looks forward to its next 100 years, we're not just celebrating a milestone, we are celebrating a legacy of leadership.

Unlike the majority of the more than 500 regional universities around the country, Lamar University was not founded as a normal school or a teacher's college. It was established to cultivate professionals for rapidly growing Southeast Texas. We can all look back and say the institution absolutely has achieved that goal. Our graduates are woven into the fabric of our community, serving as pillars of excellence and innovation. Since arriving here three years ago, I have met many individuals in Southeast Texas. And it's striking to me that so many judges, successful attorneys and esteemed medical professionals proudly hail from Lamar University. Some of the nation's best attorneys are right here in Beaumont,





“

As a Lamar graduate and the spouse of a Lamar graduate, I know how important it is for us to recognize the value and the long-standing tradition Lamar has had, especially in southeast Texas. 1923 to 2023: 100 years of not only surviving as an institution of higher learning but also positively impacting the lives of thousands of people. How honored we were to be part of the celebration and have the opportunity to visit with so many of Lamar’s donors. What a credit to our community!

–CYNTHIA (SMESNY) NORWOOD '72

”



Phillip Fuller '81, left, Terry Garth, Joseph '72 and Sandy Fertitta, Lee Ann Garth, Cheryl (Spencer) Fuller '82 and Juan '07 and Peggy Zabala (standing)



Mike Burrow, left, Gene '61 and Elizabeth Arnold -64, guest, Earline (Bower) Christ '73, Maxine Johnston -64 and Terry Stelly

“

The gifts of learning, of life and of relationship make us mindful of the opportunities this great university embodies and how each individual who spends time on this campus leaves forever changed. The combination of gifted faculty, dedicated staff and students eager to learn serves as a catalyst for change, discovery and growth. We are grateful for alumni who lead, inspire and serve their communities and for those who support higher education by giving of their time, talent and treasure. We celebrate the gifts you've bestowed and the calling to share in ways that make a lasting difference.

—SERGIO MENDEZ, *LU Ambassador*

“

and they received their undergraduate degrees from Lamar University. Our graduates in the field of education are employed in 252 out of 254 counties in Texas. Recently one graduate was named the Texas Parent Teachers Association Superintendent of the Year. Another became chancellor at Lone Star College, one of the largest community colleges in the nation with 85,000 students. Lamar University has graduated renowned musicians, artists, actors and athletes. The breadth of talent emerging from our institution is awe-inspiring.

A small sampling of our alumni over the last century illustrates how remarkable Lamar University graduates are and the impact they've had over the last 100 years: CEO of the Panama Canal Authority; president and CEO of BP Energy; CEO and chairman of the board of the Country Music Association; creator of the model for special education across the U.S., president of the International Association of Defense Counsel—led only twice by Texas lawyers, both of whom graduated from Lamar University; the youngest African-American female executive at Meta; CBS Sports broadcaster covering NFL, tennis and golf tournaments and championships; one of the best-known photo artists in the world; designer who created the capacity to differentiate between metals, thus developing the modern metal detector; CEO of LyondellBasell; Country Music Hall of Fame inductee who wrote hundreds of songs, 31 of which became No. 1 songs on the country music charts; one of the most prolific

living U.S. painters with works hanging in every major museum in the world founder of one of the largest deli chains in the U.S., Jason's Deli; founder of one of the country's largest auto care facilities, Precision Tune Auto Care; and chairman of the board and president of Texas Instruments.

Again, this is just a small sampling. The list is long of the many groundbreaking entrepreneurs and industry leaders that graduated from Lamar University and have gone on to become multi-millionaires and billionaires. The accomplishments of Lamar University Alumni are truly phenomenal!

**SO WHAT IS NEXT FOR LAMAR UNIVERSITY?**

It is a difficult time for higher education in America right now. People around the country are asking, "Is it really worth the cost to these students?" There are also many institutions that are struggling financially. Lamar University is not in either one of those categories. We have credibility. Our graduates get jobs. They move out and do the things that they're supposed to do, and the University is doing the things that it's supposed to do.

How do we keep it that way? We are going to accomplish this by doubling down over the next 100 years to stay true to what Lamar University was founded to do and has done for Southeast Texas. To keep us on that track, we have developed a strategic plan with four guiding principles—principles we use as



Lana and Bert Garcia '74, left, Kate and William Thorne, center, and Barbara and Mike Warren



Jan (Caldwell) '83 and Dan Hallmark '65, Becky (Dickson) Mason '71, Joanne Brown '81 and Keith Giblin '86 and Kristi Wernig



guidestones every Monday when the leadership team meets, so we make our decisions based on what's in that strategic plan.

### WHO WE ARE

Our first guiding principal is who we are. We produce things that are valuable for Southeast Texas. I think that's about as simple as you can put it. Our mission statement says, "Lamar University strives to educate leaders, demonstrate excellence in student learning and career readiness, and pursue research with relevance." What does that mean? Career readiness refers to the principles our students learn now to prepare them for what they'll be doing upon graduation, as well as in five, ten or twenty years, that doesn't even exist right now. So not only do they have to have a skill set that gets them their first job, but they have to have the ability to continue to learn so that in 20 years, they'll still be at the forefront of learning. When I was in graduate school in the early 90s, the field of artificial intelligence was radically different than it is now; it was logic. In the 2000s, it turned into soft computing and biologically inspired algorithms. If people didn't have the ability to learn, they couldn't have shifted in that direction. But at the same time, you have to have that skill set to get you in the door and get that first job.

### STUDENTS

Second, we're all about our students. We're going to focus on our students. For every single individual at this institution, and everybody that supports this institution, I want to be able to draw a direct line between what they're doing and how that relates to the students in the classroom. I always talk about our dining hall. If you're hungry, and you go to the classroom, it's pretty hard to learn. But if you eat, if you have a nice campus, if you get support outside the classroom, that makes what happens in the classroom that much more effective.

### TEAMWORK

The third guiding principle is teamwork. Anybody that knows me—and if you're on this campus—you'll hear me talk about the importance of teamwork. Teamwork is a force multiplier. I grew up around the military. We talked about it a lot there. You get four individuals working together—it's not additive; it's

multiplicative. It radically changes your ability to get things done. And I can tell you right now, we have a very strong leadership team on this campus. This is the best group of individuals I've ever had the opportunity to work with. And you're going to see things starting to really happen here at Lamar University in the coming years.

### MANAGING RESOURCES

The last principle is managing our resources. There are all those other institutions in higher ed across the nation that are struggling. We are not going to be in that position. Our graduate education here at Lamar is very unique. Over half of the students who go to LU are in the graduate school. There's no other institution I know of that is like that. We have over 8,000 graduate students, meaning that every two years, most graduate and more begin study. We're going to graduate over 5,000 individuals this year, which is just an unbelievable number and one of the reasons why we were number one in the funding formula. In the first legislative session I was a part of, Lamar University came out on top of all 38 institutions in the state in our enrollment percentage increase. Only seven of those institutions were positive, and in our case the reason for that is we concentrated on our graduate programs, and most of our graduate programs are in very applied fields, in STEM areas. The funding formula really rewards those programs that are valuable to Texas. And that's what Lamar University does. We train graduates that are valuable to Texas and the world. We have the largest graduate college of education in Texas right here at Lamar University.

### GRADUATE PROGRAMS

What are we going to be doing as we move forward? Here is an example. When I came to LU, faculty were working on developing several Ph.D. programs. One of them was a Ph.D. in business. And so I started talking to individuals. I said, "If we could pull this off, and we could do a great job—an excellent job—we could maybe be the fifth best Ph.D. program in business in the state. But, on the other hand, if we stay true to who we are, and we develop a Doctor of Business Administration, one that's more applied, one that's more focused on industry, and we



Kim Steinhagen, left, Patti McSpadden, Melody (O'Reilly) '71 and Pat Parsons, Floyd McSpadden and Roy Steinhagen



Larry '65 and Helen Rose, left, with David and Jeannette Hall



Becky (Dickson) Mason '71 and Jeannette Fresne

“

The 1923 Dinner allows LU donors, alumni, faculty and staff to celebrate donors in various categories and giving societies: Spindletop, which recognizes donors of \$1 million or more; Legacy Society to recognize donors whose estate plans include LU; President’s Circle for donors who choose to make long-term giving commitments; and donors who have established endowed scholarships. As Lamar has grown, so have our societies, and the former scholarship recognition dinner—happily—has outgrown LU facilities. The 1923 Dinner gives Lamar University the opportunity to celebrate all donors at one time.

The Centennial 1923 Dinner also provided a forum to Lamar University to launch the public phase of the Centennial Campaign and celebrate reaching the \$135 million mark toward our \$150 million goal. This overarching goal envelops four pillars of excellence:

Student Success—Preparing LU students to become leaders

Academic Excellence—Great minds, great mentors

Strategic Growth—A vision for a new campus

Championship Athletics—Harmony in body and mind

Following the example of many LU alumni, the “Centennial Campaign: A Century of Leaders,” is entrepreneurial and disruptive to the existing campaign models. By focusing on impactful outcomes instead of financial goals, philanthropy to LU is nimble and focused on the current greatest needs of the entire University.

—JUAN ZABALA '07, Vice President of University Advancement and CEO of the Lamar University Foundation

”

emphasize energy management, we could be the best in the nation, maybe the best in the world. That’s just one example of some of the things we’ll be doing.

We will focus on those things that we’re the best at and funnel resources to those programs with the aim of developing a national reputation. Along with nurturing emergent graduate programs, such as one for psychiatric mental health practitioners, we’re in the process of creating an alternate teacher licensure program. If a prospective student has a bachelor’s degree in something like biology, physics or math, and chooses to teach, that student can develop the skill set to teach and earn a master’s degree after completing rigorous, on-the-ground instruction training so that graduate is fully prepared for the classroom. We have nearly 20,000 graduates across Texas in the education service industry. We will draw on those alumni as mentors for these students to help make sure that they’re successful.

### UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAMS

About half of our students pursue undergraduate degrees. We want to increase the number of those students that take coursework on our campus while continuing to serve those who require online programs. First of all, we’ll be emphasizing student activities. In recent months, at a baseball game and football game I attended, the stands were packed; likewise, a concert after the football game and a dance performance were well-attended. Students were everywhere on this campus. Every activity was something students wanted to experience and that they enjoy.

We’re in the process of building an intramural field right in the center of campus outside the dorms. One of the first things I discovered when I came here was students didn’t feel like they had much to do on campus. We’re absolutely going to change that. A lot of learning takes place out of the classroom. When students are on campus, working together, they’ll end up studying together, and that’s how they’re going to be successful. We place significant emphasis on student success, making sure that our students get through their undergraduate degree and they graduate. We’re shining a spotlight on our Reaud Honors College. One thing that stands out with our pre-law, pre-med and engineering programs, among other academic areas, is there have been many outstanding, excellent students that have come out of Lamar University. We want



Dan French '73, left, Laurie Schanot, Judy (Walker) Linsley '67, Mary Ann Parker, Ellen (Walker) Rienstra '62, Hester (Briscoe) Bell '61 and Myrna (Pimack) '67 and Milton Dunnam



Mark and Mary Beth Robinson, left, Terri and Lee Potter, Mike '72 and Jo Beth Jenkins and Gerri Giglio





to make sure that the best students in Southeast Texas choose Lamar University first and go through those programs here.

### ATHLETICS

Last, but far from least, athletics is something that I think is important to an institution and is important to Lamar University. We're now starting to turn the corner in athletics. This last year, football had a winning season. That's moving forward. From what I've seen, I think we're going to have a great season next year. Our women's soccer program lost only one Southland game in the last two years. They've won both the regular season championship and the tournament championship. Women's basketball won the conference championship this year. Track and field won the conference championship last year, and cross country won the championship this year. Last year, we won the Women's All-Sports Trophy in the Southland Conference for the first time ever in our history with the Southland, and we took second in the Southland Conference Commissioner's Cup, which is overall athletics. This year, we won the 2023-24 Commissioner's Cup and Men's All-Sports Trophy.

But these are some of the things we're doing to make sure we keep our students on our campus. And we're going to grow our undergraduate enrollment because I believe we can beat the trend that's happening nationally. If we do these things, we'll have a very clear mission, and we can develop that national reputation that Lamar should have. Again, I appreciate all of your support and for helping us celebrate 100 years. I hope the next 100 years is just as exciting as the first.

“

The Keating Center will imbue our Lamar graduates with a sound practical and theoretical engineering background and the capacity to communicate their work and ideas. After graduation, they will move into the workforce with confidence, fully prepared to contribute, and will be readily adaptable to changes in their industry.

–CAROLE (JOHNSON) KEATING '67

Thanks to the education that my late husband, Chuck, and I received at Lamar, we have been fortunate enough to be able to give a hand up to current and future Lamar students. These students will be the teachers, business owners and leaders of the future. There's no better investment!

– BECKY (DICKSON) MASON '71

”



Karen Nichols '83, Kevin Elgar, Sandra (French) Clark '76, Larry '73 and Cynthia (Smesny) Norwood '72 and Vernon '69, '04, and Johnnie (Criton) Durden '00



Diane (Keating) -62 and Larry Woodcox, left, Regina Rogers '14, Joe '75 and Linda Domino, President Jaime Taylor and First Lady Stacy Taylor and Carole (Johnson) Keating '67



*An extraordinary career:*

## EMBRACING CHANGE AND SEIZING OPPORTUNITY

by Sarah Parker

**W**

ith her intellect, ingenuity and dauntless resolve to reach for any heights imaginable, Rena Clark '84 could have done anything with her career, and she has.

Clark's résumé includes multiple potentially career-defining positions in fields as varied as her passions: manufacturing engineer at General Electric, director of MBA program administration at Harvard Business School, vice president of corporate philanthropy for The Kraft Group (owners of the New England Patriots) and president and CEO/managing partner of portfolio companies in the world of private equity.

While growing up in Beaumont's Pear Orchard neighborhood, Clark was instilled with a strong value for education.

"There's always been a part of me attracted to education

and the sharing of knowledge," Clark said. "Growing up in my family...[higher] education was just sort of a given. I have the privilege of growing up in a house where my mother graduated from college in 1944. Almost every kid in my neighborhood went to college."

When Clark was just nine years old, Lamar University professor Richard Price, a friend of her family, introduced her to the idea of attending engineering school to cultivate her love of math and science. After graduating high school, she decided to pursue a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering at Lamar.

"Attending Lamar was the best decision I ever made. Lamar was small, and the community was very welcoming. In my engineering classes, I don't think I ever was in a class with more than 20 people, and it was that personal touch, if you will, that allowed me to flourish as a student and as a student leader."

During her time at Lamar, Clark embraced her love of sharing



**“If you look at how I spend my volunteer time, it’s primarily with educational institutions. I’ve always felt in me that I should be doing more in this world than just things that benefit me. I developed [my] appreciation for teaching and being in a classroom at Lamar.”**

– RENA CLARK '84

knowledge by tutoring her fellow engineering students and served as president of the Lamar chapter of the National Society of Black Engineers. She graduated from Lamar with honors, ranking number two in the mechanical engineering department.

“I’m very proud of that accomplishment, very proud of my time at Lamar. I just always felt like it was home,” she said.

After Lamar, Clark initially went to work as an engineer for General Electric, securing a position typical of a graduate in her degree field. While at GE, she joined the company’s Manufacturing Management Program and quickly realized her passions lay in more than engineering alone, deciding to pursue a master’s degree in business at Harvard Business School (HBS).

“What became clear was, in order to get the skills that I needed, I needed business training. I needed some exposure to accounting. I needed some exposure to marketing. I needed exposure to strategy,” she said.

After graduating from HBS in 1990, Clark took a management consultant position with Boston-based top management consulting firm Bain & Co. A shift in career direction came, however, when Clark was recruited back to HBS as director and COO of the MBA program. During her tenure at HBS, Clark oversaw all major administrative departments of the MBA program, including 1,800 students, 200 faculty members and 45 professional staff members, and developed the strategic operations plan for the two-year MBA program.

“It was just a great ground to sort of further develop my leadership skills. It set in me this desire to really want to ingrain myself in operating and running a business. That’s what led me into the world of private equity as company president and CEO.”

Clark spent her next few years honing her management skills in CEO roles in the private equity sector. She first led the successful turnaround of a distressed industrial printing company and then transformed a carve-out specialty chemical manufacturing company into a standalone operation with its own market identity.

With those years of accomplishment behind her, Clark felt it was time for a new challenge and shifted her career in yet another direction by accepting a position as vice president of corporate philanthropy for The Kraft Group, owners of

a group of global industrial companies and the NFL’s New England Patriots. The role not only allowed Clark to lean into philanthropy in a meaningful way but also to couple her career with another great passion in life—football.

“I love football, so just being in that environment was incredible. I attended every football game both home and away and attended a couple of Super Bowls. It was just a really exciting time, and I loved the philanthropy work. The Kraft family has developed an incredible legacy of giving, both locally and globally.”

After four years leading all charitable giving and fundraising efforts for the New England Patriots Charitable Foundation, Clark was recruited by GenNx360 Capital Partners and returned to private equity. Always looking to acquire new skills, she focused on the investment side of the company in her new role rather than leading operations. She spent the next eight years flexing her leadership skills investing in and acquiring companies, leading or co-leading deals resulting in total investment capital of approximately \$350 million.

Currently living in Boston with her college-aged daughter, Clark has moved on to working as her own boss in the private equity sector as an independent sponsor with Laurel Oak Capital Partners, a role that gives her more flexibility to focus on her family and philanthropic work.

Although her extraordinary career has taken her to great heights and a long distance from home, Clark has never forgotten her commitment to education, and her unwavering support of Lamar has remained steadfast throughout it all.

A longtime supporter of the Lamar University Foundation, Clark currently serves as secretary of the LU Foundation’s executive committee and chair of its trusteeship and governance committee. The 2014 LU Distinguished Alumna is also involved in a variety of other nonprofit organizations that support education and learning.

“If you look at how I spend my volunteer time, it’s primarily with educational institutions. I’ve always felt in me that I should be doing more in this world than just things that benefit me. I developed [my] appreciation for teaching and being in a classroom at Lamar.”

# Dream Makers

We express our deep gratitude to the alumni and friends of Lamar University who have recently established endowments or made plans to endow gifts through estate plans. These gifts encourage students to pursue a college education and support faculty in creating innovative learning environments. An endowment creates a legacy that becomes a permanent part of Lamar's history. To learn more about how you can endow a gift to Lamar, we invite you to visit our website at [lamar.edu/development](http://lamar.edu/development) or to start planning a gift through your estate, visit [legacy.lamar.edu](http://legacy.lamar.edu). In this issue of Cardinal Cadence, we are honored to recognize these Dream Makers.

*by* Karen Nichols



Molly Dahm was a full professor and the program coordinator for the hospitality administration and culinary arts programs at Lamar University. Dahm spent the first 20 years of her professional career working in both the domestic and international hospitality management fields. She spent 27 years teaching at the postsecondary level. Dahm earned her doctoral degree in educational psychology and human differences at the University of Houston. She has been instrumental in developing LU's Culinary Arts Program which has been accredited since 2003. One particular achievement was the creation of the international internship. In this program, students have traveled to London and Italy where they worked with internationally acclaimed chefs in their native countries. As a member of the Sabine Area Restaurant Association, Dahm was instrumental in securing a Hospitality Program endowment of \$250,000 supporting Lamar and continuously worked closely with students to develop their theses into publishable manuscripts. In recognition of her commitment to Lamar and the hospitality and culinary industries, the Sabine Area Restaurant Association, along with family and friends, endowed the **Molly J. Dahm, Ph.D. Scholarship in Hospitality Administration.**

John McManus is a 1963 graduate of Lamar State College of Technology who earned a Bachelor of Science in Electrical Engineering. While attending Lamar, McManus was a member of the American Institute of Electrical Engineers student chapter and served as chairman of the organization in 1963. He was also a member of the Blue Key Honor Society, serving as vice president in 1963. McManus enrolled at Lamar in 1959 as a math major, which at that time was part of the School of Engineering. He switched to electrical engineering after his freshman year. In his senior year, he realized he did not really like the field and chose to enter the new field of computer programming. His wife, Brenda Cole, has a BA degree

in accounting and economics from the University of Texas at Arlington and an MBA from the University of North Texas. She worked for The Southland Corp., Zales and Mobil Oil. Brenda volunteered with the Junior League in Dallas, was an advisor for Alpha Chi Omega sorority and held leadership positions with the Dallas Symphony Junior League. She also mentored a student from grades 3 to 9. McManus hopes that his and Ms. Cole's gift of the **John J. McManus & Brenda J. Cole Endowed Scholarship in Computer Engineering**, the first scholarship designated for this new academic program at LU, will encourage students to study computer engineering and contribute to the ethical and socially responsible furtherment of this technology.

Michael "Mike" D. Getz graduated from Lamar University in 1978 with a Bachelor of Science in Secondary Education. While at Lamar, he was a member of the Sigma Nu fraternity. He went on to graduate from South Texas College of Law with his juris doctorate and practiced law in Beaumont for over 30 years. In 2011, Getz successfully ran for and was elected to Beaumont City Council as councilman for Ward 2, and has served a term as mayor pro tem. As of 2024, Getz continues to serve on the city council and is dedicated to making the City of Beaumont a great community in which to live, work and play. In 1992, Getz met his future wife, Allison. In 2014, Allison decided to run for the position of Jefferson County tax assessor-collector, won and became the first Jewish woman to hold a county-wide office in Jefferson County, Texas. Although Allison was a graduate of the University of Texas and a proud Longhorn, she also loved Lamar University. In particular, she was a patron of the arts and loved working with former dean of the College of Fine Arts and Communication Russ Schultz to advance the fine arts programs during his tenure at Lamar. She was a long-time member of the Friends of the Arts and one of the highlights of her life was when she chaired Le Grand Bal in 2013. Allison

Getz passed away Oct. 10, 2023, and Mike endowed the **Allison and Michael Getz Scholarship for the Fine Arts** in her memory and in honor of the positive influence she had on Southeast Texas.

Teresa Wuchter '88 collaborated with Don Warren '63, director of the School of Accounting and Information Systems, to raise funds from colleagues and former students of H.A. Barlow to endow the **H.A. Barlow Faculty Scholar in Accounting.** The endowment will provide funding to support teaching, research, service and professional development activities of the recipient, who will be known as the H.A. Barlow Faculty Scholar. H.A. Barlow, beloved professor to thousands of accounting students spanning four decades, passed away in 1994 after serving as an associate professor of accounting in the College of Business. His career with LU began in 1951 and during his tenure he received the Phi Kappa Phi Teaching Award (1968) and was named a Regent's Professor (1972). Barlow was also the faculty sponsor of Delta Sigma Pi, a professional fraternity organized to foster the study of business and to encourage scholarship and social activity. Barlow's passion in life was teaching and mentoring his students. Numerous alumni have spoken in glowing terms of the impact that he had on their academic careers and on their lives. Wuchter states, "Mr. Barlow cared about us as students, and he made a real difference. I would not be the person I am today without him." Warren added, "In the classroom, I strive to emulate the professor who had the most influence on me—the late H.A. Barlow, accounting professor at Lamar."

Mary Rogers graduated in 1970 with a Bachelor of Science in Mathematics from Lamar State College of Technology. She retired from a career as an accountant and CPA for the State of New Mexico. Michael Rogers earned a Bachelor of Science in Electrical Engineering from Lamar State College of Technology,

graduating summa cum laude in 1969. He was a member of the Phi Kappa National Honor Society and Eta Kapp Nu electrical engineering honor society. He retired from Lockheed Martin Inc. as principal member of the technical staff of Sandia National Labs. The Rogers are members of both the Mirabeau Society for their more than 20 years of support to LU and the President's Circle. They endowed the **Mary and Michael Rogers Presidential Innovation Fund** to provide the university president with funding to use at his discretion to further the mission and initiatives of LU.

Delta Tau Delta Zeta Gamma Chapter was founded at Lamar in 1970 by a group of 22 brothers from the "Apollos," a social group on campus that was created to start a Delta Tau Delta chapter on campus. It began as a non-drinking social fraternity and Don Williams, professor of management in the College of Business, was the chapter advisor. The chapter was very active at Lamar for many years and often won the GPA award for fraternity groups. Delta Tau Delta had a fraternity house on Roberts Avenue and sold the house when the chapter disbanded in the early nineties. Some of the brothers of Delta Tau Delta chose to use funds from a former fraternity housing account to endow the **Delta Tau Delta Scholarship** to invest in student lives at Lamar by providing scholarship funding for students in the colleges of business and engineering and the JoAnne Gay Dishman School of Nursing.

David and Jeannette Hall endowed the third of three family legacy scholarships with the **Vernon Ray and Grace Sparks Asbury Scholarship in Elementary Education**. Although he was born in the East Texas town of Deweyville, Vernon "Ray" Asbury lived and worked most of his life in the South Park area of Beaumont. He went to elementary school, junior high and high school at South Park schools, and he would continue his education at South Park

Junior College (later, Lamar University). When he enrolled in South Park Junior College in 1928, while also working as a roughneck at the Spindletop oil field, he had no plans to become an educator. In the spring of 1930, he was encouraged by South Park Junior College President Carl W. "Skipper" Bingman to become a teacher. He took President Bingman's advice, thus embarking on a 40-year career as a teacher, coach and administrator in the South Park school district. While working, he also studied for his master's degree in administrative education at night and attended school at the University of Houston on Saturdays. To many students at South Park, Asbury was more than just an educator. He would help students and their family members find jobs, receive medical care and loan (or give) money to people in need. He would also provide similar assistance to teachers and other South Park school employees. Asbury was a strong supporter and well-known public voice of the South Park district. Altogether, he spent approximately 60 years as a South Park student, teacher, coach and administrator. This long association with South Park school district (and Lamar) motivated him to research the history of the district, which eventually led him to writing a book, *The South Park Story (1891-1971) and Founding of Lamar University* (published in 1972). When Asbury decided to write the book chronicling the history of South Park schools and the founding of Lamar University, Grace Sparks Asbury played a prominent role in the proofreading and fact checking and, in Ray's words, she "rode herd on spelling and punctuation to the nth degree." Grace also has a long history with the South Park school district. Not only was she a student and a substitute teacher in the district, but her father, James C. "JC" Sparks and uncle, Worthy C. Sparks, were founders of the South Park School. What began as a one room schoolhouse would grow to include an elementary school, junior high, high school and, for a time, a junior college. South Park Junior College opened in

1923 and later changed its name to Lamar College in 1932. Both Ray and Grace Asbury were proud residents of South Park and grateful for the education they received at South Park schools, South Park Junior College and Lamar University.

Rebecca Louise (Speed) Gale attended Lamar University and earned a BA in government in 1973, which led to her career in education. She taught English at Hebert High School for several years. After receiving a master's degree in education administration in 1979 from Lamar University, she worked in Beaumont school district administration. Becky met the love of her life, Edwin Gale, in 1975, and they eventually married in January 1983. Together they established the Gale Foundation, with a focus on funding educational efforts, medical research, Jewish life and the needy. Becky served on the Lamar University Foundation Board of Trustees in 2013-2014 with a commitment to the success of Lamar University and the stewardship of gifts managed through the Foundation. The Gale Foundation has given generously to Lamar University to support the JoAnne Gay Dishman School of Nursing. In 2022 and 2023, its gifts supported an existing nursing scholarship and equipment purchases for the nursing school. In 2024, the **Gale Foundation Scholarship Fund in Nursing** was established.

Suzanne (Kojak) Stafford earned her Bachelor of Arts in Sociology (*cum laude*) from Lamar University in 1969 and her Master of Science in Social Work from the University of Texas at Austin. John P. Stafford received his Bachelor of Science in Electrical Engineering from LU in 1969. John worked as a licensed professional engineer for Bethlehem Steel Shipbuilding and later as senior project manager for local engineering firms, including Petrocon and ENGlobal. John and Suzanne enjoy the outdoors as evidenced through their varied travel experiences and John's leadership



position with the Big Thicket Association, which is dedicated to preserving the Big Thicket National Preserve. John and Susan endowed the **Anthony Scott Kojak Scholarship in Music** in memory of Suzanne's brother. Anthony "Tony" Kojak was born Nov. 14, 1956, in Beaumont. Before enrolling at the University of Texas in 1976, Anthony had already completed 10 years of classical piano studies with Hubert Kaszynski. As he worked on his bachelor's degree in music, he studied under such greats as William Race and Danielle Martin. He graduated with honors with a Master of Music and composition degree from the University of Texas at Austin. He performed professionally in many cities in the U.S., including New York where he worked as a pianist in off-Broadway productions. At the time of his death, Anthony was working with his producer on a CD that set scripture to music. His love for music and his amazing talent as a pianist blessed thousands of people through the years.

The Junior League of Beaumont endowed the **Junior League of Beaumont Julie Richardson Procter Presidential Scholarship** in memory of Julie Richardson Procter, who served as president of the Junior League of Beaumont. She lost a courageous battle with ovarian cancer in April 2011. Procter gave unselfishly of her time and talents during her lifetime for the betterment of others. She was an active volunteer in the Junior League as well as many other civic-related organizations. While she was an accomplished attorney, Procter balanced her career with her devotion to volunteering. No volunteer job was too hard to tackle, and her optimistic attitude and dedication inspired others to enlist in worthy endeavors. The scholarship is open to students pursuing any major at Lamar University.

Born in Hamburg, Germany, Gisela Houseman became a U.S. citizen in 1956. Before moving to Southeast

Texas in 1987, Gisela was an insurance professional for 25 years with a background in accounting and finance, including CLU and ChFC designations from the American College of Financial Services. She is the owner of the Houseman Companies, a local land development firm. Over the last 30 years, she and her late husband, Tony, sold and developed land and built residential homes. Gisela's husband passed away in 2007, and she has continued to operate the business and make major contributions to Southeast Texas. Gisela is proud to be involved with Lamar as a member of the Lamar University Foundation Board of Trustees, board member of the LIT Foundation and board member of the Lamar State College Orange Foundation. Gisela has supported Lamar University programs through the arts, the College of Business and athletics to name a few. She recently endowed the **Gisela R. Houseman Scholarship in Business**, which supports all degree plans within the college.

The Texas Nurses Association (TNA) is a statewide membership-based professional association of licensed nurses. Founded in 1907, TNA is the oldest and largest nursing association in Texas. Members represent all facets of nursing practice—bedside to administration, consulting to advanced practice and education to legislation. As diverse as they are, TNA members share a common purpose: advancing excellence in nursing. It is a pursuit that requires commitment, involvement and leadership. TNA endowed the **Donna E. Wilsker Texas Nurses Association District 12 Scholarship** with accrued funds given over the years by the members of District 12 to leave a legacy in support of future nurses. The endowment was named in memory of Donna Wilsker who served for nearly 40 years as a nursing faculty member at Lamar University before her retirement as an associate professor. During her LU tenure, she served TNA District 12 in many roles and multiple

years. She served nursing and nursing students with great pride and passion. She embodied the LU JoAnne Gay Dishman School of Nursing motto, "A spirit of caring and a vision of excellence."

The four Plaisance children, Charlotte Fontenot, Cheryl Plaisance, Edmond Plaisance and Susie McDermand, have endowed the **Carl and Mozelle Plaisance Memorial Scholarship in Art**. The Plaisance family desires to leave an everlasting legacy in honor of their parents, who held the arts close to their hearts and both of whom attended Lamar University. Carl -48 and Mozelle Plaisance -48 referred to their lives in chapters, of which they had many. Carl founded Suburban TV in the 1950s and Les Enfants Art Gallery during the 1960s, at which time Mozelle joined Carl in the business. They continued to work side by side until their first retirement in 1978. In 1971 the Plaisances went on a routine "New Orleans art buying expedition" and on that trip, their future changed forever. Not only did they buy art, but also they purchased an art gallery and all of its inventory. Two weeks later they were owners and residents of a three-story, 1840s Greek revival townhouse at 416 Bourbon Street and opened for business. The eldest daughter, a newlywed at the time, was left in charge of running Suburban TV and Les Enfants in Beaumont. The decades passed and with both of their 70th birthdays behind them, the Plaisances decided they would move closer to their children. After a year of house hunting, they decided to build in Friendswood, Texas. Decades earlier, Mozelle had sketched her dream home on a 1960s Suburban TV letterhead, which she kept in her handkerchief/love letter lock box. With very few modifications, the design became their last home together as a couple. The Plaisance children want to keep the names of their parents, Carl and Mozelle Plaisance, artfully alive (as they were), and they know that has been accomplished with the endowment of this scholarship.



# How to raise a brain surgeon

by Marilyn Tennissen

**N**either Irven J. Chavis nor Ruby Bernard Chavis went to college, but they were so determined that their four children would get a good education that they read to them from their set of World Book encyclopedias.

Their efforts paid off when all four of their offspring became college graduates from Lamar University.

“My father used to say ‘Get an education and be prepared for the future.’ He said it over and over,” eldest son Cyril Chavis ’82 said. “Our parents really tried to make sure we didn’t waste our opportunities.”

His sister, Tamerla Chavis ’83 agreed.

“They always emphasized education. We went to Catholic school at Our Lady of the Assumption in Beaumont, and back then, if you got in trouble at school you got in trouble at home too!”

Both Cyril and Tamerla not only graduated from Lamar, but each went on to earn a medical degree, and both specialized in working with the brain. The two younger Chavis siblings, Iran ’90 and Jaylon ’92, also found success at Lamar and beyond. Iran earned a computer science degree and worked at Odom Middle School as a coach and computer science teacher. He now works for an underground salt dome storage company. Little sister Jaylon also went into science, with a degree in biology. An Iraq War veteran, she is now a phlebotomist in Lansing, Mich.

“Dad’s parents were Louisiana farmers,” Cyril said. “Life was hard.”

They eventually left the farm for opportunity in Beaumont, and Cyril said his grandmother had a restaurant and his grandfather opened a gas station right across the street. Ruby’s family came over to Beaumont in the 1920s, and Cyril’s maternal grandmother worked as domestic while his maternal grandfather retired from the Magnolia Refinery.

“Mom finished high school but never went to college, but she was smart and had a good job as a postal clerk. But they

struggled,” Tamerla said. “She really wanted us to be smart and be financially independent.”

Irven went to Xavier University of Louisiana but left after one year. “He always regretted not finishing. Since we were very young, they made sure we understood how important it was to get a higher education. They made sure we did our homework,” Tamerla said.

Cyril recalled that when he was young his dad had worked as a longshoreman at one time, and he thought it would be great to work like his old man. “But Dad said, no, I didn’t want to do that. He said it could be hours of labor and then no work at all,” Cyril recalled. So after graduating from Hebert High School in Beaumont, Cyril went to Lamar to study chemical engineering.

“There were good jobs available here in Beaumont with an engineering degree from Lamar. It’s a great department, very highly ranked. All my professors were really interested and helpful, really approachable,” Cyril said. “Plus I received great financial support. It was easy to choose Lamar.”

He named Otto Brown and Eugene Martinez as instructors who made classes fun and interesting. However, after doing summer work at refineries, Cyril realized he was “not fond of that environment.”

“I’ve always been good at math and science. As a kid I wanted to be an airplane pilot, then an ocean explorer. Eventually I decided to go to medical school,” he said.

But first he had to make up some of the science classes he would have taken if he had been a pre-med student and get approval from Lamar’s pre-med committee.

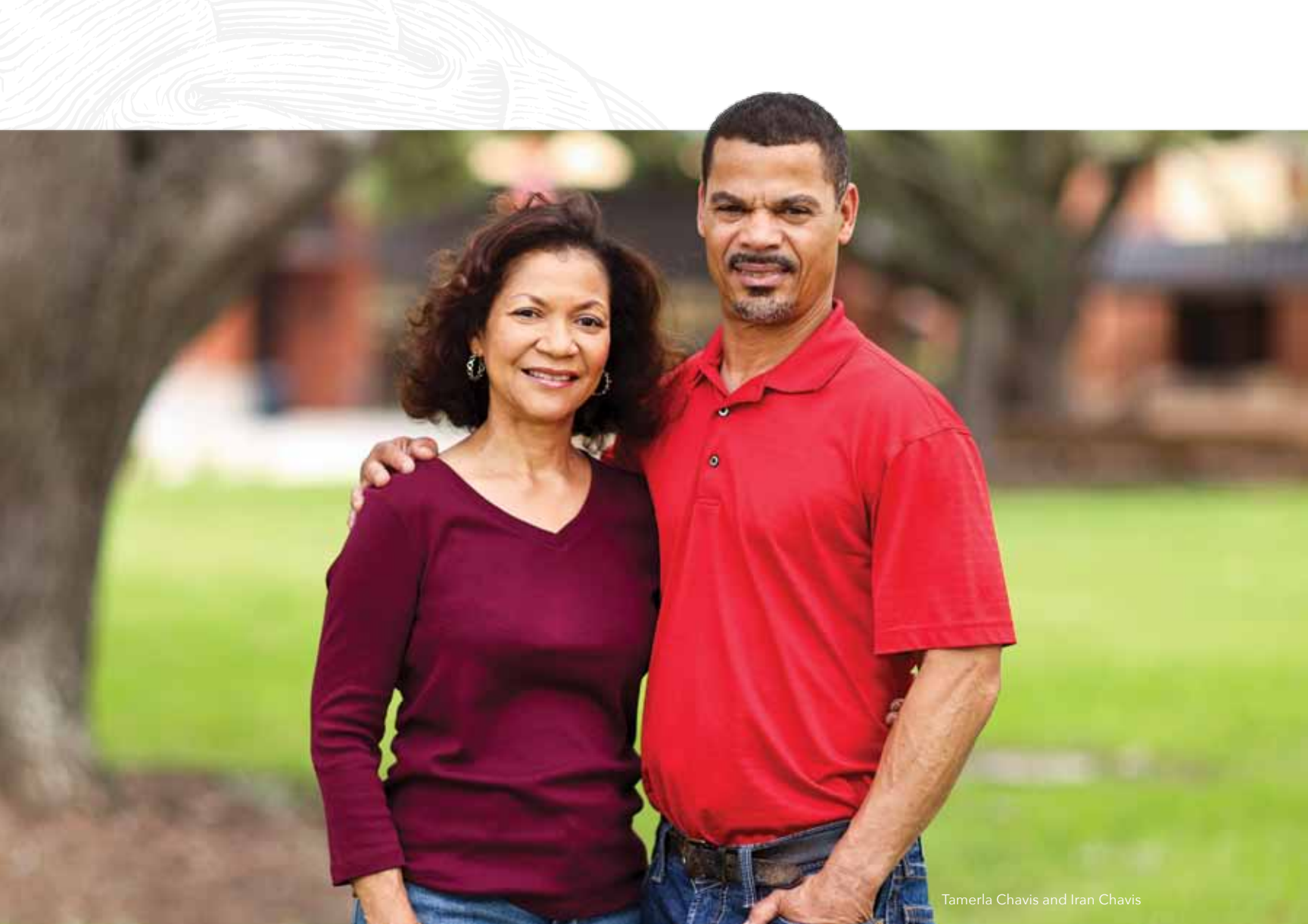
On the committee was Margaret Cameron.

“She also taught organic chemistry in a way I could understand! I made an A in her class. She really encouraged me to apply to medical school.

“It felt like my chances of getting in (to med school) were 50/50, and I wasn’t a 4.0 student, but I did the process anyway and I got in.”

After completing medical school at the University of Texas Health Science Center in San Antonio, Cyril joined the U.S. Navy and worked at the Naval Hospital in Portsmouth, Va.,





Tamerla Chavis and Iran Chavis

as a neuroradiologist. His two-year stint in the Navy ended, but his employment at the Naval Hospital continued for more than 20 years. Cyril lives in Virginia Beach, Va., with his wife Arwonder, a 1983 Lamar graduate in engineering.

Not to be outdone, Tamerla blossomed at Lamar. She was a Cardinal cheerleader, band member and Homecoming Queen of 1980 who earned a degree in chemical engineering.

Going to college in her hometown had many advantages, Tamerla said. “I was at home, but independent. As kids, we learned to do so many things on our own, like handle our own finances, buy our own cars, handle our college applications, things like that. So I enjoyed being at home. I had a car, could come and go, and be very independent and still be very active on campus. It was the best of

both worlds!”

Tamerla completed medical school in San Antonio, right behind her brother. “Cyril had the same classes ahead of me, and we had the same teachers. It was nice.”

From there she did a two-year fellowship in endovascular neurosurgery at the State University of Buffalo to become a brain surgeon.

She led a large and successful practice in Chicago for many years but then decided to return to Beaumont where she was one of the first female neurosurgeons in the area. Tamerla said establishing a practice in Beaumont allowed her to have independence. “I have to say, my mom’s prayers were answered when I came home,” she said. “I thought I would come back to Beaumont when I retired, but it was about 20 years sooner than that. But I was ready to come home.”

Looking back at her days in college, Tamerla said her “whole experience at Lamar University was really, really good for me.” So when she returned, she stayed involved and was named Distinguished Young Alumna in 2004. She also established the Dr. Tamerla Chavis Distinguished Alumni Presidential Scholarship in Engineering and has supported the Dishman Art Museum and Friends of the Arts.

“My time at Lamar helped me intellectually and helped me key into analytics and efficiency, things I stress in myself. And it helped me not to be introverted, to ask for help when I needed it. I respected my professors and had respect for authority. I feel like Lamar University took care of me.”



# Above *and* beyond

*by* Cassandra Jenkins

**I**n 1971, the voting age was lowered from 21 to 18 years old in the United States . . . it was also the same year Walt Disney World opened in Florida . . . “Fiddler on the Roof” was the biggest movie in cinemas the same year the lava lamp was invented . . . and when the Lamar State College of Technology officially became Lamar University.



## Looking back

Ed Gunderson '78 joined Lamar as a college freshman in 1971. At the time, he recalled the Setzer Center was brand new; Brooks Shivers was a dorm hall, not a dining hall; Kampus Korner was called Burger Chef; and rock group KISS played on campus.

Some of his fondest memories include watching movies and comedy shows in the Setzer Center, studying and hanging out late with friends over a pint of beer at Burger Chef, and running laps at Ty Terrell Track.

"I did rather well in high school," Gunderson said. "I had a lot of scholarship opportunities, and I wanted to go to a school in Texas. I was accepted to all the colleges I applied for, but the first reason I chose Lamar was because they made me feel like I stood out.

One of his favorite core memories from 1971 was seeing how the Cardinal footprints from Virginia Avenue to what is now Provost Umphrey Stadium were made.

"When I was going to Lamar, Big Red, the mascot, would leave from Morris Hall and walk down Virginia," he said. "As he came out of the dorm, people would all come out too, and it was like a parade down Virginia Avenue to the stadium. So, somebody decided it would be cool to paint Cardinal bird footprints on the path that led you down to the football field. It's a little corny, but it was cool to be a part of that little bit of history in the making."

Gunderson attended Lamar University from 1971-1974 before taking a two-year hiatus to serve in the military in Vietnam. He returned in 1976 and graduated in 1978 with a Bachelor of Science in Chemical Engineering.

## Drawn to LU

Gunderson said he was originally drawn to Lamar as a high school student.

"At the other colleges, I felt like I was put in a bucket with a lot of other people," he said. "Lamar, when I applied, actually invited me to come to the campus to be interviewed for a scholarship, but they also wanted to talk to me about what Lamar had to offer me. That was very different."

The second reason Gunderson said he chose Lamar was because of the University's focus on preparing students to enter the workforce.

"Lamar's course of study, their curriculum, their approach to obtaining a degree, it was all so that you could be prepared to go out into the workforce," he said. "I didn't want to do consulting. I didn't want to wait to work. I wanted to work for the chemical industry as soon as I could."

## Education and career

Gunderson joined the cooperative education program as a junior, a program that allowed him to work at a chemical plant for a year and a half while still working towards his degree.

"I'm a big proponent of that [program]," he said. "That's led a lot to my success now because not only are you marketable after

you graduate, but when you go out to a plant you actually know what you are looking at. I tell everybody that if you are getting a degree in engineering, join the cooperative education program."

Gunderson served his co-op at Gulf Oil Chemical Co., a plant in Baytown now owned by Chevron. After graduating in 1978, he immediately started a full-time job as a process engineer at Gulf Oil and remained employed there for nine years. During those years, he served as a process engineer and an operations engineer before being moved to the environmental department.

After Gulf Oil, Gunderson moved to work for a new company in Chicago where he remained for several years before moving back to Texas in 2000 to join Indorama Ventures, a top petrochemical company previously known as Huntsman.

During his time at Indorama, he said he briefly found himself in a corporate role before being asked to join the legal department where he currently works now as a senior manager for the environmental health and safety department.

## Giving back

In 2005, Gunderson created the Gunderson Heritage Scholarship in Chemical Engineering. The scholarship honors his mother, Doris, and his father, Ernst, while also giving back to his alma mater.

"Later on in my career when I had a lot of success and had more money than what I needed for my family, I reflected back," he said. "My dad was a hard worker. He was an hourly laborer at the steel mill, and my mom got a job later on to help with bills. They were hard working people."

Gunderson said he realized they still wanted to be a part of his college experience so he decided to set up a scholarship at LU to honor that wish. "They wanted to help me pay for college, but I had a scholarship, the GI Bill and I used the money I made from the co-op to pay for school so I didn't have to burden them with the expense of college."

Gunderson is also a big supporter of Red Day, Lamar University's annual giving day campaign where alumni, community members and employees can donate and raise money for the University. He regularly offers a challenge to encourage donors to give to the College of Engineering on Red Day, which this year takes place Sept. 17-18.

## Looking forward

Gunderson said he loved his time at Lamar and the career opportunities it gave him throughout his lifetime and hopes to see Lamar create new satellite campuses in smaller cities, partner with community colleges such as Lone Star College and continue to grow their degree programs and classes.

"Lamar isn't happy with the status quo," he said. "That's a big strength. It was there when I went to college, and it's there now. We see the value of Lamar and we need to show the rest of the world and the rest of the United States what that value is."

Underrecruited and undervalued:

# Be undeniable

by Check McGill

**A** pair of Lamar University student-athletes recently accomplished the unprecedented, hurdling perceptions and clearing adversity to reach the doorstep of the Olympic Games.

Chloe Rodriguez, a junior from Richardson, Texas, and Kenson Tate, a sophomore from Zachary, La., represented Lamar at the U.S. Track & Field Olympic Trials in Eugene, Ore., at the end of June. Although neither Rodriguez, a hurdler, nor Tate, a long jumper, qualified, the accomplishment set a new standard for the Cardinals program. The student-athletes have similar backgrounds as underrecruited overachievers who landed here on a campus that provided the program and culture for them to blossom into track and field stars, even if others may have thought that possibility as remote.

The duo will forever be linked by this being the first time Lamar's program had two student-athletes compete at the trials in the same year.

"The experience of competing at the Olympic Trials confirmed for Chloe and Kenson that they absolutely belong on the elite stage," said Trey Clark '93, '95, Lamar's director of track & field and cross country since 1999. "Their achievements send a clear message to student-athletes that you can achieve all of your goals and dreams if you find the right school and place. You can find that in Beaumont, Texas, at Lamar University."



When Rodriguez stepped to the starting line at the University of Oregon's Hayward Field to compete in the Olympic Trials for a spot on the U.S. roster for the 2024 Paris Olympics, she allowed herself a moment to recall her journey.

She is Lamar's first woman to compete at the trials.

"I like surprising people; I like being underestimated," said Rodriguez, a sprinter and hurdler. "That's when I'm at my best. It's been a long time of people underestimating me and thinking I can't do this or that. I always want to prove to myself that I am that kind of athlete."

Point proven. Rodriguez enjoyed one of the greatest seasons in Lamar track and field history. She finished in the top 10 a dozen times, and she won a gold medal at the Southland Conference Outdoor Championships when she broke the school and conference record in the 400-meter hurdles with a time of 57.02 seconds. That punched her ticket to the NCAA West Regionals in the hurdles, where she earned a bronze medal as part of the 4x400-meter relay team, which also won a silver medal in indoor. At the Olympic Trials on June 27, she finished seventh in her heat and 32nd overall.

"Chloe has the biggest chip on her shoulder of anyone I have ever coached," Clark said. "She was underrecruited and undervalued in high school. She reached out to me late in the recruiting process. She had what it took to be successful, but nobody was hearing her. We talked on the phone, and I really thought she was going to come through the phone and fight me."

That spirit convinced Clark that Rodriguez was wired differently, in the most special way. She teased her immense potential by scoring in the 400 in her first meet as a freshman. She has been slowly refining her technique and increasing the rigor of her training to shave time.

"Nobody has taken the time to get to know her and who she is," Clark said. "She has one of the most competitive hearts of anybody I have ever been around. That was apparent in the recruiting process. She has a lot of tools.





She does the work. She works hard. She wants to be great all of the time. She unapologetically wants to be great.

“She has surprised everyone with how far she’s come and how quickly she’s done it—from somebody who wasn’t really recruited at all to making the Olympic Trials.”



Outside of his home state of Louisiana, Tate did not generate considerable buzz on the recruiting trail, although the football and track star was a top-five long jumper on the prep level.

“Kenson was overlooked because he is not built the way everybody else is built,” Clark said. “He is a Lamar guy through and through.”

Really, since day one. Tate’s godmother is Corlis (Burrell) Andrews ’06, a former Lamar track star and Tate’s cousin. When Kenson was born, it was Andrews who christened him, which she did on the same day she competed in a track meet for Lamar. One of Kenson’s most

treasured keepsakes is a picture of himself visiting the Lamar dorms as a toddler.

Tate initially had mostly interest from colleges and universities in his home state. Then, he was encouraged to take a look at Lamar, and that is when he was shown the photo.

“Apparently, I was a Cardinal before I even knew I was a Cardinal,” he said.

Tate first impressed with his speed when his brother and friends set up a race. Although Tate was five years younger than most participants, he joined the race as a joke and his parents watched in awe.

“They said, ‘Kenson can really run,’” Tate recalled.

He started out in the 100, 200 and 400. Then, came the jumps. He jumped 24 feet, 10 inches at a regional meet, which ranked him fifth in the country among high schoolers.

“That was big,” Tate said.

He made his way onto Lamar’s radar in February of his senior year of high school.

“He is on a developmental path that has a high ceiling,” Clark said. “He is built

for big moments. He’s shorter and has a powerful build, like a running back. Most jumpers are tall, lean, angular jumpers. He is a short, powerful, speed jumper. He doesn’t quite fit the mold, but he has the ability. The process he is going through now is mastering his technical ability.”

Tate returned to Hayward Field for the Olympic Trials after competing there two weeks earlier for the NCAA Outdoor Track & Field Championships. He was twice named an All-American this season and captured two Southland Conference long jump titles, while also setting the school record for farthest distance jumped.

He finished 22nd at the trials in the long jump with a distance of 7.48 meters (24 feet, 6.5 inches).

“What more do I have to do? I have to go all of the way,” Tate said. “I have to be undeniable. I have to go to a level that very few go. I want to put myself on the map and my dream is to make it to the Olympics. That’s the journey I’m on.”

**#WeAreLU**

## DAVID J. BECK FELLOWSHIPS:

# Extraordinary. Unique. Created for Lamar University students.

by Mona Brittain

“Lamar University is, at its core, a university that values and promotes experiential learning. Students have opportunities for real-world training that prepare them to enter their professional fields or to move to graduate or professional programs with levels of experience beyond their non-LU colleagues. The David J. Beck Fellowship program is the flagship of these experiential learning opportunities. Since its inception, two dozen Beck Fellows have benefited from extraordinary and unique learning opportunities available only to Lamar University students. Those experiences have enriched their education along with those of their fellow students who benefit from the experiential knowledge that they bring back with them to the classroom.”

—Juan Zabala '07, vice president for university advancement and CEO of the LU Foundation


**O**n paper, a David J. Beck Fellowship provides a Lamar undergraduate a full academic scholarship for one year—including tuition, fees, books and on-campus room and board—along with up to \$10,000 to pursue a summer project proposed as part of the application. In practice, this fellowship makes possible a world of opportunities.

In 2009, David Beck '61 initially funded this prestigious fellowship, open to LU undergraduates in any major. Beck Fellows are chosen based on the strength of their complete application packet, including a proposed summer project, academic record and financial need.

Beck, a Lamar University Distinguished Alumnus, has served

as president of the Lamar University Foundation and a regent of the Lamar University System. He is the founding partner of Beck Redden LLP, a nationally recognized trial and appellate law firm. His honors include being named in Best Lawyers in America for the past three decades, being designated one of the 25 Greatest Lawyers of the past quarter century, and receiving the Award for Achievement in the Pursuit of Justice for All from the Center for American and International Law. Beck also served as president of the International Association of Defense Counsel, the American College of Trial Lawyers, and the State Bar of Texas.

The Beck Fellow alumni featured here share how the fellowship influenced their futures.



“This achievement allowed me to dream big and not be afraid to take risks.”

### JENNIFER (MIKEL) LANDRENEAU '11

David J. Beck Fellow '09

When Jennifer (Mikel) Landreneau, now an 11-year nursing professional, applied for the Beck Fellowship as a junior nursing major at Lamar, her proposed summer project was her hope to intern at a hospital in Ghana and live with a host family through Projects Abroad. She was selected from 22 applicants.

#### What did that summer of service in Ghana mean to you?

“The opportunity to intern in Ghana was one of the highlights of my college career! The ability to immerse into the healthcare field and a new culture on a global level was truly a once-in-a-



lifetime experience. I am so grateful for the opportunity to be a Beck Fellow. This achievement allowed me to dream big and not be afraid to take risks. Traveling abroad for the first time really opened my eyes to different cultures, backgrounds and beliefs. This experience highlighted that while globally we may have different priorities and lifestyles, the importance of community and meaningful interaction is universal."

Landreneau is a neonatal nurse practitioner at St. David's Medical Center in Austin. **Looking back, what memories and lessons learned have stayed with you since becoming a Beck Fellow?**

"With the Beck Fellowship, I was able to intern in a rural hospital and see patients who traveled long distances for health services. Their stories stayed with me and continue to remind me how fortunate I am to have healthcare services and basic necessities so easily accessible. I learned the value of nonverbal communication and mutual understanding to build a strong patient-caregiver relationship. Although we may encounter language and cultural barriers while treating patients, these obstacles should not undermine the care that we provide. I will always cherish the great memories made with my host family and the other travelers. We celebrated birthdays, attended family ceremonies and went on so many adventures. I learned the importance of flexibility and resilience in both my personal and professional life."



**"It also prepared me to present ideas, defend them and prove or disprove them—skills I still use every day in the exam and operating room."**

**DR. MICHAEL ZARZOSA '11**  
David J. Beck Fellow '10

When Michael Zarzosa decided to follow his dream, he moved back to southeast Texas and enrolled at LU, where professors helped him onto the career path to becoming a veterinarian. Zarzosa recalls that as a junior biology/pre-veterinary major, his professors encouraged him to apply for the Beck Fellowship. For his summer project as part of the application, Zarzosa wrote how he hoped to survey parasites common to domestic dogs and the probability of transfer to humans in Belize. He was selected as Lamar's second Beck Fellow in the program's history. Following graduation, Zarzosa received his Doctorate of Veterinary Medicine from Cornell University, with an interest in equine medicine and surgery. He also finished the course work required for a master's in public health in conjunction with the University of Minnesota. Today Zarzosa is a veterinarian in Morehead City, N.C., specializing in surgery, wound management and pain management.

**What led you to pursue this type of research, and what did you discover?**

"My interest in this project stemmed from a mentor initially. The research was appealing because it aligned with types of research

performed in my intended field, veterinary medicine. Additionally, because I was applying to a school that had an emphasis in research, something as prestigious as the Beck Fellowship increased that appeal. What we found was that a high percentage of canines had transmissible parasites, and the lifestyle, isolation, health care and socio-economic characteristics of the area increased exposure to both native populations of Belize and tourist populations."

**How valuable was the fellowship's scholarship and summer research to you?**

"I think it was absolutely invaluable. Not only did it help distinguish me in a large pool of exceptional individuals, it prepared me for what I was

about to experience and to be in the best position to attain my goals. Something like the Beck Fellowship helps teach you to think for yourself, prepare an idea, defend that idea in front of a panel of your (potential) peers, create a tangible plan and see it to the finish. Finally, it affords you a chance to present the findings in front of a discerning audience. Irrespective of what your ultimate goals are, something like this prepares you for a future in any chosen field.

The Beck Fellowship was an incredible experience. From the initial suggestion that I apply, I was both scared and excited. Every step of the process presented challenges and allowed for the creation of solutions. It allowed me to strengthen my bonds with mentors that I still think fondly on. It also prepared me to present ideas, defend them and prove or disprove them—skills I still use every day in the exam and operating room. Without these skills, I would not have been as outstanding as an applicant. Without the requirements of this fellowship, I would not have had the courage and knowledge during my internship to seek a mentor and be listed as an author on published papers. I am thankful every day that I had the pleasure of being a Beck Fellow, and grateful for the many ways it prepared me for success."

**Taylor one of 10 on NCAA board**



President Jaime Taylor has been selected to the prestigious National Collegiate Athletics Association (NCAA) Division I Board of Directors. In this role, Taylor will be one of 10 university presidents representing 22 NCAA Football Championship Subdivision and Division I conferences.

"I am deeply honored and privileged to serve on the NCAA Division I Board of Directors, and humbled to represent the Southland Conference," Taylor said. "This appointment underscores our university's unwavering commitment to excellence in both academics and athletics. I look forward to collaborating with the board to champion the development of our student-athletes."

The Board of Directors is the top governing body for Division I, responsible for strategy and policy and overseeing legislation and management of the division. The board is comprised of 20 presidents and chancellors; one from each of the 10 Football Bowl Subdivision conferences, 10 from the remaining 22 NCAA Football Championship Subdivision and Division I conferences, the chair of the NCAA Division I Council, and one faculty athletics representative.

The board has many functions, including:

- *Focusing on strategic topics in college sports and their relationship to higher education.*
- *Monitoring legislation to ensure it does not conflict with policies and goals.*
- *Reviewing and approving policies and procedures governing the infractions program.*
- *Approving an annual budget.*
- *Adopting legislation when significant values are at stake, or when an issue requires fast action that does not allow use of the regular legislative process.*
- *Collaborating with NCAA staff on how the national office can best serve Division I members.*

"Dr. Taylor values the transformative importance of both athletics and education and recognizes the positive and substantial impact student-athletes have on campus and in the community. He is an outstanding leader and a respected voice for the Southland Conference as we progress in this new age of college athletics," Southland Commissioner Chris Grant said.

This is the first time in Lamar University's history that it has had a representative in this crucial role.



**RED DAY** Sept. 17-18, 2024 • Noon to Noon  
Mark your calendars today so you don't miss a challenge! • [lamar.edu/redday](http://lamar.edu/redday)

**RED DAY going LIVE!**

Red Day 2024 Paint the Town RED brings together students, faculty, staff, alumni and friends for a single purpose: to make LU even better! Funds raised during LU's annual giving day **Sept. 17-18, 2024**, will create more opportunities for students to achieve their dreams. And we can't wait to top last year's challenges and goals.



For 24 hours beginning at noon Sept. 17, monitor [lamar.edu/redday](http://lamar.edu/redday) for minute-by-minute coverage, special broadcasts and rolling challenges by your college, department or fellow classmates. Earn prizes and unlock special gifts for your college. Donation bonuses will be available courtesy of the Lamar University Foundation for the top three academic colleges as measured by improvement in donor percentage over last year.

What began in 2021 as just a handful of live guest appearances has grown to be a jam-packed schedule of live interviews, news, performances, tours and much more from the academic colleges, athletics and programs all across campus.



Ways to watch, participate and possibly double your gift through a challenge:

[lamar.edu/redday](http://lamar.edu/redday)   [/lamaruniversity](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC...)



**Spindletop Center and LU counseling boost mental health access**

The Spindletop Center and Lamar University have partnered to increase access to mental health services while also providing jobs to new graduates. The T.L.L. Temple Foundation awarded a grant of \$517,942 to Spindletop Center, which will fund six entry-level therapist positions over three years. Positions will be filled by newly licensed graduates of Lamar University's master's-level counseling programs. In addition to funding salaries, the grant also funds fees for professional supervision, which all licensed professional counselor associates are required to obtain during their provisional licensure. "It's a deepening of our already existing relationship," said Emily Ross, Spindletop Center clinical intern coordinator. "We're unifying under the shared goal training in the mental health field."



Cardinal baseball Head Coach Will Davis throws out the first pitch at the June 21 Astros game. During pre-game festivities, 2016 Distinguished Alumnus Glen Morgan '75, left, poses with Davis, President Jaime Taylor and Jeff O'Malley, director of athletics.



## Golden Pass LNG creates biology scholarships

Representatives from Golden Pass LNG visited LU May 3 to present a generous donation of \$8,000 to LU's biology department. The donation will be allocated to provide one-time scholarships to four deserving environmental science majors. "Our goal is to make sure students have access to industry professionals who can come in and provide presentations and training for them," said Winnie Schubert, a safety security health and environment professional at Golden Pass LNG. "Additionally, we aim to have scholarships that enhance educational activity and allow students to go to conferences and receive extracurricular education that focuses on providing practical application. At a facility like Golden Pass LNG, many disciplines come into play." The commitment to nurturing future talent is underscored by the partnership with Lamar. "We see Lamar students as the future workforce," Schubert said. "Offering practical applications of their studies helps them gain valuable skills and a competitive edge in the job market. Our partnership with Lamar reflects our commitment to preparing students for success in their careers."



## Professor and Merit Award recipients honored

On April 11, Lamar University recognized its Professor and Merit Award recipients. The University Professor and Ann Die Hasselmo Faculty Scholar designation honors senior faculty members whose exemplary contributions to teaching, research and service have significantly enriched the University community. These distinguished educators serve as role models, inspiring both colleagues and students alike through their commitment to scholarly excellence and mentorship. The Merit Awards program spotlights the achievements of junior faculty members. Recognizing their exceptional performance in teaching, research and service, these awards not only acknowledge individual accomplishments but also foster a culture of innovation and academic rigor. Paul Bernazzani, professor of chemistry and biochemistry, was named 2024 University Professor and Ann Die Hasselmo Faculty Scholar. Merit Award recipients for 2024 are Tina Kibbe, assistant professor of history; Christina Gregory, assistant professor of political science; and Gevorg Sargsyan, assistant professor of finance.



## Counseling student earns first place

Counseling student and 10-year educator Jennifer Russell placed first in an online national essay competition hosted by the American Counseling Association. The competition aimed to recognize the insight of school counseling graduate students and the work of professional school counselors who interact with K-12 students. Her essay focused on social skills, the associated struggles and the importance of redirecting and correcting.

## DOE awards Lou \$2M for new cybersecurity center



Helen Lou, professor of chemical engineering, has received \$2 million from the U.S. Department of Energy to create the Center for Data Analytics and Cybersecurity at Lamar University. The project aims to advance digital capacity and enhancement of cybersecurity and resiliency for industrial operations. Lamar University is taking a significant step towards enhancing the security of the U.S. energy infrastructure with the establishment of the center. This initiative comes in response to the increasing

reliance of the energy, petrochemical and port industries on digital technologies, which, while promising cost savings and improved operational performance, also present new challenges in the form of cyber threats. The project is a collaboration among the College of Engineering, Department of Computer Science and the College of Business.

## Alumni receive Wayne A. Reaud Excellence in Education Award

As part of the Beaumont Foundation's ongoing commitment to supporting education, the Wayne A. Reaud Excellence in Education Award was created to celebrate and recognize superior contributions of teachers whose leadership and dedication inspire a spirit of learning in students of all backgrounds and abilities. Thirteen of fifteen teachers selected are alumni, and each received a crystal obelisk, a portrait, and \$10,000 on May 14: **Cheryl Spangler**, Dishman Elementary School, Beaumont; **Allison Morgan McBride**, Highland Park Elementary, Nederland; **Betsy Richter**, Silsbee Elementary School; **Cindy Brandenburg**, Buna Elementary School; **Rodondria R. Bradley**, Pietzsch-MacArthur Pre-K - 8th Grade Center, Beaumont; **Candace Abshier**, Hamshire-Fannett Middle School; **Staci Glach**, Vidor Middle School; **Brittany Granger**, Hardin-Jefferson Junior High School; **Delcie Thomas**, Beaumont Early College High School; **Robin McEachen**, Nederland High School; **Daniel Auchenbach**, Bridge City High School; **Karissa Ellis**, Kountze High School; and **Krystal Hayes**, Woodville High School.



## AIAA students rocket to success

The efforts of LU's American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics (AIAA) student chapter, revived in spring 2023, culminated in the 2024 NASA University Student Launch Initiative, a nine-month competition. Under Faculty Advisor Chun-Wei Yao's guidance, the team designed, built and successfully launched a high-powered rocket on April 13 in Huntsville, Ala., where they competed with universities nationwide. "Our nine-month journey through rigorous competition and navigating strict deadlines for tasks set by NASA is a testament to our students' resilience and dedication," Yao said. "Despite being a small team, the members of the AIAA student chapter and mechanical engineering senior design rocket launch team showcased remarkable efficiency when competing with larger teams from prestigious universities. Team members learned from each other, supported one another and, most importantly, never gave up. This team is one of the few to advance to the final phase of the NASA student launch competition in its first year."

"There were many nights where the group would stay up until 2 to 3 a.m. working on the deliverables, but none of that mattered once we got to NASA and got to see our rocket launch among such prestigious universities," member Jonah Watts said. "The Lamar Rocketry group has become family to me, and we are constantly pushing each other to attain our goals and keep setting even higher goals for ourselves."



# CARDINAL love stories

## Connie (Collins) '84 and Gary Applebach '84

Gary and I graduated on May 12, 1984, from Lamar University, he with a bachelor's in chemical engineering and me with a B.B.A. in accounting. We were married May 26, 1984.



APPLEBACH

## Jo Nell (Powell) '71 and David "Dave" Taylor Jr. '73

We met our freshman year in the Baptist Student Center at Lamar and recognized each other from our geology class. We became friends in 1967, began dating several years later and married in 1972. We celebrated our 51st anniversary last August. GO BIG RED!!



## Agnes (Bailey) '58 and Jerome Bourgeois '58

We met in the fall of 1956 in Lamar Tech's production of *Oklahoma*. I played the role of Curly, and Agnes was in the dancing chorus. We dated from then until May 1957 when I graduated with a B.S. in music and was immediately drafted into the Army. Agnes graduated in 1958 with a B.A. in English. After my discharge in 1959, we resumed dating and were married in August 1959. I began a research fellowship at University of Houston while Agnes taught English at Bellaire High School. In 1960, we both took teaching jobs in Brazosport. After four years teaching, I served nine years in secondary school principalships, and three years as director of curriculum and personnel while Agnes taught English and gave birth to our two children, Julie and Andrew. In 1976, we moved to Dickinson where I served 12 years as superintendent while Agnes finished her M.A. and served as high school counselor in Clear Creek ISD. In 1988, we moved to West Orange-Cove CISD, where I served as superintendent and Agnes as high school counselor. After I retired in 1991, we moved to the South Shore Harbor community in League City, and Agnes retired in 1996. In 2021, we moved to the Village of Tanglewood retirement community in Houston to be near grandchildren and great-grandchildren. We celebrated in August 2023 our 64th year in a wonderfully happy and productive married partnership. Agnes has always been the "wind beneath my wing."



BOURGOIS

## Betty (Breaker) '67 and Ed Marcontell '67, '70

We met in the fall of 1963. Ed was on the Lamar Tech football team from 1963 to 1966, when the team was Southland Conference Champion for three straight years. We were married July 16, 1966, 58 years ago. I graduated in 1967 with my B.B.A. in secretarial science, and Ed graduated in 1967 with his B.S. in physical education and then in 1970 with his M.S. in health and physical education degree from Lamar State College of Technology. In our photo, we're standing in the doorway of my dorm room in Gray Hall, 1964.

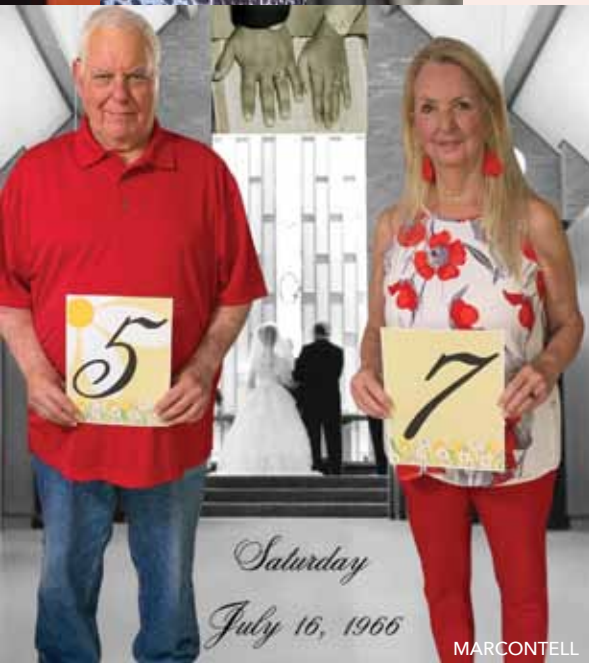


TAYLOR



**Melisa (Landry) '90 and Robert "Sarge" Chambers '89**

I was a freshman during summer semester 1986 and regularly walked through the Setzer Center. One day, this guy was sitting just outside the center, and he said, 'Hey! I've been watching you walk every day, and I want to invite you to my birthday party. Everybody always comes to my party, and it wouldn't be the same if you were not there.' I was like, 'Yeah, I bet you tell that to all these young girls here on campus,' so I didn't buy it. I just thought he was spitting game so I didn't come. Well, that following Monday when I saw him, I asked him how his birthday was. He told me he didn't have a good time because I wasn't there. But keep in mind I had already found out how the party was, and he had a blast. Everybody who knows him knows he's going to have a good time wherever he goes. So I just blew it off. Well, that's when fall semester began and the Alphas had their non-Greek pledging for the Alpha Angels, so I was on that line, and low and behold he was an Alpha. I found out he had told everybody since he knew I was on line that I was going to be his Angel. We started talking, and throughout the year it was an on-and-off relationship. In April 1988, we had our son; in December 1988, we were engaged; and in August 1989, we were married. Today we are going on 34 years of marriage with two beautiful kids, a son and a daughter. Our daughter is also a 2012 alumna of LU.



**Jayna (Lacy) '19 and Joshua Bonnette '19**

All the glory goes to God for our story. If it weren't for me deciding to stay home for college and Joshua receiving the Mirabeau Presidential Scholarship that brought him here from Houston, we might not have met. We actually met through our best friends, twin siblings Blaire and Brant—who became my matron of honor and one of Joshua's groomsmen—at the twins' 23rd birthday party at their house.

A year prior to this in 2019 during college, I remember seeing Joshua in the twins' driveway one night working with Brant on a dirt bike. Blaire and I were just chatting before I headed home, and I looked over and said, "Blaire, who is that? He's really cute." I remember he had a nice beard and was wearing a baseball cap (I am a sucker for both). Blaire said, "Oh, that's Brant's friend, Josh. We've known him and his family since we were young because our moms were best friends! He goes to college with us too." I noted how cute he was, but we didn't cross paths for a whole year. I headed off to Florida to perform at Walt Disney World after college graduation in January 2020, and Joshua had started his engineering career in Beaumont. I thank God now for the COVID layoffs at Disney that turned my world upside down, because I came home that summer (the summer we met). We followed each other on social media, got to know each other more and started dating in November 2021. It's crazy that we both went to LU and were always spending time with our best friends at their house but never ran into each other. I still don't know how we didn't meet sooner, but God's timing is perfect.



Submit your Cardinal Love Story at [alumni@lamar.edu](mailto:alumni@lamar.edu)





We hope you enjoy reading about former classmates. If you have news to share—a position announcement, milestone, achievement, wedding, baby—or know the whereabouts of a lost alumnus, we want to hear from you.

**SEND US YOUR NEWS:**

Cardinal Cadence  
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Beaumont, TX 77710

lamar.edu/alumni-update  
e-mail alumni@lamar.edu  
or call (409) 880-8921

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Update your information so we can keep you up-to-date on what's happening at the university, invite you to special events and make sure you get access to all of the perks of being a Cardinal.

**50s**

Distinguished Alumna **Bette Stead** '57, B.B.A. general business, has completed her newest book, *How the Killdeer Family Survived the Great Flood*, about how a bird family is saved from flood waters by humans and are sure to thank them for their kindness. Other books in the series are *Hilda and Harold Bunny Learn About Business*, about twin bunnies who learn about counting change and asking for a receipt, and *Featherington Van Hummingbird III Here*, which chronicles the adventures of a hummingbird who learns a valuable lesson after a life-changing run-in with a cicada changes the way he views the world. She is professor emerita at C. T. Bauer College of Business, University of Houston, where she taught for 34 years. She and her husband, Gene, live in Houston.

Professor Emeritus **Hershel Parker** '59, B.A. English, published mainly on Herman Melville as a professor of English at University of Delaware before retirement. For the last four years, he has researched his own American ancestry and race and has published *An Okie's Racial Reckonings*, available on Amazon. He and his wife, Heddy, live in Morro Bay, Calif.

**60s**

**Anita Nugent** '66, B.A. English, who earned her master's degree in science teaching, teaches chemistry, physics and forensic science at Santa Fe High School and is in her 60th year of teaching. She lives in Glorieta, N.M.

Save Our Children honored Distinguished Alumna **Paula (Tate) O'Neal** '69, B.A. government, '79, M.Ed. counseling and development, with the Allison Getz Lifetime Achievement Award for 2023-2024. She retired as the executive director of Some Other Place and lives in Beaumont.

**70s**

**Daryl Ann (Chris) Borel** '70, B.S. mathematics, '83, M.Ed. supervision, '13, Ed.D. educational leadership, is an assistant professor of educational leadership at Lamar University. She and her husband, Michael, live in Nome.

**King Campbell** '70, B.B.A. general business, '72, M.B.A. business administration, was elected to the University of Texas at Tyler Athletic Hall of Fame May 2023. Campbell coached men and women's golf from 2005 to 2013. In 2013, he coached the men to the Division III National Championship and was named the Division III National

Coach of the Year. He and his wife, Angela, live in Leander.

Nephew of the legendary Babe Zaharias **George Grimes** '71, B.G.S. general studies, is president of the Babe Didriksen Zaharias Foundation. He is a psychologist, and he and his wife, Mary, live in Georgetown.



**Jo Nell (Powell)** '71, B.S. elementary education, and **Dave Taylor** '71, B.B.A. general business, always wear their LU shirts when cruising. Dave is a sales person for Renegade Industrial Supply, and Jo Nell taught for many years in Nederland school district before retiring. They live in Port Neches.

**Chief James Singletary** '72, B.B.A. marketing, retired as chief of police for the city of Beaumont after 53 years of service. He lives in Beaumont.

The National Trial Lawyers named **The Honorable David Bersnen** '73, B.B.A. marketing, a Top 100 Civil Plaintiff. A 2015 LU Distinguished Alumnus, he owns The Bersen Law Firm, and he and his wife, Dinah, live in Beaumont.

**Connie (Hawkins) Dorman** '75, certif. '90, A.A.S. nursing, retired as the school nurse at Orangefield Elementary. She and her husband, **John Jr.**, '73, B.S. elementary education, live in Orange.

**Gary Dunn** '76, A.A.S. industrial electricity and electronics, is retired as a terminal operator from Phillips 66. He and his wife, Laura, live in Beaumont.

The Greater Port Arthur Chamber of Commerce presented **Ron Arceneaux** '77, B.S. civil engineering, with the John Warne Gates Award. Arceneaux is chairman of the Port Arthur Chamber of Commerce board as well as the president and CEO of Arceneaux Wilson & Cole. He and his wife, **Susan (Chevis)** '77, B.S. elementary education, who works in records management at Arceneaux Wilson & Cole, live in Port Neches.

Parkland Health in Dallas named **Dr. Charles "Ed" Singleton** '78, B.S. biology, the 2023 Ron J. Anderson Physician of the Year. He is a podiatrist with Barrett Foot and Ankle Centers, and he and his wife, Kimberly, live in

Fort Worth.

**80s**

Julie Rogers Gift of Life honored **The Honorable Carl Griffith Jr.** '81, A.S. law enforcement, '83, B.S. criminal justice, '87, M.Ed. guidance and counseling, for his support of the lifesaving cause. He and his wife, Lori, live in Winnie.

ISRI, the Voice of the Recycled Materials Industry, honored 40-year industry veteran **Mel Wright** '81, B.B.A. management, with its 2024 Lifetime Achievement Award in recognition of his dedication to advancing the industry and his lifelong commitment to leadership and service. He is president of Wright's Scrap Metals Inc. He and his wife, Neysa, live in Beaumont.

Coldwell Banker Commercial Worldwide has named **Debra "Deb" (Morrison) Cowart** '82, B.S. home economics, a 2023 Circle of Distinction Gold Member. She is an associate broker with Coldwell Banker Commercial-Arnold and Associates, and she and her husband, **Milton** '00, B.S. industrial technology, who is SR region manager for Energy Texas Inc., live in Lumberton.

The Neches River Festival named president and CEO of American Valve and Hydrant **Tim Sudela** '82, A.A.S. drafting technology, '85, B.S. industrial technology, '92, B.S. mechanical engineering, its 2024 Citizen of the Year. He and his wife, Lisa, live in Beaumont.

During its "Black Pioneers: Legacy in the American West" quilt exhibition, the Stark Museum of Art showcased an art quilt by **Tomasita Louviere-Lignons** '83, A.A.S. business data processing. She and her husband, **Oscar** '80, A.A.S. industrial electricity/electronics, live in Austin.

The Rotary Club of Beaumont honored past club president and past district governor **Roger McCabe** with its 2024 T. Kelsey Lamb, Sr. Award for Business Ethics. He is an attorney and a shareholder with MehaffyWeber P.C. He and his wife, **Sharon (Smith)** '83, B.S. art, '89, M.S. home economics, who is a social worker with Baptist Hospitals of Southeast Texas, live in Beaumont.

A book written by **Wendy (Hinote) Lanier** '85, B.S. audiology/speech-language pathology, '91, M.Ed. elementary education, '14, M.S.





## A Dinner and Conversation

The LU Office of Alumni Affairs hosted eight accomplished alumni, current students and eight faculty members for an evening of engaging conversation over dinner Feb. 6, 2024. The exclusive event provided students with valuable insights into the professional landscapes of their chosen fields.

### ALUMNI HOSTS:

**Dr. J. Chad Davis '90**, recently retired as the medical director of Pediatric ICU at the University of Texas Medical Branch Galveston.

**Eli Clark '04**, technology manager-mechanical recycling at LyondellBasell Industries. He has held multiple engineering roles at Lyondell Chemical, Equistar Chemicals, Nisseki Chemical, Schlumberger and LyondellBasell.

**Dr. Alex Edgerly '13**, is a dentist and owner of Edgerly Dentistry in Bridge City.

**Marion Phillips III '84**, is the senior vice president of community development and DEI at U.S. News & World Report.

**Dr. Richard Bowling '88**, is a podiatrist at Beaumont Bone & Joint.

**Aleshia Fife '81**, retired as the executive project manager of CPMC-LLC, represented careers in business, HR, management, leadership, operations

and computer science. Her extensive job history includes roles at Lockheed Martin, IBM and Cardinal Technologies.

**Elohor (Okene) Jackson '20**, is a high pressure copolymer improvement engineer at Dow Chemical.

**Dr. Bethany Aiena '11**, is the associate director of the Behavioral Health Program at the Michael E. DeBakey Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Houston.

**1 Pre-Med Table (sports medicine/podiatry)**—standing from left: Carsen Barrett, Saad Mohammed, Ryan Servantes, Mohamed Irhabi, Annanniyavani Suresh and Jordan Nelson; seated from left: Jenny Tu; Hannah Thrash; Dr. Richard Bowling '88; Ana Christensen, professor and interim chair, Department of Biology; Jada Thrash and Michelle Lane

**2 President Jaime Taylor**, center, pictured with alumni hosts, from left, Eli Clark '04, Alex Edgerly '13, Bethany Aiena '11, Elohor (Okene) Jackson '20, Aleshia Fife '81, Marion Phillips III '84, J. Chad Davis '90 and Richard Bowling '88

**3 Communication and Media Table**—standing from left: Ervin McMillen; Brynn Trove; Mallary Warner; Hailey Waobikeze; Drake Rothenberger; Nicki Michalski, associate professor and interim chair, Department of Communication and Media; and Mitchell Caldwell; seated from left: Madelyn Sims, Ashton Burch, Marion Phillips III '84, Hailey Alfaro and Ivory Davis

**4 Psychology Table**—standing from left: Jacob Thompson '24; Vavah Kamasas-Quashie; Clara Schreck; Dr. Bethany Aiena '11; Jeremy Shelton; associate professor and chair, Department of Psychology; Lauren Smith; Mary Wernig and Peyton McLaurin; seated from left: Sara Barboza, Julia Barrett, Madeline Tzul '24, Stephanie Barron '24, Jocelyn Maldonado and Alyvia Ott

**5 Pre-Med Table (pediatrics)**—standing from left: Sergio Mendez; Campbell Fuller; Dr. J. Chad Davis '90; Ian Lian, associate professor of biology; Zaid Mohammed '24 and Miguel Arevalo; seated from left: Kristin Hebert '24, Alli Gross (Texas Academy '24), Harvest Prater, DeAnna Gilmore, Alyson Vu and Elizabeth Diaz Arreola

**6 Chemical and Biomolecular Engineering Table**—standing from left: Conner Montgomery '24; Paul Ivory '24; Tracy Benson, professor and chair, Dan F. Smith Department of Chemical and Biomolecular Engineering and Jack Gill Endowed Chair; Logan Morris; Luis Arevalo '24 and Kelvin Elgar '24; seated from left: Annabelle Broussard '24, Peyton Lee, Lucia Ortiz, Kewwe Onakpoya, Elohor (Okene) Jackson '20 and Dennis Tran

**7 Business Table**—standing from left: Tomisin Egbewale '24; Folasade Asoro; Aleshia Fife '81; Melissa Baldo, instructor of business law; Zuhair Merchant '24 and Bryce Sheffield; seated from left: Daniella Lopez-Rosa, Dominique Wallace, Amarie Guillory '24, Chloe Raczkovi '24, Soleil Tran and Peyton Jones

**8 Pre-Dental Table**—standing from left: Megan Do; Aria Gray; Dr. Alex Edgerly '13; Ashwini Kucknoor, associate professor of biology; Rehan Hamdan and Samana Shah; seated from left: Jakobe Moye, Marisa (Sevilla) Medina '24, Estrella Balderas, Waverlee Cooper, Helena Bautista-Mathias and Rima Shaaban

**9 Engineering Table**—standing from left: Billy Tolar; Cristian Arevalo; Eli Clark '04; Mansour Karkoub, professor and chair, Department of Mechanical Engineering, and Michael E. and Patricia P. Aldredge Endowed Chair; Jace Bush and Bobby Barton; seated from left: Francisco Alegria, Ryan Shugart, Jacob Smith, Jonah Smith '24, Tiolu Akinwunmi and Alex Tran





# CLASS NOTES

Sgt. Colt Ryan '21, LU Police Department, and Emily Robinson '22, assistant director, New Student and Leadership Programs



## LU Alumni Employee Network Social

LU employees who are graduates of Lamar University gathered for a networking social March 5, 2024, in the Setzer Student Center, co-sponsored by Neches Federal Credit Union and the Office of Alumni Affairs.

speech-language pathology, has won a Christopher Award, which celebrates authors and other creatives whose work "affirms the highest values of the human spirit." *The Dog That Gave My Brother Words*, ages 7 and up, End Game Press, follows a nonverbal child with autism who receives the gift of a therapy dog. Wendy, and her husband, **Boyd** '84, B.S. deaf education, who retired as an associate professor in the Political Science Department at Lamar University, live in Lindale.

The Nederland Chamber of Commerce named **Todd Bordelon** '86, B.B.A. marketing, 2024 Mr. Nederland. He is vice president and chief financial officer at United Unlimited Sales and lives with his wife, **Cindi (Neal)** '87, B.S. secondary education, '13, M.Ed. school counseling, in Port Neches.

**Alan Bone** '87, B.S. secondary education, who earned his master's degree in English in 1995, is senior associate director of information technology at Uncommon Schools. He and his wife, Melissa, live in N.Y.

**Donna Gober** '88, B.S. elementary education, '08, Ed.D. educational leadership, who earned her master's degree in wellness in 1996, retired as director of wellness at Southern Methodist University. She is a clinical instructor of teacher education at Lamar University and lives in Beaumont.

**Mark Wales** '89, mechanical engineer, is a CAD drafter with GBA Ships e.V. He and his wife, Ruth, live in Florence, S.C.



Kelsey Smith '22, assistant director of customer service, Student Financial Aid; Natalie (Rhodes) Butaud '14, associate director of outreach and customer service, Student Financial Aid; Michayla (Newsome) Davis '23, ERP analyst; and Hailey Watts '23



Shannon (Copeland) Figueroa '02, '03, '07, director, Office of Alumni Affairs and Office of Advancement Services; Evie Clifton, coordinator of alumni affairs, and Sharlene Hatch '00, financial aid counselor, Student Financial Aid



Alicia Hargreaves '23, business coordinator, KVLU; Charlee (Chelette) Fitzgerald '18, '19, community impact officer, Neches Federal Credit Union; and Jason Miller '01, Station Manager, KVLU



Kandice Boatwright, Center for Academic Success; Kelly (Rivera) Williams '12, team lead, academic advising, Undergraduate Advising Center; Deidra (Wright) Mayer '02, '12, associate vice president, Admissions, Aid and Scholarships; Christy (Vanhorn) George '18, student retention coordinator, Undergraduate Advising Center; Melissa (Byars) Riley '99, '02, '24, instructor of mathematics



Christy (Vanhorn) George '18, student retention coordinator, Undergraduate Advising Center; Joe Kruger, associate professor and chair, Department of Earth and Space Sciences, and Melissa (Byars) Riley '99, '02, '24, instructor of mathematics



Reece Smithhart '21, '23, assistant director of Admissions Operations; Elyse Broussard '20, '22, HR recruiter; Jane Tzul '22, scholarship coordinator; Imelda Tristan '18, '20, '22, Reaud Honors College advisor and success coach; Jacqui Rodriguez '22, admissions counselor; and Julio Delgado '23, academic advisor, Undergraduate Advising Center



Amy (Fortenberry) Brown '01, administrative specialist-TEXES and Certification Office; Beverly (Shulman) Kemp '23, Dimples (Chavis) Jones '10, '13, business manager, College of Education and Human Development; and Nicole Kyles-Burton '17, '19, '22, career consultant, Center for Career and Professional Development



Charlotte Holliman '83, '90, library associate, and Lyle Goines '82, manager, Physics Laboratory

## 90s

**Dr. J. Chad Davis** '90, B.S. chemistry, who earned his medical degree in 1994, retired as division director of pediatric critical care and medical director of the pediatric intensive care unit at the University of Texas Medical Branch. He and his wife, **Holly (Denham)** '03, B.A. history, '11, M.Ed. administration, live in Port Neches.

**Christopher "Chris" Graham** '90, B.S. computer science, has completed 33 years as a Distinguished Engineering Associate with ExxonMobil Technology and Engineering and serves on the LU Alumni Advisory Board and the Computer Science Industrial Advisory Board. The LU Computer Science Hall of Honor recently selected him as its eighth inductee, and he has received

Pamela (Watkins) Comer '11, '17, director of McNair Scholars Program, and Amy (Pumphrey) Dillow '10, '16, career services coordinator, Center for Career and Professional Development



two patents in the last two years. He is a 35-year volunteer with Sigma Nu Fraternity. He and his wife, Amy, live in Huffman.

The Texas Bankers Hall of Fame inducted **Carmen (Angelle) Jordan** '90, B.B.A. finance, into the organization April 25, 2024, for her contributions to the banking profession. American Banker magazine named her one of the Top 50 Women in Banking. She is president of Origin Bank and lives in Sugar Land.

**Everett Todd** '90, M.S. kinesiology, is special teams coordinator and defensive ends coach for the Southern University Jaguars. He and his wife, Donna, live in Magnolia.

Congratulations to **Kathryn (Walker) Washington** '91, B.S. elementary education, on receiving the Margaret Montgomery Leadership Award at the Texas Council of Women School Executives. She is an assistant professor of educational leadership at Lamar University and lives in Porter.

**Shawn Oubre** '92, A.S. law enforcement, '93, B.A.A.S. applied arts and sciences, '02, M.P.A. public administration, retired as city manager for the city of Woodway, where he and wife, Roxanne, live.

**Mike Sarbaugh** '93, B.S. kinesiology, is third base and infield coach for the New York Mets. He lives in Shillington, Penn.

**Lynette Vincent** '93, B.M. music-vocals, '97, M.M.E. music education, earned her doctorate in music education in 2008 and is associate professor of music education for East Texas Baptist University. She lives in Marshall.

Westfield High School Coach **Billy Goffney** '94, B.S. kinesiology, celebrated his 500th coaching victory when he led his boys basketball team to a victory over Nimitz to capture the District 14-6A title. He lives in New Waverly.

Houston's biennial FotoFest featured work by photographer **Dennis Moncla** '94, B.A.A.S. applied arts and sciences, and the Art Museum of Southeast Texas exhibited Freeze Frame, showcasing images of birds in the wild, in May 2024. He and his wife, Jean, live in Beaumont.



SAVOY-HADLEY

Congratulations to **Julie (Barlow) Strassburger** '94, B.S. home economics, and her daughter, **Mary Claire** '22, B.S. hospitality administration, on the opening of their new business, Estella. Mary Claire also teaches leadership at St. Anne Catholic School, and they live in Beaumont.

**Terry Savoy-Hadley** '95, B.A.A.S. applied arts and sciences, is president of the MLK Support Group and author of the children's book Butch Goes to School. She and her husband, Kerry, live in Port Arthur.

**Marsha (Heggie) Worthy** '95, B.S. medical technology, is associate vice president for human resources at Lamar University. She and her husband, **John** '93, A.A.S. computer drafting technology, live in Orange.

**Jimmy Vallee** '97, B.A.A.S. applied arts and sciences, is founding partner and managing director of Valhil Capital, owner of Valhil Advisors and cofounder and chairman of Deltawave Energy. He is a leading expert in blockchain. He and his wife, **Kristina (Chirafis)** '92, B.S. communication, live in Houston.

**John Calderon** '98, B.M. music, is a music instructor in applied guitar at Alvin Community College. He lives in Houston.

**Laura (McCurley) Distefano** '98, B.B.A. economics, B.B.A. accounting, is vice-president and chief accounting officer at EOG Resources Inc. She and her husband, **Brian** '99, B.S. earth science, who is a freelance marketing and communications consultant, live in Friendswood.

## 00s

Congratulations to Vidor High School Head Girls Soccer Coach **Ralph Fields** '00, B.S. kinesiology, on his 200th win Feb. 2. He and his wife, Stephanie, live in Vidor.

**JoAnne Ivy** '00, B.B.A. accounting, is director of finance for Entergy Mississippi. She lives in Madison, Miss.

**Larneka Lavalais** '00, B.A. criminal justice, '02, M.S. applied criminology, '12, M.Ed. counseling and development, is a counselor and advisor with her own practice, Larneka Lavalais LPC, PLLC. She lives in Port Arthur.

**Jennifer (Voss) Collier** '02, B.M. music, is principal of Tomball Memorial High School. She and her husband, Nathan, live in Cypress.

**Christy (McKinnon) Beaudry** '03, B.S. interdisciplinary studies, '05, M.Ed. special education, '11, M.Ed. administration, is executive director of special services for College Station school district. She lives in Houston.

Neches Federal Credit Union promoted **Jason Duplant** '03, B.B.A. marketing,

to chief product officer. He and his wife, **Brandi (Schroeder)** '10, B.S.W. social work, live in Lumberton.

Texas Elementary Principals and Supervisors Association named **Daisy (Middlebrook) Marino** '03, B.G.S. general studies, '15, M.Ed. educational technology leadership, 2024 Assistant Principal of the Year for Region 5. She is assistant principal at China Elementary School and lives with her husband, **Frank** '06, B.A.A.S. applied arts and sciences, in Beaumont.

**Robert Reid** '03, M.Ed. administration, is superintendent of schools for the Diocese of Beaumont. He and his wife, **Mary Ann (Goudeau)** '91, who is community affairs advisor for Golden Pass LNG Terminal, live in Port Arthur.

**Christopher Theriot** '03, B.S. kinesiology, is interim athletic director and head football coach at Nederland High School. He and his wife, **Lindsay (Robichau)** '04, B.S. nursing, live in Orange.

**Randy Thompson** '03, B.B.A. management information systems, is information systems manager at Neches Federal Credit Union. He and his wife, **Summer (Schwertner)** '04, B.B.A. management information systems, '05, M.B.A. business administration, live in Port Neches.

Save Our Children named Alumni Advisory Board member **Shawn Webb-Locke** '03, B.S. sociology, '12, M.Ed. school counseling, a 2024 Difference Maker. She is a realtor, and she and her husband, **James** '92, live in Beaumont.

Spring Creek Elementary School promoted **Mindy (Grayson) Chapa** '04, B.S. interdisciplinary studies, who earned her master's degree in education in 2013, to principal. She and her husband, **Xavier** '03, B.S. industrial technology, who is a sales specialist at IBM Corp., live in College Station.

**Josh Daspit** '04, B.S. political science, co-created a tool designed to highlight the top scholars and universities conducting research in family business, the Family Business Research Productivity Ranking. He is associate professor of management and the Dean Paul R. Gowens Excellence Professor in Business at McCoy College of Business at Texas State University. He lives in San Marcos.

Neches Federal Credit Union promoted **Kristen (Parson) Stewart** '04, B.B.A. marketing, to chief strategy officer. She and her husband, **Justin** '03, B.S. communication, '14, B.S. mechanical engineering, live in Port Neches.

**Kevin Barbay** '05, B.S. exercise science and fitness management, who earned his master's degree in education-sport management in 2007, is offensive coordinator at the University of Houston. He and his wife, Kacie, live in Friendswood.

Congratulations to **Zach Dubuisson** '05, B.G.S. general studies, and his

wife, Alyssabeth, on the birth of their daughter, Apolline. He is an instructional consultant for Indiana University Bloomington. They live in Bloomington, Ind.

**Tamara (Hanks) Grantham** '05, B.A. English, has authored a new book, *Harleigh Sinclair and the Ice Crusade*, the second installment in a series. She and her husband, **Dr. David Grantham** '05, B.A. chemistry, who is a surgeon, live in Andover, Kan.

**Tan Truong** '05, B.S. computer science, is chief technology officer for Dash Solutions. He lives in Houston.



COLLAZO

**Amy (Taylor) Collazo** '06, B.S. interdisciplinary studies, '17, M.Ed. special education, '20, M.Ed. administration, is director of the LU Cardinal Colorguard. She and her husband, **Justin** '01, B.M. music, who is band director for C.O. Wilson Middle School, live in Port Neches.

**Laura Hinson** '06, B.G.S. general studies, is senior director of sales for ZCLAP Inc. She lives in Austin.

Congratulations to **Lorelei (Stinnett) Jackson** '06, B.S. interdisciplinary studies, '09, M.Ed. administration, on being named Vidor Elementary School 2024 Teacher of the Year. She and her husband, **Austin** '07, B.B.A. accounting, who is controller for Broussard's Mortuary, live in Vidor.

The online magazine *Voyage Houston* featured **Dawanna Jones** '06, B.A.A.S. applied arts and sciences, '11, M.Ed. educational technology leadership, is a community engagement specialist for Bechtel and owns Senoj Professional Business Services. She lives in Beaumont.

Gov. Greg Abbott reappointed **Sonia (Gonzalez) Sanderson** '06, B.G.S. general studies, to the Texas Board of Respiratory Care for a term ending Feb. 1, 2029. She is a procurement contract technician for Fluor Federal Petroleum Operations, formed to manage and operate the Strategic Petroleum Reserve. She lives in Beaumont.

**Rachel (Martinez) Sexton** '06, B.S. kinesiology, is a paraprofessional at Port Neches Intermediate school. She and her husband, Cody, live in Port Neches.



# Extraordinary alumni receive LU's highest honor

**E**stablished in 1970 by the Lamar University Alumni Association, the Distinguished Alumni Award recognizes alumni who have excelled in their careers or life services, enhancing the University's reputation. It also acknowledges those who have made significant contributions to their community, state and nation through civic activities and professional and public service.

"The 2024 honorees were chosen from a pool of talented, successful and loyal alumni. They are united by their exceptional passion, dedication and drive to make the world a better place," Shannon Figueroa, director of alumni affairs, said.

This year, four alumni—Charles E. Breithaupt, Stephen C. Head and Carmen (Angelle) Jordan and Edwin E. Vallery—received the Distinguished Alumni Award, the highest award Lamar University bestows upon its graduates during a dinner Apr. 5 at the University Event Center in the Mary and John Gray Library.

"Lamar University has many extraordinary alumni, and the Distinguished Alumni Awards give the university the perfect opportunity to recognize their achievements, service to the university and how they are making a difference in their professions, communities and around the world," Figueroa said.

## **CHARLES E. BREITHAUPT '75, '79**



Charles E. Breithaupt, current executive director of the Texas University Interscholastic League (UIL) and associate vice president at the University of Texas at Austin, leads the largest interscholastic academic, athletic and music competition governing body in the United States. He earned a B.S. in 1975 and an M.S. in 1979 in health and physical education from LU and a doctorate in education in 1996 from the

University of Texas at Austin. With 48 years in public education, Breithaupt initiated significant changes as UIL executive director, including a six-conference alignment, centralized football championships and diverse new activities. He and his wife, Deborah (Lane) '90, who earned her master's degree in elementary education and taught in Georgetown ISD, live in Georgetown.

## **STEPHEN C. HEAD '73, '75**



Stephen C. Head, former chancellor of Lone Star College (LSC) from 2014-2023, retired after 39 years of service. Under his leadership, LSC became a prominent community college enrolling over 85,000 students, employing 6,000 individuals and boasting a \$500 million annual budget.

Head earned his bachelor's and master's

degrees in history at LU and later completed a Ph.D. at Texas Tech University. In his tenure, Head prioritized student access, academic quality and workforce programs aligned with community needs. Recognized for his contributions to LSC, he was named Chancellor Emeritus upon retirement. Head continues to be active in supporting community college missions and lives in The Woodlands with his wife, Linda, who works at LSC.



## **CARMEN (ANGELLE) JORDAN '90**

Finance graduate Carmen (Angelle) Jordan is Origin Bank's regional president for greater Houston. Joining the bank in 2018 as executive vice president, she quadrupled loans and doubled deposits while enhancing credit performance. Specializing in merger and acquisition finance and energy service lending, she chairs Origin's corporate loan committee.

Previously, as Houston market president at IBERIABANK, Jordan led loan growth from \$400 million to \$1.4 billion amid challenging energy downturns. Jordan has received many accolades, including American Banker Magazine's Top 50 Women in Banking twice. In April 2024, she was inducted into the Texas Bankers Hall of Fame. Devoted to her alma mater, Jordan has chaired its College of Business Advisory Board and contributes to the Lamar University Foundation. She lives in Sugar Land, Texas, with her family.

## **EDWIN E. VALLERY '79**



Edwin Vallery, a Lamar University graduate in finance, had a successful career at Shell Oil before retiring in 2019. He is an active member of St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church and currently serves as an accountant at Our Mother of Mercy Catholic Church. Vallery's philanthropy began in 2019 when he established tuition assistance scholarships for LU's College of

Business. Over time, he expanded his support to include book scholarships and extended it to three campus organizations. Nine students currently benefit from the scholarships he created, and Vallery goes beyond financial aid by fostering strong relationships with the recipients. He regularly meets and mentors students and conducts workshops, emphasizing the importance of giving back to the community. Vallery is a member of Lamar University's Legacy Society, President's Circle and Black Alumni Network.



ECKENROD

The School Nutrition Association recently appointed **Tiffany Eckenrod** '08, M.S. family and consumer sciences, to its nutrition and research committee. She is director of child nutrition for Medina Valley school district and lives in San Antonio.

**Corrin (Talbert) Gonzales** '08, M.Ed. special education, is director of special education at the Region 5 Education Service Center. She and her husband, Mario, live in Bridge City.

**Jessika Johnson** '08, B.S. communication, '11, M.S. kinesiology, is director of Key Accounts at NES Fircroft. She lives in Houston.

**Luvia Peveto** '08, B.S. communication, is director of accounts for Covalent Logic. She and her partner, Guy, live in New Orleans.

**Lesley (Jackson) Austin** '09, M.Ed. administration, '17, Ed.D. educational leadership, is superintendent of Rockport-Fulton school district. She lives in Mansfield.

**Blaine Caillier** '09, B.G.S. general studies, earned his master's degree and is regional president of First Financial Bank, Southeast Region. The Greater Port Arthur Chamber of Commerce recently honored him for his service to the chamber and the community. He and his wife, **Regina (Toohey)** '11, B.S. interdisciplinary studies, '15, M.Ed. special education, live in Orange.

**Beth Gallaspy** '09, M.A. English, who earned her law degree in 2024, is an equal justice works fellow with Lone Star Legal Aid. She and her husband, Pete, live in Beaumont.

Congratulations to **Tatiana (Randle) Hall** '09, B.S. family and consumer science-fashion retailing and merchandising, and her husband, Vernon, on the birth of her daughter, Varion. Tatiana teaches at Heritage Rose Elementary School, and they live in Missouri City, Texas.

Congratulations to **Meghan (Scurria) Phares** '09, B.S. interdisciplinary studies, '18, M.Ed. teacher leadership, and her husband Jeremy on the birth of their daughter, Hazel. Meghan teaches third grade at Elementary South School in Barbers Hill school district. They live in Vidor.

**Nick Reeves** '09, M.Ed. administration, is head of school for New Braunfels Christian Academy. He lives in New Braunfels.

Sheldon school district named Sheldon Elementary School Principal **Jana (Davison) Rolling** '09, B.B.A. accounting, '12, M.Ed. teacher leadership, 2024 Elementary Principal of the Year. She and her husband, **Nicholas** '10, B.B.A. finance, who owns Rolling Motors, live in Houston.

**Geneva Salinas** '09, M.Ed. administration, '23, Ed.D. educational leadership, is principal of Triumph Public High School San Antonio. She lives in San Antonio.

## 10s

**Megan (Schneiter) Coots** '10, B.S. interdisciplinary studies, '19, M.B.A. business administration, is office manager for Colonial Pipeline. She and her husband, T.J. live in Winnie.

**The Honorable Naomi (Showers) Doyle** '10, B.A. political science, '12, M.P.A. public administration, was named 2024 Woman of the Year at the 38th annual MLK I Have a Dream Brunch. She is Precinct 1 Place 1 judge for Jefferson County and lives with her husband, Earnest, in Beaumont.

*Bold Journey* magazine featured **Ashley Gooden-Stewart** '10, B.A.A.S. applied arts and sciences, who earned her master's degree in public administration in 2012, regarding the nonprofit she founded, The Baby Stewart Foundation, which works to ensure access to care for infants and spread awareness on infant loss. She and her husband, Carylton, live in Texas City.

**Stephanie (Pair) Howell** '10, M.Ed. administration, is superintendent of Corsicana school district. She and her husband, Steven, live in Corsicana.

**Kyle Keith** '10, B.B.A. general business, is head of global marketing and customer experience at KMT Waterjet Systems. He and his wife, **Amanda (Jones)** '11, B.B.A. human resource management, live in Montgomery.

Sheldon school district named King Academic School of Excellence Principal **Jumana (Walton) Mills** '10, B.S. family and consumer sciences-family studies, '13, M.Ed. school counseling, 2024 Secondary Principal of the Year. She and her husband, Weldon, live in Humble.

**Kathleen Odom** '10, B.A. music, '12, M.M. music, teaches music at Bob Hope Elementary School and owns Keys & Strings Music Studio. She lives in Nederland.

Congratulations to **Cassie (Schildknecht)** '10, B.B.A. management information systems, '18, M.B.A. business administration, and **Trevor Sims** '14, B.S. nursing, '19, M.S.N. nursing administration, on the birth of their son, Elliott. Cassie is senior analyst at Entergy Texas Inc., and Trevor is clinical account specialist at Biosense Webster. They live in Conroe.

**Lisa (Boyett) Stephens** '10, M.Ed. administration, is assistant principal at Splendora High School. She and her husband, Jason, live in Cleveland, Texas.

Congratulations to **Lindsay (Fisher)** '10, B.S. interdisciplinary studies, and **Josh Yawn** '07, B.S. communication, on the birth of their daughter, Amelia. Josh owns Joshua Productions, hosted the Game Show Network's live program, "GSN Live," and was the producer of the 25th anniversary reunion of Nickelodeon's "You Can't Do That on Television." They live in Beaumont.

**Amber (Alexander) Clark** '11, B.A.A.S. applied arts and sciences, won the Deans' Award from the Southwest Educational Research Association during its 2024 conference. She earned a master's degree in educational leadership in 2016 and is director of administration for Lamar Institute of Technology. She lives in Beaumont.

**David Collins** '11, M.Ed. administration, is athletic director at Greenville High School. He and his wife, **Crystal** '20, M.Ed. teacher leadership, who is an instructional support specialist for Richardson school district, live in McKinney.

**Elaine (Wang) Howard** '11, M.Ed. administration, '16, Ed.D. educational leadership, is superintendent of Boerne school district. She lives in Spring Branch.

**Julissa Becerra-Pham** '12, B.S. interdisciplinary studies, teaches first grade at Hillcrest Christian Academy. She and her husband, Danny, live in Port Arthur.

**Lanna Eaves** '12, B.A. English, '14, M.A. English, teaches English at Bob Hope High School. She lives in Port Arthur.

Congratulations to **Brittany (Johnson)** '12, B.S. kinesiology, '17, M.Ed. special education, and **Major Goldman** '09, B.A.A.S. applied arts and sciences, on the birth of their daughter, Miriam. Brittany teaches physical education at Staff Sgt. Lucian Adams Elementary School in Port Arthur, and they live in Beaumont.

Cardinal basketball letterman **Mike James** '12, B.G.S. general studies, surpassed Vassilis Spanoulis to become the all-time scorer in the history of the Euroleague. The former NBAer has played 10 seasons in Europe.

Congratulations to **Amy Pinnt** '12, B.S. family and consumer science-nutrition, dietetics and hospitality, and **Eric Sauerwein** '08, B.S. chemical engineering, '19, M.B.A. business administration, on the birth of their son, Harrison. Amy is director of economic development for the Greater Beaumont Chamber of Commerce, and Eric is project development manager at Paton Engineers and Constructors. They live in Nederland.

**Larry Croy** '13, M.Ed. administration, earned a doctorate in organizational leadership in 2022 and is principal of

Richland High School in Prosper school district. He lives in Frisco.

**Jarred Dorhauer** '13, M.Ed. administration, is principal of Village Elementary School in Georgetown school district. He and his wife, Ronda, live in Georgetown.

**Cory Mitchell** '13, B.A.A.S. applied arts and sciences, is in business development with Nighthawk Services. He and his wife, **Jennie (Lee)** '10, B.S. nursing, who is utilization management director for Texas Independence Health Plan, live in Orange.

Congratulations to **Jordan Mobley** '13, B.B.A. management information systems, and his wife, Jasmine, on the birth of their son, Jyaire. He is a real estate agent with ERA real estate. They live in Missouri City.

Congratulations to **Brianna (Burks) Moore** '13, B.B.A. management, '16, M.B.A. business administration, M.S. accounting, and her husband Jesse, on the birth of their daughter, Lucille. Brianna is SHEQ and project manager at INEOS Olefins and Polymers USA, and they live in Deer Park.

Congratulations to **Amanda (Bryant)** '13, B.B.A. management information systems, and **Darrick Newmann** '10, B.B.A. management, on the birth of their son, Joseph. She teaches third grade at Ehrhart School, and they live in Silsbee.

**Chance Norman** '13, B.S. civil engineering, is advanced project development schematics supervisor for the Texas Department of Transportation. He and his wife, Zoey, live in Conroe.

Congratulations to **Evan West** '13, B.S. communication, and his wife, Krista, on the birth of their son, Holden. He is senior vice president of sales for Nolan Transportation Group. They live in Charleston, S.C.

**Taylor "John" Wigley** '13, B.B.A. management information systems, is network administrator for Neches Federal Credit Union. He and his wife, **Hayley (Touchett)** '15, B.S. interdisciplinary studies, who teaches at Roy Guess Elementary, live in Beaumont.

**Dewayne Wilkins** '13, M.Ed. educational leadership, is chief financial officer of Lubbock school district. He lives in Early.

Congratulations to **Jacqueline (Harris) Burningham** '14, B.A. American Sign Language, on her marriage to Brody March 1, 2024.

**Jana (Waldrup) Clark** '14, M.Ed. administration, is principal of Boyd Elementary School. She and her husband, Troy, live in Fort Worth.

Neches Federal Credit Union promoted **Jacob Devillier** '14, B.B.A. management, to chief member service officer. He and his wife, **Samantha (Hodge)** '15, B.B.A. accounting, live in Port Neches.



# CLASS NOTES

Thomas Davis '15 and  
Kennetha (Robinson)  
Alvarez '09, '12



## LU Alumni Advisory Board Spring Meeting

Members of the Lamar University Alumni Advisory Board gathered for their spring board meeting March 7, 2024, and toured the JoAnne Gray Dishman School of Nursing.



Terry Savoy-Hadley '95, Hetty (Green) Brown '79, Shannon (Copeland) Figueroa '02, '03, '07, Usha (Balaratnam) Beckman '87 and Shawn Webb-Locke '03, '12



Hetty (Green) Brown '79 and  
Sharita Gardner '12, alumni  
advisory board president



Sam Blanda '08 and  
Ernesto Alvarez '11



Gerard Celestine '91, '96,  
and Meg (Baertl) Brown '15

Usha (Balaratnam)  
Beckman '87, Celine Do  
'18, '22, and Danielle  
(Hudson) Sutton '08



Elohor (Okene) Jackson '20  
and Celine Do '18, '22



**Maria Hafner '14**, M.Ed. administration, is principal of Wolford Elementary in McKinney school district. She and her husband, Chris Wheeler, live in Frisco.

Congratulations to **Morgan (Simmons) '14**, B.S. speech and hearing sciences, '17, M.S. speech-language pathology, and **Brandon Laird '14**, B.M. music, '18, M.Ed. administration, on the birth of their daughter, Ava. Morgan is a speech-language pathologist for Humble school district, and Brandon is a band director of the concert and marching band for the Texas A&M University System. They live in College Station.

Congratulations to **Jordan (Bodin) '14**, B.S. interdisciplinary studies, and **Aaron McFarland '13**, B.S. exercise science and fitness management, on the birth of their son, Ryker. Jordan teaches third grade at Highland Park Elementary School in Nederland school district and Aaron is an electrician. They live in Nederland.

Congratulations to **Laura (Hicks) Olvera '14**, B.S. interdisciplinary studies, '21, M.Ed. administration, and her husband, Ryan, on the birth of their son, Holden. Laura is professional learning coordinator for Fort Bend school district, and they live in Houston.

**Gerald Pope III '14**, B.S. communication, teaches at Heritage Middle School. He and his wife, Amber, live in Live Oak.

**Ezekiel Turk '14**, B.S. kinesiology, is principal of Hillcrest Christian Academy. He and his wife, Elise, live in Nederland.

**Alana (Odenwald) Chisum '15**, M.Ed. administration, is assistant superintendent of human resources for McKinney school district. She and her husband, Cody, live in McKinney.

**Kylie (Robinett) Johnson '15**, B.S. industrial engineering, '22, M.B.A. business administration, M.S. management information systems, is CORE and technical project manager at Pratt & Whitney. She and her husband, Wes, live in Arlington.

Congratulations to **Lauren (Eicher) '15**, B.B.A. accounting, '18, M.B.A. business administration, and **Jacob Scully '15**, B.B.A. management, B.B.A. general business, on the birth of their twin sons, Wyatt and Emmett. They live in Pearland.

Christus St. Elizabeth Hospital recognized **Mary (Nguyen) Stankus '15**, B.S. nursing, for rescuing two young girls found unresponsive from nearly drowning in a pool by performing CPR. Mary is a registered nurse and lives with her husband, **Shane '15**, B.S. nursing, in Bridge City.

Congratulations to **Christina (Guerra) Cordova '16**, B.S. speech and hearing sciences, '19, M.S. speech-language pathology, on her marriage to her husband, Oscar, March 9, 2024. She teaches early childhood at Bob Hope School, and they live in Groves.

**Stephanie (Stallman) Corley '16**, B.B.A. management, '22, M.B.A. business administration, is a human resources manager for Lamar Institute of Technology. She and her husband, Blake, live in Port Neches.

**William Hill '16**, B.A.A.S. applied arts and sciences, is a sales representative at University Coin and Buillion Ltd. He and his wife, Lily, live in Beaumont.

**Ta'quisha Radford '16**, B.B.A. finance, B.B.A. economics, '20, M.S. management information systems, M.B.A. business administration, married **Scorpio Collins '16**, B.S. industrial engineering, Dec. 22, 2023. Ta'quisha is logistics coordinator at BDP International, and Scorpio is STEM professional at the Naval Surface Warfare Center. They live in Philadelphia, Pa.

**Kristeen (Kris) Reynolds '16**, B.B.A. accounting, '17, M.B.A. business administration, and her company DrinKicks won the 2024 NFL Players Association Pitch Competition \$25,000 prize. She lives in Port Arthur.

Lumberton Middle School named **Casey Stringer '16**, B.S. exercise science and fitness management, Dec. 2023 Employee of the Month. He teaches eighth grade health and lives with his wife, **Lauren (Moore) '13**, B.F.A. studio art, in Lumberton.

Congratulations to **Robyn Summers '16**, B.A.A.S. applied arts and sciences, and Paul Nicholson on the birth of their son, Nathan. They live in Beaumont.

Congratulations to **Meagan (Hutto) Thierheimer '16**, B.A.A.S. applied arts and sciences, who earned her master's degree in library science in 2019, and her husband, Justin, on the birth of their son, Parker. Meagan is librarian at Adams Elementary School, and they live in Port Neches.

Congratulations to **Caitlin (Tassin) Vinning '16**, B.S. nursing, who earned her family nurse practitioner degree in 2022, and her husband, Joseph, on the birth of their son, Gabriel. Caitlin is a surgical nurse at the Surgical Specialty Center of Baton Rouge, and they live in Prairieville, La.

**Ashleigh (Sadler) Bordeman '17**, B.S. psychology, is a human resources manager for Lamar Institute of Technology. She and her husband, Nicolas, live in Bridge City.

**Kenneth Davis '17**, Ed.D. educational leadership, is executive director for middle and K-8 schools at Springfield Public Schools. He lives in Springfield, Mo.

Congratulations to **Laura (Vazquez) Gallegos '17**, M.Ed. teacher leadership, and her husband, Pedro, on the birth of their son, Enzo. They live in Dayton.

**Ronald Givens '17**, B.S. criminal justice, is deputy division director of agribusiness, land and minerals at the Texas Department of Criminal Justice. He and his wife, Stacie, live in Beeville.



**Shannon (Boase) Knowles** '17, M.Ed. administration, is principal of Argyle High School. She lives in Argyle.

**Richard Malebranche** '17, M.Ed. school counseling, is an ordained deacon with St. Katharine Drexel Mission. He lives in Gainesville, Va.

Congratulations to **Braye (Hardy) Musquiz** '17, B.G.S. general studies, and her husband, David, on their marriage April 6, 2024. She works at Fidelity Investments, and they live in Saginaw.

**Rachel Rector** '17, M.Ed. administration, is principal of Jimmie Ray Elementary in Waxahachie school district, where she lives.

**Emily (Carl) Rhine** '17, B.B.A. marketing, is senior digital marketing strategist at Education First Federal Credit Union. She and her husband, Justin, live in Port Neches.

Congratulations to **Katie (Loftin) Shroff** '17, B.B.A. advertising communication, and her husband, Michael, on the birth of their son, Caden. Katie teaches business CTE at Dayton High School, and they live in Huffman.



**Isabella Tucker** '17, B.S. speech and hearing sciences, married Daniel Sparrow Jan. 20, 2024. Isabella teaches Spanish as a foreign language for Leander school district, and they live in Austin.

Congratulations to **Kiandra (Bowers)** '17, B.S. communication-broadcasting, and **Wesley Williams** '15, B.S. communication, on the birth of their son, Josiah. They live in Conroe.

**Darian Askew** '18, B.G.S. general studies, married Malik Muhammad Oct. 23, 2023. They live in Houston.

**Alexandria Boyd** '18, B.S. kinesiology, '22, M.B.A. management, teaches algebra in Allen school district. She lives in Beaumont.

Congratulations to **Mabry (Trent)** '18, B.B.A. marketing, and Tony Carrillo on their marriage Feb. 10, 2024. She teaches sixth grade at Rodeo Palms Junior High School in Alvin school district, where they live.

**Progga Chirontoni** '18, B.S. mathematics, B.S. chemical engineering, who earned her master's degree in environmental and water resources engineering in 2020, married Soham Roy Jan. 16, 2024. Progga is an engineer at Carollo Engineers, and they live in Austin.

Congratulations to **Joshua Crain** '18, B.S. mechanical engineering, and his wife, Holly, on the birth of their daughter, Olivia. They live in Alvin.

**Celine Do** '18, B.B.A. management information systems, '22, M.B.A. management, is human resources coordinator at Provost Humphrey Law Firm. She lives in Nederland.

Congratulations to **Megan (Romero)** '18, B.S. exercise science and fitness management, and **James Hernandez** '18, B.B.A. general business, on their marriage Feb. 24, 2024. James is general manager of Juan's Mexican Food, and they live in Lumberton.

**Alejandria (Avila) James** '18, B.S. chemical engineering, is an environmental engineer at Oneok. She and her husband, **Jacob** '14, B.S. physics, B.S. mechanical engineering, who is a mechanical maintenance engineer at LyondellBasell Industries, live in Baytown.

Congratulations to **Marsha (Smith)** '18, B.S. family and consumer science-family studies, and **Samuel Placette** '15, B.S. mechanical engineering, on the birth of their daughter, Ivy. They live in Nederland.

Congratulations to **Riquerra (Broadnax)** '18, B.A. American Sign Language, and **Robert Salazar** '19, B.B.A. management, B.B.A. management information systems, on their marriage April 18, 2024. They have a YouTube channel that features their comic book hunting hobby, @TheRobertSalazarComics. They live in Spring.

**Hannah Carlson** '19, B.S. communication-corporate, is children's book story team lead for Brave Books. She lives in Conroe.

**Gina Chaney** '19, B.S. mathematics, '20, M.S. management information systems, married **Katie Robertson** '19, B.S. criminal justice, '20, M.S. criminal justice, Oct. 21, 2023. Gina is systems analyst at American Valve & Hydrant, and Katie is a legal assistant with Provost Umphrey Law Firm. They live in Beaumont.

**Madison (Marino) Doan** '19, B.B.A. finance, B.B.A. economics, is senior research associate at The Heritage Foundation. She and her husband, **Edward** '20, B.S. chemical engineering, who is a materials, process and delivery engineer with Procter & Gamble, live in Washington, D.C.

Congratulations to **Baylee (Bryan)** '19 and **Dillon Edwards** '18 on their marriage April 1, 2023, and the birth of their daughter, Charlotte. They live in Port Neches.

### Alumni, faculty and students attend deaf education conference

The Department of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education hosted an alumni reception at the Association of College Educators-Deaf and Hard of Hearing Conference Feb. 1, 2024, in Las Vegas at the Westgate Las Vegas Resort and Casino.



ACE-DHH President-Ashley Greene-Woods assistant professor of deaf studies and deaf education, receives the 2024 Dr. Jon Henner Memorial Early Career Award from the ACE-DHH.



From left back row: senior interpreter Barbara (Tippett) Johnson '12, Curt Radford '12, students Erich Tucker and Scott Cohen, adjunct instructor Oscar Ocuto '19, assistant professor Sean Hauschildt '22 and students Jessica Beaty and Brad Cohen; middle row from left: associate professor Zanthia Smith '83, '85, '99, professor and chair Diane Clark, Katie Cue '20, Pauline Ballentine '24 and students Dani Goyette, Jessica Beaty, Adele Ann Eberwein and Autumn Barker; front row from left: student Caroline Koo, Heidi MacGlaughlin '18, adjunct instructor David Meek '18, students Karen Soza and Latoya Dixon, assistant professor Ashley Greene-Woods '20 and student Holly Metcalf



### The Big Event

Students, faculty, staff and alumni gathered March 23, 2024, for the Big Event, the largest student-run, one-day service project in the nation. The participants formed teams and were disbursed to assist non-profit organizations across Southeast Texas: American Red Cross Southeast and Deep East Texas Gulf Coast Region facility in Orange.

**Brenda Hernandez-Iglesias** '19, B.S. chemical engineering, married Peter Reza Jan. 20, 2024. Brenda is senior commercial analyst at Cheniere Energy, and they live in Houston.

**Dr. Cade Johnson** '19, B.S. biology, B.S. exercise science and fitness management, '20, M.B.A. business administration, is completing his residency at University of Texas–Health Houston in emergency medicine. He and his wife, Mary, live in Houston.

**Madison Marino** '19, B.B.A. finance, B.B.A. economics, married **Edward Doan** '20, B.S. chemical engineering, Jan. 20, 2024. Madison is a senior research associate for The Heritage Foundation, and Edward is a materials, process, and delivery engineer at Procter & Gamble. They live in Washington, District of Columbia.

Congratulations to **Bri (Bundage) Reed** '19, B.S. communication–corporate, and her husband, LaQuay, on the birth of their daughter, Londyn. They live in Baytown.

**Morgan Takach** '19, B.B.A. finance, is a transition support partner at LPL Financial. She lives in Charlotte, N.C.

**Abigail Zuniga** '19, B.S. communication–corporate, '21, M.B.A. marketing, is a marketing coordinator for G&G Enterprises. She lives in Port Arthur.

## 20s

Congratulations to **Alyssa (Winfree) Ardoin** '20, B.G.S. general studies, and her husband, Rick, on the birth of their daughter, Stevie. They live in Orange.

**Bailey Broussard** '20, B.S. communication–corporate, is a tour guide for the Houston Astros. She lives in Houston.

**David Clubb Jr.** '20, M.S. management information systems, is a data management specialist for TC Boiler and Piping. He lives in Winnie.

Congratulations to **J.C. Correa** '20, B.G.S. general studies, on his marriage to Andrea Reyes Feb. 10, 2024. He plays baseball for the Corpus Christi Hooks, the Double-A affiliate of the Houston Astros. They live in Spring.

**Patricia Correa** '20, B.F.A. graphic design, is a UI designer at Marriott International. She lives in Harker Heights.

**Dr. Jordan Curl** '20, B.S. biology, is completing his residency at Lonestar Family Health in family medicine. He and his wife, **Shelby (Bickham)** '19, B.S. criminal justice, who is a culture and talent manager for Seamless.AI, live in Conroe.

**Margan Ferguson** '20, B.S. speech and hearing sciences, received the Educator of the Year award at the 2024 Blossoming Minds MLK Gala. She lives in Orange.

Congratulations to **Kayla (Tran)** '20, B.S. biology, and **Cole Fournet** '21, B.S. mechanical engineering, on the birth of their son, Charles. Kayla is a veterinary technician at Spurlock Road Vet Clinic, and they live in Bridge City.

**Kacie (Hayes) Guidry** '20, B.G.S. general studies, '23, M.Ed. applied digital learning, teaches English, language arts and reading at Nederland High School and sponsors the debate team. She and her husband, **Cory** '04, B.S. industrial technology, live in Nederland.

**Dr. Omar Hamza** '20, B.A. chemistry, is completing his residency at Harvard University in psychiatry. He lives in Boston, Mass.

**Camryn Burkhalter** '20, B.S. nursing, married Bryce Hollier Jan. 20, 2024. They live in Groves.

Congratulations to **Dalesia (Harris) James** '20, B.S. exercise science and fitness management, and her husband, Chris, on the birth of their twins. She earned a master's degree in athletic training and is an athletic trainer at Gilmer High School. They live in Gladewater.

**Hannah Hudgins** '20, B.S. communication film studies, married **Cedric Lyons II** '18, B.S. communication film studies, Dec. 12, 2023. Hannah is assistant media coordinator at the University of Texas at Dallas, where they live.

Congratulations to **Chelsea (Muhammad) Malbrue** '20, B.G.S. general studies, and her husband, Trey, on the birth of their son, Steffon. They live in Beaumont.

**Dr. Katelyn Meaux** '20, B.S. biology, B.S. psychology, is completing her residency at University of Texas Medical Branch–Galveston in obstetrics and gynecology. She lives in Dickinson.

**Jade Moreau** '20, B.S. communication–broadcasting, is an investigative reporter for KFDM-TV Channel 6. She lives in Vidor.

Congratulations to **Dr. Beth (Castillo)** '20, B.S. exercise science and fitness management, who earned her doctorate in physical therapy in 2023, and **Dr. Avery Murdock** '19, B.S. exercise science and fitness management, who also earned his doctorate in physical therapy in 2023, on the birth of their son, Luke. Avery is a physical therapist in Nederland, and they live in Port Neches.

**Rodney Randle Jr.** '20, B.G.S. general studies, is defensive back for the Calgary Stampede.

**Riya Sinha** '20, B.S. mathematics, '22, M.S. computer science, is a cyber security intern at Domain Experts Group. She lives in Houston.

**Caroline Bridges** '21, B.S. chemical engineering, earned her license as a professional engineer. She is an operations engineer at BASF TotalEnergies Petrochemicals. She lives in Beaumont.

**Heather (Norrell) Green** '21, M.Ed. administration, is chief executive officer at NORCAL Engineering. She and her husband, Stephen, live in McKinney.

**Robert Gonzales** '21, B.S. industrial technology, is an analytical systems support engineer at Linde. He lives in Houston.

**Melanie Morton** '21, B.S. nursing, '23, M.S.N. nursing education, is a nursing instructor at Lamar University. She lives in Nederland.

Baptist Hospitals of Southeast Texas nominated **Sam (Arthur) Prejean** '21, B.B.A. general business, B.B.A. management, for the Nov. 2023 Baptist Way Award. She is a human resource generalist and lives with her husband, Landon, in Hamshire.

**Yesenia Loera Romo** '21, B.B.A. economics, B.B.A. finance, '22, M.B.A. business administration, is a corporate banking associate at Texas Capital Bank. She lives in Port Arthur.



**Shay Stegemann** '21, B.A. American Sign Language, received the Women in Fiction Writing Award for her children's book, *My Name is Maya*, which is about a young deaf girl who uses American Sign Language. She lives in Fulshear.

Congratulations to **Kayla (Hoelscher) Yates** '21, M.Ed. administration, and her husband, Jimmy, on the birth of their son, John. She teaches career and technical education at Deer Park High School South Campus, and they live in Houston.

Congratulations to **Amany (Hammad) Zayed** '21, B.S. nutrition, and her husband, Adam, on the birth of their son, Taim. They live in Glen Ellyn, Ill.

**Kattya Fernandez** '22, B.B.A. accounting, M.S. accounting, owns Hidden Barn Event Hall and is the manager of Le Cottage Event Hall. She lives in Port Neches.

Congratulations to **Ashur Fondren** '22, B.S. electrical engineering, on his marriage to Emma Brasher Feb. 2, 2024. They live in Sugar Land.

**Mattie Hamilton** '22, B.S. communication–public relations, is administrative associate senior for the Department of General Education and Developmental Studies at Lamar Institute of Technology. She lives in Beaumont.

**Manuel Humphrey II** '22, B.S. communication–advertising, is the marketing specialist for Beaumont

Convention and Visitors Bureau. He lives in Beaumont.

**Arthur Keele Jr.** '22, B.S. criminal justice, '23, M.S. criminal justice, is police chief of Jersey Village. He and his wife, Rachel, live in Katy.

**Jamie Mondragon** '22, M.B.A. business administration, is associate athletic director of marketing fan engagement for Texas A&M University–Corpus Christi. She lives in Corpus Christi.

**Hannah (Spikes) Patteson** '22, B.S. communication–broadcasting, is teaches audio/visual technology and digital media at Hamshire-Fannett High School. She lives in Groves.

**Gabriel Poarch** '22, B.S. communication–broadcasting, is technical director at WPMT-Fox 43 in York, Penn.

Neches Federal Credit Union promoted **Kaleigh Wortham** '22, B.S. university studies multidisciplinary, to consumer lending strategies supervisor. She lives in Port Arthur.

**Gabrielle Gaspard** '23, B.S. communication studies, is a digital producer for KBMT/KJAC 12 News. She lives in Beaumont.

Congratulations to **Johnny Guidry** '23, M.B.A. business administration, on his selection as a finalist for the Presidential Management Fellows Program Class of 2024, the federal government's flagship leadership development program for advanced degree holders across all academic disciplines. He was one of 825 applicants selected from 7,193 applications. He lives in Spring.

Congratulations to **Hannah (Huff)** '23, B.S. speech and hearing sciences, and **Christian Guillory** '23, B.B.A. accounting, B.B.A. finance, B.S. accounting, on their marriage. They live in Beaumont.

**Nischal Kharel** '23, M.E. mechanical engineering, is an engineer with the specialty precast group of Delta Engineers, Architects, Land Surveyors and Landscape Architects. He lives in Beaumont.

**Callie Melancon** '23, B.S. communication studies, is an academic advisor for the JoAnne Gay Dishman School of Nursing at Lamar University. She lives in Port Neches.

**Lac Nguyen** '23, B.S. industrial engineering, is manufacturing engineer at QEMS Inc. He lives in Hewitt.

Neches Federal Credit Union promoted **Megan Woodard** '23, B.B.A. management, to assistant vice-president of digital services. She lives in Bridge City.

**James Watson** '23, M.Ed. administration, is communications and community liaison for Chapel Hill school district. He lives in Mount Pleasant.

**Andrew "Drew" Worthy** '23, M.E. mechanical engineering, is a mechanical designer for Hanson Professional Services Inc. He lives in Orange.





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# Continuing a tradition

by Reilly Smith

**W**ith a doctorate in dental surgery from the University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston and a flourishing dental practice in Bridge City, Texas, Alex Edgerly is one of our area's most successful LU alumni. Less than a decade after graduating with his B.S. in biology and minor in chemistry, he has established Edgerly Dentistry, his private dental practice, which recently received the Bridge City Chamber of Commerce's Business of the Month award for June 2023. Alongside his success in dentistry, Edgerly has established himself as an entrepreneur, community leader and active alumnus.

A Southeast Texas native who grew up in Orangefield, he first decided to transfer to Lamar in 2011 after two years attending Lamar State College Orange. When he applied to Lamar University, Edgerly was looking for a school that was close to home but could still help him meet his career and academic goals. During his first semester at Lamar, he treated campus as a commuter experience—he would attend class and then go home, but he did not feel he was involved enough in campus life. Before too long, Edgerly decided to take a leap of faith and get involved in the LU Ambassador program. He said, "It seemed like an organization that held a prestige and a reputation among the students and the faculty, and I wanted to be a part of that."





Becoming an LU Ambassador was Edgerly's first—but certainly not last—leadership role at Lamar University. He remembers his time as an LU Ambassador fondly and described it as his first step towards his highly involved active career at Lamar University. He also recalls encouraging his sister to get involved as well, hoping to pass on the legacy when she was feeling discouraged during her first semester at Lamar. For the Edgerlys, LU is truly a family affair: sister Macy '21 earned a bachelor's degree in nursing, sister Erica (Rone) '16 Edgerly earned a bachelor's in family and consumer sciences with a focus in fashion retailing and merchandising, and Erica's husband, Jacob '17, earned his BBA in management information systems in 2017 before going on to earn a master's degree in the field along with his MBA, both in 2023. Alex learned how to manage his work-life balance on campus while serving as a university blogger, as president of the American Student Dental Association, as a Peer Advisor, as a member of the Study Abroad Council and as a Student Director. He was also involved in student groups like the American Medical Student Association, Beta Beta Beta Biological Honor Society and Phi

Kappa Phi Honor Society, and he served on LU committees such as the University Grade Appeals Committee, the International Student Committee and the Lamar University Multicultural Student Advisory Committee.

Edgerly certainly credits Lamar for his background in biology and chemistry, but he particularly remembers the one-on-one care, career counseling and encouragement he received as a pre-dental student. He recalls the special care he received from Biology Department professors Kucknoor, Hoch and Christensen, and he is honored to still be remembered by them, remarking, "Even ten years later, Dr. Kucknoor still recognizes me." Offering advice for current pre-professional students, he encourages them to get started early, to be serious, to get involved and to ask their professors questions.

Edgerly recounted his first day of dental school, when students were self-identifying as alumni from schools like Texas A&M and University of Texas, and he was proud to have come from Lamar University. He recognized that as one of five or ten students rather than one out of thousands, he had access to more personalized care from his academic department and his preprofessional coordinator. He said, "I'm very hesitant to think I would have gotten this experience anywhere else."

When asked what he remembers most fondly about Lamar, Edgerly described his experience as a study abroad student. A biology major, he traveled to Belize for two weeks to study brittle stars, oceanography and wilderness research, staying first on Tobacco Caye and then in the rainforest on a jaguar reserve. Besides the college credit he received, Edgerly recounted the friendships he made and the cultures he was able to experience. Edgerly He also described being asked to speak at the 2013 LU Annual Scholarship Dinner as his favorite student experience. He remembers following directly after Jimmy Simmons, president at the time, and feeling nervous but honored to be asked to speak at such a prestigious event.

Edgerly is proud to be an active alumnus, previously serving as an Alumni Advisory Board member. He is also an alumni-owned business participant and has been invited to speak as an on-campus speaker before the Pre-Dental Society and as a host at "Dinner and Conversation," a dinner event that matches students with successful alumni in their chosen fields. As an alumnus, Edgerly keeps in contact with staff members including Juan Zabala '07, current vice president of university advancement and chief executive officer of the Lamar University Foundation, and Shannon Figueroa '02, '03, '07, director of advancement services and alumni affairs. A self-proclaimed "Kool-Aid drinker," Edgerly is an alumnus who feels a sense of responsibility to give back to the campus that started him on his road to success. "I'm very grateful and appreciative of all the opportunities [Lamar] gave me," he said, "so I feel a responsibility to in turn thank Lamar for all the success they've guided me to."

He wants to give back to Southeast Texas, to be a part of Lamar University's long-standing traditions and prolong the journey towards success for future generations of Cardinals. Edgerly credits LU for helping him learn how to navigate the professional world, declaring that getting involved taught him how to build relationships, how to communicate, and how to network and build his professional work ethic. He is proud to see the community re-investing in Lamar University, of the administrators who make it all happen, and the positivity and growth he sees, because he believes Lamar University is a great representation of Southeast Texas. "We have such success in Beaumont, Texas. People who change the world and take care of other people. I want to make sure the tradition continues."



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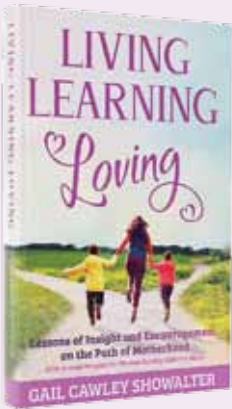
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# FEATHERS OF *wisdom*

by Lauren Wilson



SHOWALTER

**N**ow retired from a career teaching art, English, special education and Braille instruction, Gail (Cawley) Showalter '70, who self-describes as “an old bird with feathers of wisdom for women,” can these days be found traveling far and wide, sharing insights gained from a lifetime meeting challenges with perseverance, faith and generosity. Of the many that she shares with her audiences, one of her “feathers of wisdom” is to “choose something you can give back to that you’re passionate about.” Gail herself is a living testament to the power of those words, having followed her own passions to change countless lives for the better. Now, Gail and her husband Dr. Sam W. Showalter '66 have entrusted Lamar University to honor her family’s legacy and to help continue her extraordinary mission with a commitment to establishing two remarkable presidential endowments.

The first—the Gail and Dr. Sam W. Showalter Presidential Endowment for Spindletop-Gladys City Boomtown Museum—reflects the pride and love Gail has for her family and the legacy they have built, which students and guests can learn

about when visiting the museum. Their exhibit, “Cawley’s: from Machining to Automation,” tells the story of the Cawley family business, which was started by Gail’s father Clifton M. Cawley and continued by Gail’s brother Don and his son Cliff, and which is still in operation today as Sage Automation in Beaumont. The exhibit features model steam engines and robotics developed by the three generations of Cawley engineers and pays tribute to the family’s exceptional talents, work ethic and contributions to industry.

The second endowment reflects a major pillar of Gail’s life’s work and a passion that comes from personal experience. With her own story of raising three children and going back to college as a single woman, Gail was inspired to create SMORE, an organization dedicated to seeing Single Moms Overjoyed, Rejuvenated and Empowered. “I kept thinking about these moms, and so I started having events,” she said, describing where SMORE began, with events and retreats where mothers could come for an escape to be pampered and supported. From there, Gail and her colleagues at SMORE knew they could go even further. “It’s a wonderful thing,” she

recalls a friend saying, “but how are we changing lives?” With this in mind, Gail and her colleagues set their sights on helping single mothers access the resources they need to earn a degree and pursue a career. “Thirty percent of the 10 million single mothers in the United States live in poverty. Thirty percent,” she explains, “and the only way out is education.” Through her work with SMORE and the Philanthropic Educational Organization (PEO), this goal has become a reality, providing single mothers with holistic support on their path to graduation and a brighter future for themselves and their families. With the establishment of the Gail and Dr. Sam W. Showalter Presidential Scholarship for Single Parents, Gail’s dream will impact even more lives and forever make a difference for the students at Lamar University.

More stories, words of wisdom, and information about Gail’s life and works can be found at GailShowalter.com and in her book, *Living Learning Loving: Lessons of Insight and Encouragement on the Path of Motherhood*.