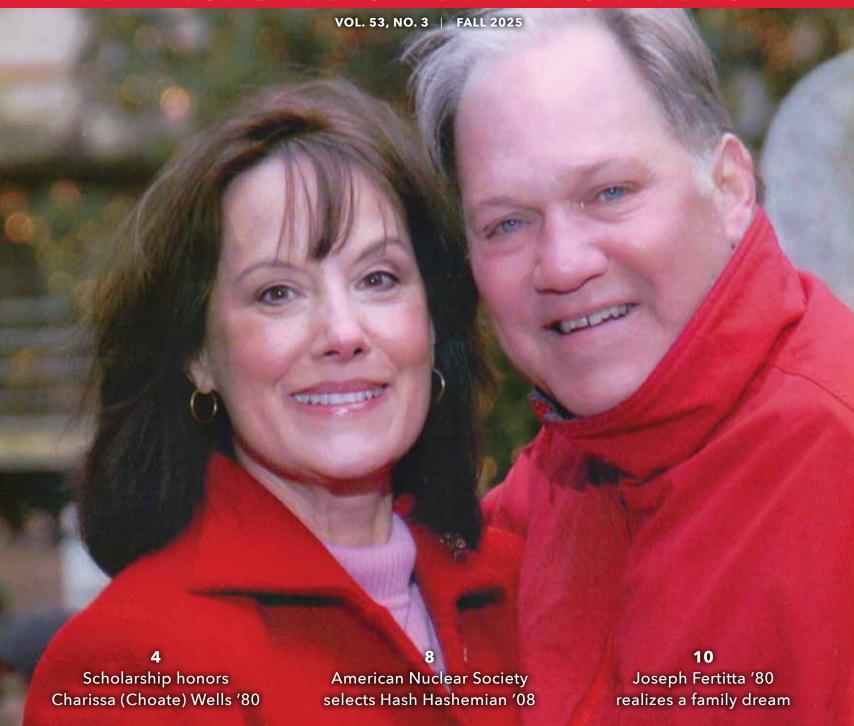
CARDINAL

CADENCE

THE MAGAZINE OF LAMAR UNIVERSITY



FROM THE PRESIDENT I



From left, President Jaime Taylor with Texas Coffee Company president Joseph Fertitta '72 and Juan Zabala '07, vice president of university advancement and CEO, Lamar University Foundation Inc.

e all know that life rarely goes according to plan. You can map out every step, and then some little twist of fate sends you off in a completely new direction. You might trip over a crack in the sidewalk or get stuck in an elevator with a complete stranger. But

here's the thing I've learned over the years. Unexpected turns might feel like detours, but they are often the true starting point for our most important work. And what follows those moments is often the most inspiring part of the story.

The idea of finding purpose in seemingly random experiences runs all through this issue of Cadence. For Brit Featherston '85, '87, his career in public service began in an emergency room where he jumped in to help police officers subdue a man who was attacking ER staff. His story proves that some careers begin not with a plan, but with a single, courageous act. For Michael Lindsay, the path to a new purpose also began in a hospital, this time during his recovery from a 16-hour surgery to save his hearing. He was so moved by the dedication of his surgeon and the work of some of our audiology students that he decided to give back to the profession that had changed his life.

And our cover story illustrates this theme in a truly meaningful way. For Dr. John Calhoun Wells, what began as a new job at Lamar University sent his life in an entirely new direction after a chance introduction to alumna Charissa Choate '80. What followed is an amazing story of love and partnership through adversity, one that inspired him to endow a scholarship that honors her life and journey.

These stories are a great reminder of what happens when we believe in the power of human connection, a power that can emerge from a chance meeting, a moment of vulnerability, or a crisis. Here at Lamar University, we believe that fostering authentic connections is the most important work we do. It's the foundation of the teamwork that moves us forward, and it's the spark that can turn an unexpected detour into a legacy that changes the world.

Every part of our campus is a potential stage where connections like these can happen. I invite you to help us cultivate that environment. Your support, your mentorship, and your engagement are crucial to ensuring that the legacy of one Cardinal will become the inspiration for another.

With Cardinal Pride,



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Juan J. Zabala, '07, Vice President of University Advancement

Cynthia Hicks '89, '93, Editor

CONTRIBUTORS

Writing

Brooke Barnett; Kristen Baker '24; Evie Clifton; Philip Cole; Shannon (Copeland) Figueroa '02, '03, '07; Kristin Hebert '24; Cassandra Jenkins '19; Jasmin Landry '12; Allison Lennartz '14; Stephan Malick '95, '18; Sarah Parker '07; John Rollins '12; Sherri Smith; April Thompson '19, '22; Kensi MacCammond Williams '24

Photography

Bernie Auld '82; Kristen Baker '24; Jerome Cabeen; Evie Clifton; Marita Duesler '72; Shannon (Copeland) Figueroa '02, '03, '07; Brandon Gouthier '96; Morgan Miller '11, '18, Leo Weeks Photographers; Miguel Perez; Dr. Lauren Richardson '15; John Rollins '12; Clara Schreck; Kim (Glawson) Smith '90; MaryE Wilkinson

Design

Mike Rhodes, Rhodes Design

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Changes of address may be sent to: University Advancement P.O. Box 10011 | Beaumont, Texas 77710 or alumni@lamar.edu

DIVISION OF UNIVERSITY ADVANCEMENT

Juan J. Zabala '07, Vice President

Uliana Trylowsky, Associate Vice President

Shannon Copeland Figueroa '02, '03, '07, Director of Alumni Affairs and Advancement Services

P.O. Box 10011 | Beaumont, Texas 77710 (409) 880-8419 or fax (409) 880-8409

LAMAR UNIVERSITY ALUMNI OFFICE

When visiting campus, you're invited to stop by the Alumni Office at the John Gray Center, Rudy C. Williams Building, Suite 102, 855 Jim Gilligan Way.

P.O. Box 10005 | Beaumont, Texas 77710 (409) 880-8921, or (800) 298-4839 alumni@lamar.edu | lamar.edu/alumni

LAMAR UNIVERSITY FOUNDATION

Juan J. Zabala '07, CEO Karen Nichols '83, COO

P.O. Box 11500 | Beaumont, Texas 77710 (409) 880-2117

foundation@lamar.edu | lamar.edu/foundation

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John and Charissa (Choate) Wells '80

Photo courtesy of John Calhoun Wells







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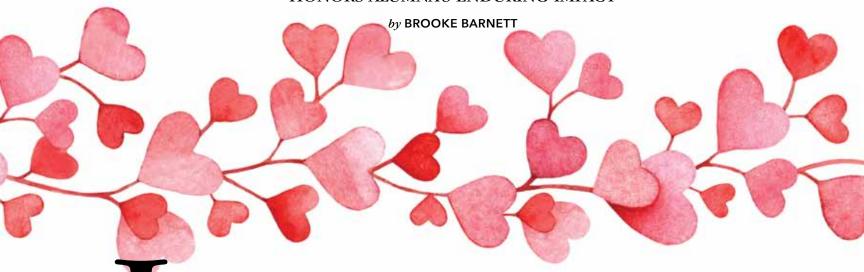
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Endowed in leve:

LAMAR'S CHARISSA CHOATE WELLS SCHOLARSHIP HONORS ALUMNA'S ENDURING IMPACT



n 1987, Dr. John Calhoun Wells was employed as a senior research fellow at Harvard's prestigious John F. Kennedy School of Government. He was fully immersed in his research, expecting the next three years to be defined by rigorous public policy work. What he didn't expect was that one of the most transformative experiences of his life wouldn't come from the halls of Harvard—but from a connection he would make more than 1,500 miles away in Beaumont, Texas.

There, in the most unexpected of places, he would find not just a new chapter, but the love of his life.

During his first year at the Harvard Kennedy School, Wells was invited to be the keynote speaker at a conference at the John Gray Institute at Lamar University, a labor management institute devoted primarily to human resources issues centered on the oil and petrochemical industries and their unions. A few months later, the chancellor of the Lamar University System personally invited him to apply to lead the institute. Armed with ideas for strengthening the institute, Wells was named president in 1988. To fulfill research obligations at Harvard, he split his time between the two institutions for the next year.

"When I first landed at Lamar in 1988, a staff member named Susan Sampson learned I had been single since 1975," he explained. "She asked if I was 'ready to meet some Texas women' and decided to play Cupid for me."



Sampson introduced Wells to a mutual friend named Charissa (Choate) Christopher '80, a Lamar alumna well known in the Southeast Texas area. She had modeled, sung in a band, worked in radio and television, served as a spokesperson for local businesses and charities, was a prolific freelance writer and served as a public relations director for a local hospital. While

she often appeared in radio and television commercials throughout Beaumont, Houston and southwest Louisiana, she was perhaps most well known for her weekly segment on KFDM-TV's "PM Magazine" and for hosting KBMT-TV's daily morning show, "Good Morning Golden Triangle, " where she interviewed guests such as Oprah Winfrey.

In April 1988, Sampson arranged for Wells and Charissa to meet at a local tavern, along with a group of colleagues.

"Charissa was running late," Wells recalled. "There were several colleagues there, and I was somewhere between bemused and irritated. Here I was, meeting someone new, and I had a whole crowd watching."

But when she arrived, conversation flowed easily. Charissa peppered him with questions about his life and work. "She had been a reporter, and she was loquacious," Wells laughed. "The longer I sat there across the table from her, the more



attracted I became. She was articulate, and she had a great voice. She was also very easy on the eyes."

As the group began to leave, Wells asked Charissa if she'd like to have dinner—just the two of them. He remembers her looking up at him with a smile and saying, "That be nice." They ended up at a quiet table at Carlo's, a local Italian restaurant.

"She was just so vivacious," he recalled. "She was quick witted and had a strong and captivating personality. It wasn't like a regular blind date. We were engrossed in each other's company. I realized quickly that she was extraordinary. At the end of the night, I had this epiphany: 'You know, I just might marry this woman."

This realization took him by surprise. After more than 13 years as a career-focused bachelor, Wells had intentionally never dated anyone with children—yet Charissa had two young sons, Zachary and Clayton. Wells asked her to meet again two days later, and a life-changing relationship began.

"Looking back, the only regret I have is not marrying her

sooner," he reflected. "We actually broke up two or three times over the next few years but always came back together very quickly. Actually, I was scared. Charissa loved Beaumont and had young kids. I knew my future would probably take me far from there, as career opportunities arose. I always imagined I would return to Kentucky, where I was from. Looking back now, I never fully appreciated the risk she took to marry me."

The couple married in Beaumont in July 1993 and were driving to Washington D.C. by the end of August. Wells became a presidential appointee of the Clinton administration, serving as the director of the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service in Washington, D.C, an independent agency of the federal government. The couple relocated to Reston, Va., a Washington D.C. suburb, where they lived for nearly two decades.

"Even when we were dating, she was always throwing parties. Charissa continued opening our home even after we left Beaumont," Wells said. "She baked cookies to introduce

"She was the love of my life and she showed the most incredible strength"

herself to neighbors and hosted a Christmas party with over 40 guests just weeks after our furniture arrived. Everyone was charmed by her."

In 1998, Wells resigned

his presidential appointment to open his own labor management and dispute resolution consulting firm, Wells & Company. Charissa was his partner in the firm and also taught classes for single mothers at the Women's Center of Northern Virginia. She wrote a handbook for single mothers and volunteered her time at a domestic abuse center.

Charissa was deeply devoted to her children, a role she truly felt she was born to embrace. Her love for kids extended far beyond her own family—she delighted in hosting neighborhood Christmas cookie-making parties, complete with surprise visits from Santa and his elves. While volunteering at the domestic abuse center, she spent time with the mothers and their children and even dedicated a special chapter of her handbook to the joys and challenges of raising kids.

Wells first noticed subtle signs of memory loss in Charissa in 2006. By the fall of 2010, a local neurologist raised the possibility of dementia, and the following year, a leading Alzheimer's specialist at the Mayo Clinic confirmed the diagnosis: early-onset Alzheimer's disease. Charissa was just 59 at the time of her definitive diagnosis. The couple faced the diagnosis with strength and grace, navigating the difficult journey together. In 2012, they returned to Texas to be closer to her adult children. Wells retired and devoted himself to caring for Charissa full time. She passed away on Jan. 1, 2019, at their home in Cordillera Ranch, just north of San Antonio, Texas, at the age of 67.

"She was the love of my life and she showed the most incredible strength," Wells reflected. "She was talented in so many ways, but most importantly, she was just a singularly good human being. She always made me laugh. I truly met my match. There was never any doubt what I wanted to do to honor her."



In her memory, Wells returned to Beaumont and partnered with Lamar University to create a scholarship in her name, endowed at \$1 million.

"Charissa attended one year at Lamar, before getting married and starting a family," he explained. "Even as a single mother, she was committed to finishing her degree. She worked for years to earn her Bachelor of Science in speech in 1980. She was proud to be a Lamar graduate. I knew she would love a scholarship designed to support other hardworking single mothers, just as she had been."

The Charissa Choate Wells Scholarship supports Lamar students with junior standing or above in any field of study who are working, raising children and pursuing degrees simultaneously. It will support eight to 10 "Charissa scholars" each year. "The whole notion is to support single mothers who are trying to do it all, while staying true to their determination to better themselves," he said. "She would have loved this scholarship. I knew it was the right thing."

As Wells reflects on his life with Charissa, he seeks to honor the strength, charisma and joy she brought to everything she touched.

"She was always a very vibrant soul," Wells concluded.

"She always embraced life to the fullest and made the best of every day. There was a light in her that never dimmed—she embraced every moment with joy, warmth and an unshakable spirit and faith."

Through the scholarship bearing her name, he hopes to empower others facing similar challenges—to help them persevere, pursue their dreams and build a brighter future. In supporting these students, Wells finds comfort and purpose, knowing that Charissa's legacy will continue to inspire, uplift and change lives for generations to come.

Graduate of the Last Decade

by KENSI MACCAMMOND WILLIAMS

hen it comes to the engineering excellence that is so synonymous with Lamar University, Adebayo "A.J." Onafuwa '18 is an outstanding example. Having received his bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering, Onafuwa not only

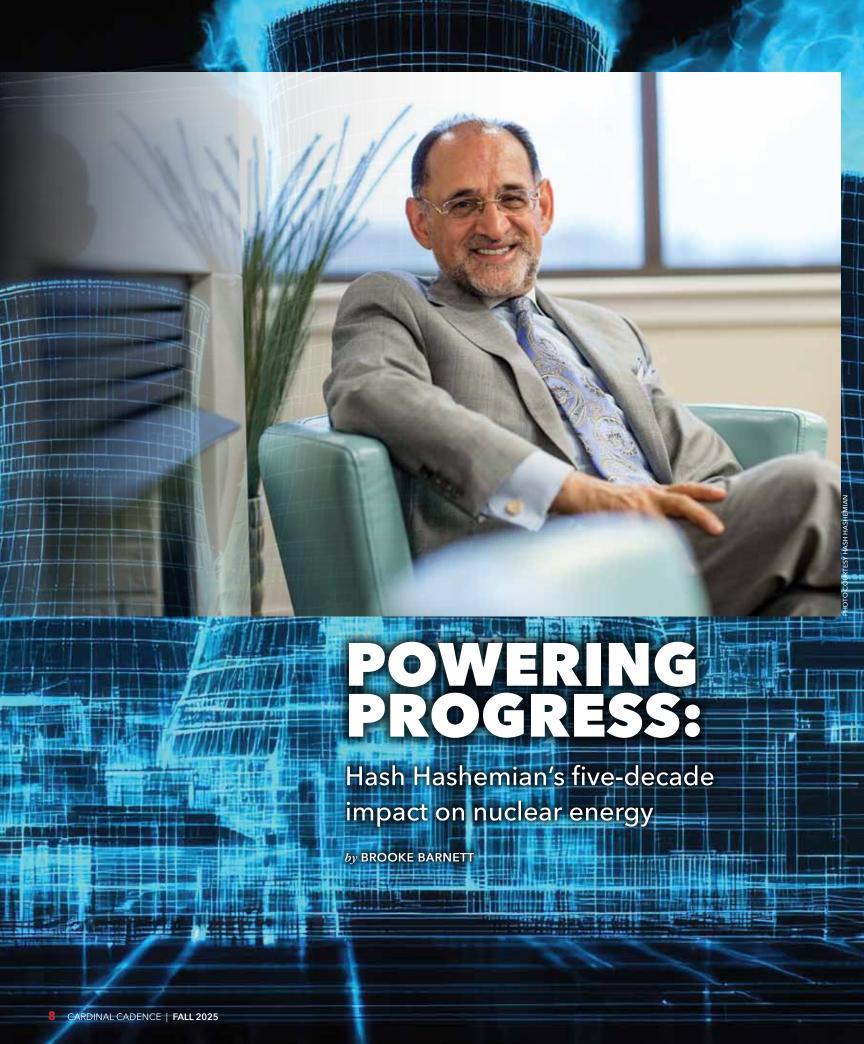
flourished during his time at LU but has already carried that success well into his professional career beyond graduation. Before his current role as operations and maintenance lead at Meta, Onafuwa has had quite a few opportunities to hone his skills as a professional engineer, first at Honeywell as a mechanical design engineer and then at Samsung Semiconductor as a process engineer. When considering his past and current occupations, Onafuwa shares a key aspect of his success: "Across all these roles, Lamar gave me the confidence to jump into unfamiliar domains and learn fast. The ability to adapt is probably one of the most valuable things I took away."

During his time at Lamar, Onafuwa was a recipient of the Yolanda Lee Convers National Society of Black Engineers (NSBE) Award Scholarship, an award that not only recognized his hard work and skill but also created a wonderful opportunity for him to explore the future he could

have with a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering. "Being a Nigerian student, joining NSBE, that meant a lot to me," he reflects. "It kind of inspired me to be a better student, and honestly, I don't think I'd be where I am today without that scholarship." The support Onafuwa received throughout his academic journey still greatly inspires him, and when asked if any specific professor may have helped him most as a student, it takes no time for him to pinpoint one that stands out. "Dr. Yao—his classes were instrumental, pun intended, in my career," Onafuwa said. "Dr. Yao pushed us to approach problems from multiple angles-analytical, numerical and experimental. That class shaped the way I think as an engineer."

When faced with challenges that came his way in previous roles or with those he addresses at Meta, Onafuwa is clear on how he navigates problem-solving. He asks himself, "Has there been anyone who has worked on something similar? Is there any kind of lesson learned that can be brought forward to give me more insight on the actual problem and possible solution?" He finds his answer, he reveals, by facing ambiguity and embracing being resourceful. In that deceptively simple approach, he builds on what others have found before him while also applying what he's learned as a mechanical engineer.





or more than five decades, Hashem M. "Hash" Hashemian '08 has been at the forefront of nuclear energy—shaping the field as a researcher, entrepreneur and industry leader. Now, after a career defined by innovation and impact, he reflected on his journey, his success and the future he envisions for nuclear power in the United States.

Hashemian has had a long and remarkable academic journey, in which Lamar University played an important role. After immigrating to the United States from Iran, he began his time in higher education at Lamar, studying electrical engineering alongside professor and advisor Wendell Bean.

"Lamar contributed a lot to my decision to study nuclear engineering," he reflects. "I came to study electrical engineering and intended to go back to Iran. I took a class with Dr. Bean that focused on nuclear engineering, and that became my passion. Lamar didn't offer a nuclear engineering program, so I left after six months to study nuclear engineering in Tennessee."

Hashemian chose the University of Tennessee (UT) because of its focus on nuclear engineering and its ties to the Oak Ridge National Laboratory, where his aunt was doing her postdoctoral research. He earned a master's degree in nuclear engineering from UT but decided to postpone his return to Iran to gain work experience in the United States.

To gain relevant experience in the nuclear industry, he formed the Analysis and Measurement Services Corp. (AMS) in 1977, alongside his major professor from UT. When Iran put their nuclear power program on hold, he decided to stay in America indefinitely and focused on growing AMS. He acquired full ownership of the company in 1985, and AMS has since expanded to provide nuclear plant testing equipment, training and services for nearly all the nuclear power plants in the United States and many across the globe.

"Ninety-five percent of the business in our industry is in generating nuclear power, with only five percent focusing on defense," he explained. "There are approximately 450 nuclear power plants worldwide, with about 100 of them in the United States. AMS serves nearly all of them with highly specialized technologies."

By the time Hashemian reached the age of 50, he decided it was time to return to his original goal of pursuing higher education.

"My former mother-in-law just loved to remind me that all my brothers-in-law had Ph.D.s and I didn't," he laughed. "So, I contacted Dr. Bean and asked him if I could come back and work on a doctorate in engineering. I also reached out to universities in Canada and Europe, to see what doors might open. When all three programs accepted me, I ended up starting—and finishing—all three Ph.D.s over the course of a decade. Apparently, I just really wanted to beat my brothers-in-law."

In addition to earning his doctorate in electrical engineering from Lamar, Hashemian earned Ph.D.s in nuclear engineering from Chalmers University of Technology, Sweden, and computer engineering from Western University in Ontario, Canada.

Even while pursuing his higher education, Hashemian continued to focus on his business. Today, AMS operates in more than 26 countries and is the leading global provider of nuclear plant instrumentation and control system testing.

"In the first 35 years of my career, I worked more than 16 hours per day. We took the risks, and did the work," he reflected. "I remember the first nuclear power plant that we contacted to become a client initially said no, then called back a week later and said yes. We've done a lot of business since then. I am very fortunate that I have great people working for me."

At the same time he founded AMS, he became involved with the American Nuclear Society (ANS). Over the past 50 years, he has served in leadership roles on numerous committees and conferences for the organization. He

will serve as ANS president through 2026, a role that he sees as being full of possibilities. As ANS president, Hashemian plans to focus on building new power plants as a global and national priority.

"The reason that I want to serve as president is because we need to change the conversation from nuclear design and start building new power plants. As a private industry, I hope we can partner with the government to promote the environmental benefits of nuclear energy," he added.

With demand for clean energy climbing, Hashemian believes nuclear power must play a central role.

"We just need a lot more power," he said. "Currently, 20 percent of energy in the U.S. is generated by nuclear, so we are the second largest producer behind coal and gas. By 2050, we will need three times the amount of energy currently being produced. We won't be able to get there without nuclear energy, especially if we care about the environment."

Hashemian remains energized by the growth of nuclear energy. With AMS thriving, his presidency at ANS underway, and new opportunities on the horizon, he shows no signs of slowing down. He prioritizes time with his children and recently welcomed his first grandchild, Vera Rose Sizemore. He also helps care for his mother, with whom he frequently travels. He is engaged in both local and national politics and enjoys giving back to his community through his philanthropy and community involvement.

"Right now, nuclear power is sizzling hot, so there is lots of interest in my company," he said. "I sometimes consider selling it and spending more time on philanthropy. But I love what I do and who I work with. I want to stay and see the growth of this industry. It has been an amazing industry to have a career in. It's so incredible that I started my education in Beaumont all those years ago and ended up as the president of ANS. It's been quite a journey."





Every dream realized

by SARAH PARKER

ords struggle to define the depth of feeling Texas Coffee Company President Joseph Fertitta '72 has for the company his grandfather founded in

Beaumont more than a century ago, or the meaningful role the business has played in his life and career.

"Would I say I love this company? It goes beyond love. This company has been my heart since I was a child," Fertitta said.

Makers of TexJoy Seasonings and Seaport Coffee, the family-owned Texas Coffee Company traces its roots back

to first-generation American Charles J. Fertitta Sr.'s Crescent Market grocery store, which was located near the Port of Beaumont at the south end of Magnolia Street. An acuity for business runs in the Fertitta blood, and Charles saw an opportunity to provide an important resource to the many sailors who frequented the port-coffee.

Using a peanut roaster he received from a cousin in San Antonio, Charles began roasting coffee beans imported from Central and South America to make a roast that became known as Seaport Coffee, and in July 1921, he founded Texas Coffee Company. When Charles began incorporating spice products in 1926, the company expanded to include the now iconic regional brand TexJoy.

As the company grew, it continued to be a family business and an intrinsic part of life for many of the branches of the Fertitta family. It was amidst this flourishing enterprise, surrounded by a sprawling family filled with successful businessmen that Joseph Fertitta spent his formative years.

"Growing up in Southeast Texas was an unbelievable

experience because my family was pretty much all born and raised here," Fertitta said. "[We were] a very closeknit Sicilian family. Sundays were over at grandma's and the traditional Sicilian lunch or dinner, which usually had pasta and most of the time fried chicken. And that's how we formed such close relationships with our cousins. Our cousins are like brothers and sisters."

Having that strong family connection as a foundation taught Fertitta not just the importance of family but of community and how community support can play a key role on the road to business success.

"What it showed me was that no man or woman is an island. When you hear that someone is self-made,

> somewhere along the line someone had to help them," he said.

Fertitta began pursuing business success in his boyhood, starting his first profitable business venture at age 10. While many young boys would be content earning their spending money with a paper route from the local newspaper, Fertitta knew there was far more profit in

being your own boss. With a little family support and his own ingenuity and grit, Fertitta established his own "egg route," selling eggs around town in his family's wheelbarrow.

"I always had that confidence in me that I controlled my own destiny," he said. "My grandfather had an egg company on his ranch, Fertitta eggs. I bought the eggs from him, and I went door-to-door selling eggs. I was selling two and three cases of eggs a week, fifty cents a dozen. I had my little route pad, so I could sign how many dozen eggs you wanted, and I could set the price. I was the owner. I controlled my own destiny."

Knowing that business leadership was the only future for him, Fertitta opted to stay close to home and pursue



his bachelor's in business administration with a marketing focus at Lamar University.

"Lamar is a diamond in the city of Beaumont," Fertitta said.
"To have a university of this caliber [in your hometown] is almost unheard of. We have so much talent that graduated from Lamar."

Fertitta's collegiate years were highlighted by his membership in the Alpha Tau Omega fraternity. Among his fraternity brothers, he received invaluable mentoring and guidance and forged lifelong bonds that helped him both in school and beyond.

"I didn't leave Lamar saying, 'I'm going to be a success.' I left Lamar saying, 'Thank you, Lamar, because you gave me the opportunity to be educated.' Get a college education. I can't stress that enough. I'm proud of that diploma right there," he said.

After graduation, Fertitta began honing his business acumen in a variety of industries from banking to insurance to real estate. He often worked seven days a week at three jobs to advance to where he wanted to be.

"I learned at a very, very young age that there are certain things you have to do to get what you need to be successful," he said. "I don't see myself as successful. I see myself as doing the things I needed to do to get the things I wanted to have. I'm a 100% believer that in order for you to succeed, you have to fail. No rain, no rainbows. Within our lives, a little rain must come so that we can see the rainbow."

While his business ventures, particularly in real estate, became increasingly prosperous, Fertitta never let go of his childhood dream of running his family's company. In 1999, Fertitta began to realize that dream, uniting with other third-generation family members to take the reins and

start a new chapter for Texas Coffee Company. Fertitta took on the key leadership management role of vice president-secretary-treasurer while his cousin Carlo Busceme III became president and his brother Donald became vice president-general manager.

After his cousin's unexpected death in 2017, Fertitta assumed the mantle of president, fulfilling his nearly lifelong dream to follow in his father's and grandfather's footsteps. Together, the Fertitta brothers secured controlling shares in the company after buying out some family members with others remaining as minority shareholders.

"It took me years to get here, but I had to be patient and bide my time. Things always seem to have a way of working out if you're willing to be patient and remain focused," he said. "And you never give up on whatever those dreams are."

As president, Fertitta is committed to leading Texas Coffee Company into the future as the popularity and brand awareness of TexJoy continues to increase beyond Southeast Texas. While Fertitta isn't one for hobbies or golf, he and his wife Sandy remain steadfast supporters of Lamar and are members of the President's Circle and regulars at Le Grand Bal.

Now in his mid-70s, Fertitta has no plans to retire from the company that has been his heart since childhood.

"I love what I'm doing, and I'm doing it my way, so why wouldn't I want to keep doing it? I wrote down something that my cousin said when he bought the Houston Rockets, and I keep it up here on my bulletin board," Fertitta said. "'Very few people in life get to have every dream come true.' Well, I'm one of those few people."



ream (akers)

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 or to start planning a gift through your estate, visit legacy.lamar.edu. In this issue of Cardinal Cadence, we are honored to recognize these Dream Makers.

by Jasmin Landry

Kathryn "Kay" D. Doucet '77 dedicated more than 30 years of her career to Port Neches-Groves school district as a choir teacher, a role she cherished deeply. Her passion for music extended beyond the classroom as she served as a member of the choir and later directed the handbells and the Chancel Choir at Trinity Presbyterian Church in Nederland, Texas, where she was a member for more than 40 years. She was a proud graduate of Port Neches-Groves High School, class of 1972. Her community and the many lives she influenced held a special place in her heart. Kay graduated from Lamar University in 1977 with a Bachelor of Science in Music and was a member of the concert choir as a student. Her husband, Curtis W. Doucet Ir. '89 was also an active member of Trinity Presbyterian Church, where he served for several years as the choir director and then as a choir member. He was a veteran of the U.S. Air Force, former Boy Scout leader and an Eagle Scout. Curtis was a musician and band director for more than 40 years and graduated from Lamar University in 1989 with a Master of Music Education. The Trinity Presbyterian Church and friends of Kay and Curtis established the Kay and **Curtis Doucet Memorial Scholarship** in Music.

Kay-Alana Turner '24, a bright but brief in shining light in our lives, achieved much in her academic career from Lamar University, graduating in 2024. One of her most cherished accomplishments was her selection as a Lamar Ambassador. To honor her service as an ambassador her, family and friends endowed the **Kay-Alana Calhoun Turner Memorial Scholarship for Lamar University Ambassadors**. Kay's family is comforted that Kay might continue to be known as a blessing to others in perpetuity.

Mark '80 and Cindy Morris '80 both graduated from Lamar University, each with a B.B.A. in accounting in May 1980. They married that same year and began their careers in public accounting in Houston, Mark at Arthur Young and Cindy at Deloitte Haskins & Sells. After four

years in public accounting, they moved their careers to the mortgage, oil and gas, and funeral industries. In 1999, they purchased East Texas Cemetery Services Inc. in Nacogdoches, Texas, providing grave services and outer burial containers to local funeral homes in the East Texas area. They eventually sold the business after 22 years. Mark was also an original founder of CMG Funeral Partners LLC., which owned and operated fifteen funeral homes, cemeteries and crematories. They credit Lamar University for providing the background of accounting and business that was essential to building successful careers. Campus life was a fun and enjoyable experience marked by membership in Delta Sigma Pi, service as a resident assistant in the dorm and through participation in sporting events and social activities. Both Mark and Cindy have lifelong friendships and wonderful memories. As a result, they chose to give back to Lamar University by providing the **Mark and Cindy Morris Presidential** Scholarship in Accounting to a student who wishes to earn a degree.

Michelle B. Shepard '87 began her college journey in 1983 when she graduated from Port Neches-Groves High School. She was thrilled to have the opportunity to attend college and applied to Lamar University. It was a great option for her: close to home and affording an excellent education for the cost. Her parents could pay her tuition, and she worked part-time to pay for other expenditures. Since Lamar was a smaller institution, she received invaluable help from professors and mentors from the student development office and participated in many organizations. Some of those include Alpha Lambda Delta, Alpha Chi Omega, Order of Omega, Cap and Gown, Peer Advising and Leadership Lamar. She had the opportunity to hold leadership positions and make lifelong friends. In 1987, she graduated with a B.B.A. in accounting and went to work for Arthur Anderson in Houston. She earned her certified public accountant license and continued her professional career for 10 years with Texas Commerce Bank, which is now known as JP Morgan

Chase. She is married and privileged to be called "Mom" by three beautiful young adults. She shared she was fortunate to be a full-time mother and a part-time accountant. Michelle and her husband Glen have benefited from their college education and are thrilled to be able to give back to her alma mater with the Michelle Broussard Shepard Regents Scholarship in Accounting. The couple's challenge to each recipient is to join at least one student organization and become the very best version of themselves.

John Daniel "Dan" Rienstra '91 was the son of John D. Jr. '60 and Ellen Walker Rienstra '62, '80, and the grandson of John H. "Johnnie" '29 and Esther Hooks Walker '29, all LU alumni and lifelong supporters of Lamar University. His grandparents, Johnnie and Esther Walker, attended Lamar in its first incarnation, South Park Junior College, both graduating in 1929 with Associate of Arts degrees. Dan came up through public schools in the Beaumont school district and was a 1982 graduate of Beaumont-Charlton-Pollard High School, where he was an award-winning debater. He then attended Lamar and in 1991 earned a Bachelor of Business Administration degree in economics. He possessed a natural aptitude for business and finance, which he built upon through his studies at Lamar. He exhibited an exemplary work ethic, both with his studies and his constant employment throughout his college career. Dan pledged Phi Delta Theta fraternity and enjoyed his years of association with the group, making many friends and entering enthusiastically into college life. Throughout his short adult life, he continued to love and support Lamar University. He died March 15, 1996. Described by a friend as "bright, kind, fun-loving and wise," he has been sorely missed by all. Ellen Rienstra and Dan French '73 established the John Daniel "Dan" Rienstra Faculty **Scholar Endowment in Business in** Dan's memory.



FOOTBALL GAMES & FAMILY TIES:

A multigenerational LUleaacu by SARAH PARKER

strong educational foundation, drive and determination are all attributes Wendy (Crowder) Fournet '04, executive vice president and chief administrator of a massive multi-hospital health system based in Tennessee, credits with her success. But of

all the factors that have led her to coveted c-suite positions in the healthcare industry, the unwavering support of her father, Vernon Crowder '64, is right at the top of the list.

"My father always told me and my sister that we could do whatever we wanted to do, and that helped drive my own thoughts that I could do anything I wanted," Wendy said. "I definitely got my drive from my dad's side of the family."

Many of Wendy's fondest childhood memories come from days spent with her father on Lamar University's campus, where Vernon taught for three decades in the physical education department.

"For me, [Lamar] was just part of life," Wendy said. "With my grandfather [Tolbert Crowder] being on [Lamar's] board of regents and my dad working there, every Saturday night we were at the football games."

A former Lamar football player, Vernon was proud to share his school spirit with his family at countless Lamar sporting events.

"I did enjoy sharing my work life with my family," Vernon said. "During summer sessions when my children were out of school, I would often take one of my children with me to the University. All of my children enjoyed going to the various athletic events at LU. We took them to football, basketball, volleyball and track meets at Lamar. These were great family outings. They developed a real love for Lamar Athletics and my career at Lamar."

That love for Lamar was foundational for Wendy, so when she graduated high school, it was never a question of where she would earn her bachelor's degree.

"Lamar is a big part of our family. So many people in my family graduated from Lamar." Wendy said, counting off numerous relations among the University's alumni. "I think the love my grandfather had for Lamar and [his] wanting it to be successful was probably one of the



biggest drivers for me. He was a strong figure in my life growing up."

With both parents working in education, Wendy felt like the education field was the natural path forward, but after earning her bachelor's in history at Lamar with "some of the best teachers," she ultimately decided to take her career and continued education in a new direction, pivoting into the healthcare industry.

"I really loved history, and I taught for several years, but I found out through teaching that I really like to work with adults," Wendy said. "I really enjoyed facilitating and doing workshops, and that put me in a position where I was looking at other opportunities."

Wendy got her start in healthcare at the University of Texas Medical Branch, working in organizational development. She went on to earn her master's degree in human resources and leadership development from LSU in 2015. Before graduating with her master's, Wendy had already landed her first chief administrator role at EQhealth in Baton Rouge.

"Wendy was always a competitive student [and] athlete,"



Vernon said. "I am quite certain that her experiences gave her a confidence that she could compete with anyone in any endeavor."

Tapping into that confidence and drive, Wendy continued to land executive level positions, working as chief human resources officer for a health system in Lake Charles and chief administrative officer for a health system in Kalispell and Billings, Montana.

"I had really wanted to succeed," Wendy said. "I wanted to be in leadership, but I never really had my eye on the c-suite. Promotions during my career made me realize that I could do more, and I made the leap to apply for director roles."

For the past two years, Wendy has served as executive vice president and chief administrator of Erlanger Health System, the largest nonprofit health system in the Chattanooga area. Erlanger is nationally acclaimed and boasts six world-class hospitals, including the only Level I Trama Center and the only children's hospital in the region, as well as a leading academic medical center and 28 primary care locations. Erlanger employs around 8,000 workers, and its healthcare professionals treat more than one million people each year.

"It's a lot of fun," Wendy said. "Everything that is not clinical falls under me. I have marketing. I have human resources. I have compliance, patient experience, diversity, equity and inclusion, all things that help support a health system fall to me to manage and run for the organization."

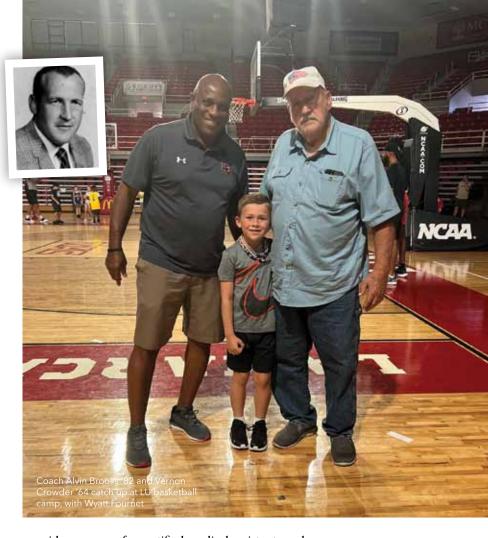
With a family filled with medical professionals, Wendy strives to do all she can to support Erlanger's employees and make sure their needs are met.

"After COVID, there was a lot of burnout and people wanting to get out of healthcare. It's important to me in the position that I'm at to create a culture that's inviting and that people want to thrive in," Wendy said. "The most rewarding thing is making sure that the community mission continues in healthcare, that I leave a place better than it was and that it is going to be sustainable in the future."

While at Erlanger, Wendy continued to pursue her education, and in 2024 earned her doctorate in organizational change from Baylor University. For her dissertation, Wendy researched women's leadership roles in the healthcare industry and gender gaps in executive healthcare. Her studies have ignited a passion in her to help female healthcare workers become advocates for themselves and not be afraid to seize growth opportunities.

"I think for younger generations of women, getting them involved in STEM programs and some type of understanding that they can advance themselves with scientific-type degrees is important," she said.

Inspiring the next generation of healthcare workers is one of Wendy's goals at Erlanger. She has worked to partner with local high schools in underserved areas to



provide programs for certified medical assistants and sterile tech processing that allow students to graduate with those designations.

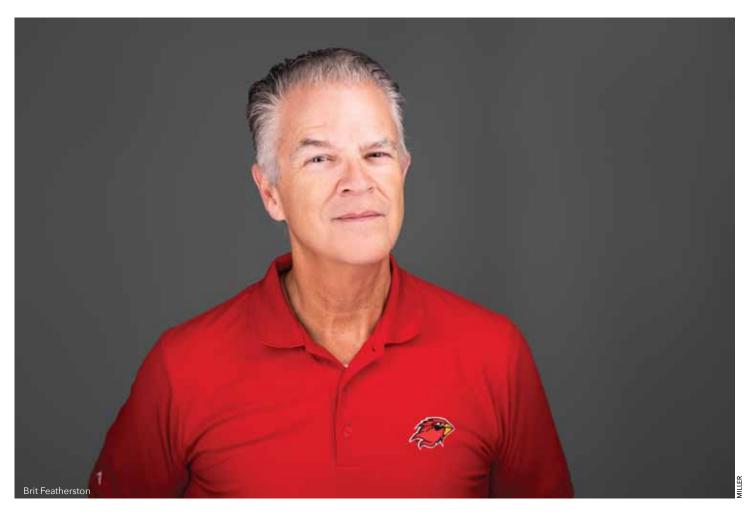
"Since I started that program two years ago, we will now have 10 high schools participating this coming year," Wendy said. "One student who went through the program went on to get her vocational nursing designation and now works at Erlanger. Getting kids interested in healthcare and giving them opportunities to see where they can go at an early age is really important."

As for the next generation of the Crowder/Fournet family, the legacy as Cardinals continues. Both of Wendy's sons, Colin '22 and Cole '21, earned their bachelor's degrees at Lamar.

Following in his mother's footsteps in the healthcare industry, Colin serves as a trauma ICU nurse in Tennessee.

Cole works as mechanical engineer, leading projects involving advanced metrology tools and complex manufacturing systems. He says Lamar was "an easy choice" not only because of its strong engineering program, but also due to the "deep family ties" his mother and other relatives have with the school.

"My mother's experience at Lamar and the pride she has always shown in her education played a huge role in my decision [to attend]," Cole said. "I'm proud to be part of a multigenerational legacy at Lamar University."



Chasing justice

Two-time Lamar University grad Brit Featherston serves the Lone Star state through public safety, prosecution

by CASSANDRA JENKINS

ocated along Fannin Street in downtown Beaumont on the 13th floor of the Century Tower sits the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of Texas, a government agency whose mission is to represent the United States in both criminal and civil litigation in East Texas.

The 13-story glass and concrete building was the home of justice, determination and freedom for Port

Arthur native Brit Featherston '85, '87, for 23 years.

Featherston joined the U.S. Attorney's Office in 1996 as a new Baylor University law grad and executive assistant and eventually worked his way up to becoming U.S. Attorney before retiring from the office in 2022. During his tenure, he closed major cases such as the dragging death of James Byrd Jr. in Jasper; served as the Justice Attaché for the U.S. Embassy in Kabul, Afghanistan; and managed various programs for the Department of Justice.

In the beginning

Before his illustrious career as a lawyer, attorney and liaison took off, Featherston was just a boy who wanted to learn the best way to protect and serve his people.

"I started as a lifeguard working at a local pool when I was in high school," Featherston said. "I had to take a basic first aid

class, and I liked that so much that I got interested in first aid and emergency management, which eventually led me to take an emergency medical technician class at Lamar."

Featherston spent three to four years working as an EMT and taking part-time classes at Lamar University before he began moving towards his next journey becoming a police officer.

"One day, at the hospital, I was helping several cops fight a guy that had come into the emergency room and was assaulting the emergency room staff," he said, thinking back. "I met several police officers through that, and they ended up saying, 'Have you ever thought about being a cop?' I never thought about it before, but I was young and looking for fun, so I decided to apply and see if I could become a cop—and it worked."

Featherston joined the Port Arthur Police Department in 1981, where he worked as a cop and detective for 10 years.

"The two things being an EMT and being a police officer have in common are that they help people," he said. "I knew I wanted to protect and serve, and that was my calling if there ever was one."

During his transition into the workforce, Brit earned his associate's degree in law enforcement from Lamar in 1985. He later earned his Bachelor of Science in criminal justice in 1987. He also received his Texas Commission on Law Enforcement, or TCOLE, license at the Lamar University Police Academy.

He said he usually worked part-time or night shifts so he could go to school during the day and still graduate with his college degree.

"I loved my job, so I never wanted to move after high school," Featherston said. "Lamar allowed me to be an EMT and a cop and still go to school. I remember there were times when I had a test the next day and we'd have to do transfers from Galveston to Houston, and on the way back, I'd be in the back of the ambulance or cop car studying for a test."

Featherston said he remembers falling asleep in class often due to the grueling schedule; however, he said he always felt like his professors appreciated the students who worked and went to school.

"I always got great feedback from the professors to give me that morale boost, that encouragement to keep going and get it done," he said.

Since he graduated, Featherston has returned to Beaumont several times to teach at the Lamar University Police Academy. He has also been a guest speaker and lecturer for the Criminal Justice at LU.

A new direction

After graduating from Lamar in 1987, Featherston went on to pursue a law degree from Baylor University, graduating in 1992. After a short stint in practice as a private attorney, he became a prosecutor for the Brazoria County District Attorney's Office in 1995. There, he prosecuted misdemeanor and felony cases until joining the U.S. Attorney's Office in 1996.

The U.S. Attorney, according to the Department of Justice, is the chief federal law enforcement officer in a given district who is primarily responsible for prosecuting federal crimes and representing the U.S. government in civil litigation, including crimes such as drug trafficking, fraud and terrorism. The Eastern District of Texas includes Beaumont, Lufkin, Plano, Sherman, Texarkana and Tyler.

During his time as a prosecutor, Featherston's more memorable cases included the infamous murder case of James Byrd Jr. in Jasper by the three men who chained the young man behind a truck and dragged him for three miles until he died. All three men were either given the death penalty or received a life sentence.

"The case was huge," Featherston said. "It garnered international attention. A lot was riding on it, and it was our job to make sure that justice was served and these people were put in jail, and that's what we did."

Another highlight of his career was becoming a justice attaché two different times for the U.S. Embassy in Kabul, Afghanistan, and Baghdad, Iraq. A justice attaché is a senior Department of Justice official who serves as the primary liaison to the members of the Iraqi judiciary and oversees the various law enforcement components under the Chief of Mission

in Iraq.

"Working overseas, having the opportunity to work in Afghanistan and Iraq are things that no normal prosecutors get to do," Featherston said. "I was fortunate enough to be chosen to go over there and run those operations. I got to work with locals who wanted to make their country better, who wanted to protect their country, and I loved it."

During his career, Featherston received several commendations and awards for his work as a police officer and attorney, including:

- Police Officer of the Year in 1981
- An FBI commendation for his work on the James Byrd Jr. capital murder case in 2000
- A Public Service Commendation from the U.S. Coast Guard in 2006 for his service during Hurricane Rita and the development of the Sabine-Neches Maritime Security Plan
- · Commendations from the Department of Justice for work during Hurricane Harvey and for his service as the justice attaché

Featherston retired from the U.S. Attorney's Office in 2022. He now serves as the executive assistant district attorney for the Jefferson County, Texas District Attorney's Office in Beaumont.

Today

He said his current career mission is to continue growing a nonprofit organization he helped start in 2024 called reVision Southeast Texas, which provides mentors and resources to youths aged 12 to 22 who have been involved in the juvenile justice system. The organization partners with Lamar University and other organizations to provide services.

"True happiness comes from serving other people," Featherston said. "It doesn't come from fancy cars or material things, but when you can help somebody else out, that's where your true worth comes from. That's when you should feel good about yourself."

'They are the magic

Ann Die Hasselmo endowment gift used to recognize faculty excellence at Lamar University

by CASSANDRA JENKINS



nn Die Hasselmo created her namesake endowment in 1986—a gift a lifetime in the making.

Hasselmo graduated from Lamar University in 1966 and went on to serve as a professor, dean and LU Foundation trustee later in life. She was also designated as a distinguished alumna and served as a commencement speaker on three separate occasions.

In addition to playing a role on dozens of boards at universities both in and out of Southeast Texas, she also served as president of Hendrix College in Arkansas. In 2002, she joined Academic Search in Washington, D.C., a leading higher educational executive search firm, and rose to become senior managing director.

However, despite her many accolades and experiences across various higher educational institutions across the United States, she said her unending love and respect for her first alma mater never wavered. And even today, creating the Ann Die Hasselmo Faculty Excellence Endowment at Lamar is one of her biggest shining accomplishments.

The endowment supports distinguished professors and their research and is used to further the mission of faculty excellence by providing funds for faculty awards. Each year, the University bestows approximately three merit awards on faculty who are deemed University Merit Award recipients, as well as the title University Professor to one superlative faculty member. In the following year, the former University Professor is named the Ann Die Hasselmo Faculty Scholar.

"With my love and respect for the University and the role it plays in Southeast Texas and around the world, I just knew I wanted to do something that would be budget-relieving and yet represent the faculty in some way," Hasselmo said of creating the endowment. "I wanted the interest and the payout on that endowment to support everything about those awards, from the cost of reception to medals."

Recipients of the University Professor Award are awarded for life and carry a \$2,500 honorarium, while merit awardees are given a \$1,000 stipend for research.

The Ann Die Hasselmo Faculty Excellence Endowment has gifted thousands of dollars over the years to dozens of faculty members. Past recipients have included assistant and full-time professors across all types of disciplines, such as speech and hearing sciences, biology, communication and economics.

In 2025, Lamar awarded the 29th University Professor and Merit Award honorees, with the University Professor distinction given to Kaye Shelton, a professor in Lamar University's doctoral program in educational leadership within the College of Education and Human Development.

In an April interview with Lamar University, Shelton said mentoring doctoral students at LU has been a deeply rewarding experience.

"Getting to witness their 'ah-ha' moments, their breakthroughs and the ripple effects of their work has been an amazing journey," she said. "Our students trust us with their curiosity, their struggles, their dreams. They are why our work matters. Our truest legacy is really in the lives we shape along the way."

Hasselmo said it's this sentimentality that led her to invest in the faculty and professors at Lamar, so students can continue to be taught by caring and compassionate educational leaders.

"Education is a remarkable opportunity in this country—it opens the world for people, and those people, teachers, who open the world for students deserve to be recognized for the transformative power of their classrooms," Hasselmo said. "They are the magic. They are the individuals who bring discipline to life. They capture the imagination of a student who takes their class, whether it's required or an elective, and a single class can change the entire trajectory of someone's life and their career."

Hasselmo said her professors at Lamar changed her life, starting as early as her freshman year of college, studying at the campus in the 60s.

"My respect for the faculty at Lamar started very early, as early as the beginning of my freshman year, with a professor who didn't want to see me fall behind," she said.

As a freshman college student out of Silsbee High School, Hasselmo was poised to study early education, but accidentally wound up in a sophomore political science class—an interaction that would kickstart the blossoming idea for the endowment two decades later.

"I was the only freshman in that class, and I remember early on being assigned material in the reserve reading room in the library," she recalled. "And although I was able to discuss it, on the day the material was due, the professor spoke with me, and he helped me drop that class without it affecting my GPA because he didn't want my academic career to fail by being misplaced in his class. I point that out because that kind of outreach was characteristic of my undergraduate years at Lamar."

The Baytown native said she went on to have four wonderful years at LU, creating meaningful relationships with her professors along the way and noting the personal interest that all faculty had for the students who ended up in their classes.

"What I experienced as a student—from English to psychology to biology—was that they cared," she said. "And Lamar is very fortunate that the values of the faculty I experienced as an undergraduate still exist today."

Hasselmo said she tries to attend the award ceremony every spring, when possible, to see the new group of recipients and how their careers are changing and hopes that her endowment continues to fund faculty excellence.

"It's important in everything we do to give back," she said. "We end up being on the receiving end of many good things in our lives, and many institutions benefit us along the way, whether it's a university or a theatre.

"Those of us who reap the benefits of the education we receive should consider it a privilege. But I also believe we have an obligation to give back to those who gave to us. Society benefits from that kind of giving back, and when we enrich an institution, we enrich the world we live in by doing so."





Lamar University recognized five exceptional graduates at the annual Distinguished Alumni Awards April 4, 2025. The Distinguished Alumni Awards celebrate graduates who have made significant contributions in their respective fields while demonstrating a steadfast commitment to Lamar University and their communities. Honorees are Carolyn (Johnson) Keating '67, Stephen Lee '89, J. David Montagne '74, Roland Rodriguez '74 and Herman Wilson '63.

















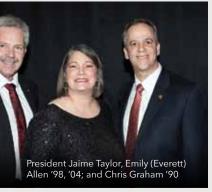




































FROM GRIDIRON TO GRANITE:

BERNIE AULD'S JOURNEY
FROM LAMAR TO NATIONAL
DAM SAFETY LEADER

by STEPHAN MALICK

hen Bernie Auld '82 reflects on his journey from a Lamar University football scholarship recipient to a nationally recognized dam safety engineer, he does so with a mix of humility, humor and unmistakable pride. "It's kind of cool," he said early in the conversation, "to be interviewed by my alma mater. That's up there."

Auld's story is one of resilience, reinvention and relentless curiosity. It begins in Port Arthur, Texas, where he was raised, and winds through decades of engineering innovation, public safety advocacy and a deep-rooted passion for learning.

Auld's Lamar experience began with an athletic scholarship that allowed him to stretch a four-year degree into five and a half, thanks in part to a redshirt year following knee surgery. He was on the 1981 squad that beat the 4th-ranked Baylor team in a nail-biting 18-17 victory. He still holds a tie for the fifth-longest interception return in Lamar football history—a 60-yard run that could have been 70 and a touchdown, had it not been for a pulled hamstring.

"It was cold and rainy that day," he recalled with a laugh. But it wasn't just the football field that shaped him.

"Lamar taught me how to learn," Auld said. "Coming out of high school, I didn't know how. College forced me to figure it out."



He credits a hydrology and hydraulics professor for helping him visualize engineering concepts in three dimensions, a skill that would become foundational in his career.

Engineering a safer future

After graduating in 1982, Auld's career took him from West Texas to Nashville, where he helped design the landside infrastructure for the then-new Nashville airport—work that remains in use today. His career trajectory shifted dramatically while earning his master's degree at the University of Tennessee when he partnered with Bruce Schanz, a national figure in dam safety. That collaboration led to co-authoring a paper on incremental hazard evaluation for dams, which remains influential in the field.

In 1995, Auld launched his own consulting firm, designing over 225 McDonald's locations across 11 states and leading major floodplain mitigation projects. One standout effort in Jonesboro, Arkansas, removed over 250 structures from a FEMA-regulated floodplain—at no cost to the government.

But the 2008 economic downturn forced Auld to reevaluate his career path.

"I sat down and asked myself," he said, "What do I want to do when I grow up? The answer: dam safety."

He joined the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) in 2011, overseeing inspections and modernization projects across 49 dam sites.

At TVA, Auld has been at the forefront of integrating cutting-edge technology into dam safety. He developed a thermal imaging system to detect seepage in earthen dams—a method now used across TVA's high-hazard embankments.

"All earthen dams seep," he said. "The key is detecting changes. That's where the risk lies. We're always looking for change, that's the red flag."

He's also helped implement drones, submersibles and ground-penetrating radar to inspect dams that are otherwise inaccessible.

One of his most significant projects involved a \$100 million seismic retrofit of Pickwick Dam, located just 100 miles from the New Madrid Seismic Zone.

"We deal in extreme events," Auld said. "Our dams are designed for one-in-10,000-year events. That's the level of risk we manage."

A philosophy of passion and purpose

When asked about his professional philosophy, Auld doesn't hesitate. For him, that passion is dam safety.

"Find what you're passionate about and go for it," he said. "It may take a good part of your life, but it's worth it. I look forward to working each day. This is what drives me."

That said, he and his wife, Christy, do make time for life's pleasures. They share a love of travel, cigars and fine spirits—he favors tequila and bourbon; she prefers rum and scotch. Their lifestyle blog, "All I Ever Wanted to Know," chronicles their adventures. "She's the writer," Auld said with a chuckle. "I just supply the cigars."

Their blended family includes three children and seven grandchildren, all living in Middle Tennessee. Known affectionately as "Coach" to his grandkids—a nod to his years coaching youth football—Auld beams when talking about them. "We're going to a Braves game for Father's Day," he said. "It's always fun."

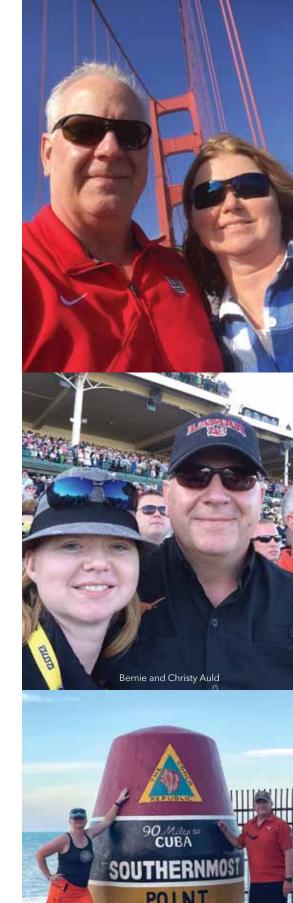
Full circle

Despite his national and professional impact, Auld remains deeply connected to the area. He visits Port Arthur when he can, though most of his family has relocated to the Houston area. He also fondly recalls his culinary roots.

"Growing up in Port Arthur, that's a culinary mecca—totally Cajun," he said. "I still miss the boudain and the brisket. You just can't find good beef barbecue in Tennessee. Tony Chachere's is all you can find here, but I still have some TexJoy steak seasoning in the back."

Returning to Lamar's campus recently, Auld was struck by how much it had grown and his memories here.

"It was kind of cool to see the Lamar campus again," he said of a recent visit. "It really feels like things have come full circle."



FALL 2025 | CARDINAL CADENCE





by SUSAN JOHNSTON TAYLOR



t was family conversations over fruit at her grandparents' kitchen that stirred Lauren Richardson's '15 curiosity about science. Richardson's grandmother worked in a cancer research lab at The University of Texas Medical Branch (UTMB) in Galveston, so she'd talk about experiments or protein structures, cells dying or what they were trying to identify.

"Both of my grandmothers are my passion for why I'm doing science," explained Richardson, who is now an assistant professor at UTMB and co-chief scientific officer at Gravitas Women's Health Solutions Inc. "One of them had cancer and actually passed away from cancer but really got me interested in why cancer develops, what are some of the mechanisms of that?"

Growing up in the area with several members of her family affiliated with Lamar, it felt like a natural fit. Richardson's grandfather, Andrew

Johnson, was a professor of history and vice president for administration, personnel and student services at LU. He served as interim president from 1984 to 1985, and her grandmother, Betty Johnson, worked at Lamar for a time. Her mother, Laura (Johnson) '77, '79, taught at Lamar and her dad, Ben Stafford '81, '85, and husband, Alex, also attended Lamar. Uncles John '78, Bradley '85 and Bill '89 Stafford; aunt Letitia (Johnson) Farnie '84; cousins Crystal (Rost) '01 and Brian Stafford '17, '19; and in-laws, Katherine (Streetman) '78 and David Richardson '83, '95, round out the Cardinal connections.

Richardson was a McNair Scholar and received the Gene Ohmstede Scholarship in biology. During her undergrad, she worked in the campus bookstore, served as membership vice president of her sorority Alpha Delta Pi, hosted orientations for new students, and conducted research with

Ian Lian, associate professor of biology. "He was my undergrad research mentor and really showed me that science can be fun, creative and explorative," she said. "He is very focused on helping his students, so I learned a very fun side of science from him."

She also worked on cancer research with Yong Sun Lee at UTMB as an undergraduate student. "That was a great opportunity because it's where I got my first manuscript, which helped me get into grad school," she added. Taking a biotechnology course with Lian and teaching pig dissections for Anatomy and Physiology classes were additional highlights of her undergrad year at Lamar.

Outside of campus, Richardson attended the National Cancer Society Conference in Philadelphia and presented to Congress about the importance of funding for undergraduate research through a program called Poster on the Hill with the support of Lian. She says the latter experience "really sparked my passion for undergraduate research, and still to this day I like to host undergrads, high school, middle school students in our lab to just learn about science and to spark their interest in science as an educational path for them."

Seizing the opportunities available during undergrad helped build a competitive CV for graduate school applications. "I'm glad that I attended Lamar, because I got so much research experience, so much tailored classroom attention that I was able to make good grades, create a great CV and get into an amazing graduate program," Richardson said.

Her undergraduate research experience and thesis through the Ronald E. McNair Postbaccalaureate Achievement Program allowed her to skip a master's degree and go straight to UTMB for a Ph.D. in cell biology.

As a tenure-track assistant professor in the OB-GYN department at UTMB, Richardson now brings her medical students to conferences at Lamar and elsewhere. "I help to manage the Division of Basic Science and Translational Research Labs," she explained. "I conduct research as part of a very large interdisciplinary collaborative group called the Menon Lab."

The Menon Lab for Perinatal Research is led by Dr. Ramkumar Menon, who also mentored Richardson for her Ph.D. and guided her throughout her career. The lab focuses on understanding and reducing preterm birth, an obstetrical condition where babies are born too soon and are often premature.

"No one knows why some babies are born too soon, and there are a lot of risk factors for moms that can lead to pregnancy complications," Richardson says. "We are passionate about helping moms and babies by understanding why women have adverse pregnancy outcomes. We create new therapies for pregnant women, and we try to evaluate those therapies before they go into clinical trials. To evaluate these therapies, we create new platforms for laboratory testing."

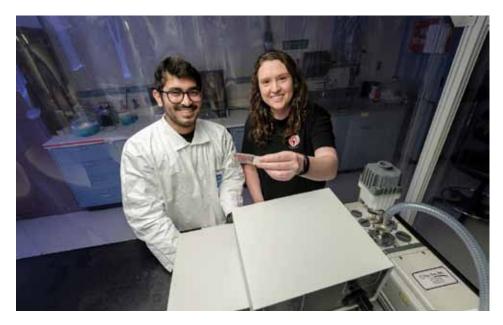
Richardson specializes in organ-on-chip technology. "We basically recreate human organs, but in tiny plastic devices, so that we can truly model human organs in the lab and try to better understand why women go into preterm labor or develop preeclampsia or gestational diabetes," she said. These devices can also be used to evaluate how much of a drug or environmental pollutant can cross from the mother to the baby during pregnancy.

So many people approached the lab wanting to use what the group has developed through academic research that it has spun off into a biotech company. With Richardson as co-chief scientific officer, Gravitas Women Health Solutions Inc. gives other entities access to this expertise and technology through a fee for service.

"If a person wants to evaluate a drug or study a biological mechanism in one of our reproductive organ-on-chips, they'll set up a meeting with us, we discuss their scientific question,

> and design an experiment that works for them," she said. "We do pregnancy and women's health reproductive organ-onchip related studies for a fee through that company." Gravitas can also provide data interpretation and manuscript assistance on a consulting basis.

In addition to teaching and research, Richardson is active in her church community and remains passionate about inspiring the next generation of scientists. "We need more men and women scientists," she said. "I think the younger you can educate people and show them different avenues of science, or any STEMtype career, the greater the opportunity you have to really change the trajectory of their educational future."





At the top

Online MBA among nation's most affordable

Lamar University has earned a place among the nation's most affordable online MBA programs, ranking 32 in College Consensus's "40 Most Affordable Online MBA

Programs for 2025." The degree can be completed in as little as one calendar year.

LU recognized for first-generation student success

FirstGen Forward announced the selection of Lamar University as one of 20 new higher-education institutions to advance to the Network Leader phase of the FirstGen Forward Network. The University was chosen based on its demonstrated commitment to advancing the outcomes of first-generation students through improving both firstgeneration student success initiatives and institution-wide approaches.

University HQ rankings recognize LU nationally and statewide

University HQ's latest rankings recognize LU for its excellence in online and on-campus education, receiving high marks both nationally and statewide.

- online MBA in criminal justice ranked No. 2 in the nation,
- online master's program in clinical psychology ranked No. 5
- online bachelor's degree in computer programming placed No. 10
- M.Ed. in marriage and family therapy holds No. 14
- B.B.A. in entrepreneurship ranked No. 21
- M.Ed. in counseling ranked No. 25 in the nation
- On-campus programs recognized statewide: human resources program ranked No. 15, criminal justice program placed No. 22 and cybersecurity program ranked No. 23

LU earns top national rankings

Intelligent.com, a trusted resource for program rankings and higher education planning, ranked Lamar University among the top institutions in the nation in several categories for 2025.

- M.Ed. in teacher leadership-gifted and talented secured the No. 2 spot nationwide
- Quickest Online Bachelor's Degree Programs: LU earned No. 2
- Fastest Online Finance Degree Programs: LU ranked No. 3
- Fastest Online Criminal Justice Degree Programs: LU ranked No. 4
- Online M.S.N. in nursing administration ranked No. 5

Online programs earn affordable accolades

LU has once again been recognized for its commitment to affordable, high-quality education with three of its online degree programs earning top spots in the Affordable Degree Guide's 2025 rankings, which assess tuition costs, accreditation and academic quality.

- B.B.A. in finance ranked No. 7
- B.S. in sociology placed No. 14
- B.B.A. in human resource management placed No. 12

Lamar University's continued recognition in national affordability rankings highlights its dedication to offering high-quality education without the financial strain often associated with earning a degree. By prioritizing both academic excellence and affordability, the university remains a strong choice for students seeking to advance their careers without accumulating significant debt.

Leading LU

Cole leads Center for Midstream Management and Science

Philip Cole has been named executive director of the Center for Midstream Management and Science (CMMS) at Lamar University.

"Our goal is to bring experts from across industry and academia to identify and find solutions to any failure points in transporting products," Cole said. "We seek to elevate the profile of CMMS at Lamar University within the pipeline industry for the safe and reliable delivery of natural gas in Texas. With the Golden Triangle LNG infrastructure and having the fourth largest port in the nation, Lamar University is at the right place and the right time. We have a bright future."



Wickland named VP for operations, CFO

Mary Wickland '92 has been named LU's vice president for operations and chief financial officer. A Southeast Texas native and Lamar alumna, she previously served as executive vice president for finance and operations at Lamar State College Port Arthur, Lamar State College Orange and Lamar Institute of Technology.

"Since I'm a true Southeast Texan, born and raised in Beaumont, I am so very excited to join the university that opened all kinds of doors for me," Wickland said. "I am ready to give back to the Lamar University community what it gave to me-the ability and confidence to always move forward and never give up."



Williams named director of resiliency center

Brian Williams, an expert in emergency management and public administration, now leads the Center for Resiliency at LU as director.

"The way we define community resilience is by looking at the system as a whole. Communities consist of local government, businesses, nonprofits and other

key systems like healthcare and the environment. Resilience is the ability of these components to work together when adversity strikes," Williams said.



Welch named provost and vice president for academic affairs

Brett Welch has been appointed as provost and vice president for academic affairs at Lamar University.

"As interim provost, I have prioritized shared governance and inclusive decision-making," Welch said. "The growing spirit of cooperation between the

provost's office and various constituency groups has reinforced my confidence in Lamar University's potential for continued growth and excellence."

"Dr. Welch is an exceptional representative of our institution. He effectively communicates our academic endeavors to the public, alumni, donors and community partners," Taylor said. "His ability to articulate our goals and connect with the community will be a significant asset in his role as provost. His collaborative approach to leadership ensures that all areas of our university work together seamlessly, which positions Lamar University for continued success as we move into our second century."

Quanta center affords students hands-on training

In January, 18 students from LU's mechanical and industrial engineering departments used their winter break to visit the Quanta Advanced Training Center, located at the state-of-the-art Lazy Q Ranch in La Grange, Texas. During this trip, the students were able to receive their OSHA 10-Hour Certification and explore the Quanta training facility.

The students participated in an OSHA-authorized training course, hands-on engineering experiences, career preparation workshops,



and a Six Sigma introductory course. "The trip was very insightful into the world of electricity and internet that we use every day," Connor Hayes, senior mechanical engineering student, said. "The most impactful aspect of the visit was experiencing how much time is spent

on teaching safety and maintaining a safe culture throughout their company and their interactions."

The partnership between Quanta and Lamar University was established through the Texas State University System to provide career and internship opportunities to students and partner with LU's research and sponsored programs. Through months of collaboration with TSUS, Quanta Services, Lamar University's Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, and the Department of Mechanical Engineering, the program was offered completely free of charge to students. "This partnership is invaluable as it provides students with knowledge of career and internship opportunities with Quanta and its family of over 200 companies as well as networking opportunities, such as the Dashiell Career Day," Amy Dillow, marketing coordinator for the department of career and professional development, said.

Rodeo team launch spurs excitement

Lamar University launched its first rodeo team this fall, giving students the opportunity to compete at the collegiate level. Gene Theodori, associate provost for academic and research administration, is leading the effort to establish the team and recruit students. "This is a unique and exciting opportunity for our students to showcase their skills, represent LU and be part of one of the most historic sporting traditions in America," Theodori said.

The team will compete as a member school of the National Intercollegiate Rodeo Association, the sport's primary governing body. Unlike NCAA athletics, college rodeo is organized separately, with students competing in regional circuits to qualify for the College National Finals Rodeo held each June in Casper, Wyo. LU will compete in the NIRA's Southern Region, which includes colleges and universities from Texas and Louisiana, in a variety of events: bareback riding, saddle bronc riding, bull riding, tie-down roping, steer wrestling, team roping, breakaway roping, barrel racing and goat tying. "Students don't have to come in with a championship belt buckle to join," Theodori said. "We're building this team from the ground up, and we welcome all levels of experience."

Senior celebration

More than 100 seniors gathered in May at the Sheila Umphrey Recreational Sports Center to mark the end of their academic journeys during a special senior-only event hosted by the university.

Kyle Fayan, associate director of student involvement, revived the event after a three-year hiatus.

For many students, the evening was a reminder of how far they've come. Criminal justice senior Lindsey Hodges said the sense of community at Lamar played a big role in her experience. "I started as an online student, but I always came to campus for events like this," Hodges said. "Being here and feeling that connection, it reminded me I was part of something bigger and that Lamar really does feel like a family."

Reflecting on his academic journey, senior construction management student Embry Robles encouraged prospective students to consider Lamar's welcoming environment and the connections it fosters. "If I were to tell anyone curious about Lamar one thing, I'd say this is the land of opportunity," Robles said. "It's a place where you can really grow, personally, professionally and academically. But more than that, it's a community. People here genuinely care. You're never just a number."

LU launches leadership studies

Lamar University has launched a new leadership studies program aimed at equipping students with essential leadership skills to succeed in a rapidly evolving workforce. The program, offered through the Department of Leadership and Professional Studies, focuses on developing students' abilities in self, team and organizational leadership. Through a unique combination of classroom instruction, community service, peer collaboration and experiential learning, students will emerge with a deep understanding of how to lead effectively across diverse environments.

"It directly addresses an unprecedented demand for leadership talent," Jeff Dyson, president of M&D Supply, who will also serve as a faculty member in the new initiative, said. "With the worldwide growth of capitalism, the impending retirement of baby boomer-aged leaders, and the vast untapped business potential in many regions, this program is designed to equip the next generation of leaders with the essential marketable skills to thrive in these evolving landscapes."

Early bird admission program takes flight

LU has launched a new Early Bird Admission Program offering high school juniors early college admission and guaranteed scholarships to qualifying students. The pilot program has already made a major impact, with more than \$20 million in scholarship offers extended to students across Southeast Texas.

In total, 10 area high schools submitted 873 transcripts for review. Of those, 791 students met the eligibility requirements and received scholarship offers totaling \$20,832,000. In addition, 150 students were being notified that they are eligible to apply for Lamar University's Presidential Scholarship, a prestigious full-ride award.

"This program is truly unique, as it offers admission to students in the spring of their junior year, rather than waiting until the fall of their senior year," Hanna Terro, director of admissions, said. "Along with the admission offer, we are also awarding scholarships ranging from \$8,000 to \$40,000 over four years, depending on a student's academic profile. What sets Lamar University's program apart is the earlier timeline and the inclusion of an upfront scholarship offer. To qualify, students must be juniors who rank in the top 50% of their class and have a normalized weighted GPA of 3.5 or higher. Accepted students are guaranteed at least the University Scholars Scholarship, valued at \$8,000 over four years. Top-tier students may be awarded up to \$40,000 through the Cardinal Elite Scholars program.

LU Cheer cracks winner's circle in second appearance

Lamar University's cheer team earned a third-place finish at the 2025 National Cheerleaders Association College Nationals in Daytona Beach, Fla., marking a major step forward for the program. In only their second year



competing at the event, the Cardinals improved on last year's fourthplace finish to claim a spot in the winner's circle, reserved for the top three teams in each division. "Last year we were nervous," head coach Megan Thompson '20 said. "This year, we knew what to expect. The veterans on the team helped guide the newer athletes, and everyone had each other's back."

For Thompson, a Lamar alumna, the achievement carried personal meaning. "This was a full-circle moment for me," she said. "When I was on the team, we dreamed of competing at nationals. Now, I get to lead them there as a coach. It means everything." Thompson said the program's national recognition reflects the broader success of Lamar athletics in recent years. "It's not just us," she said. "Baseball, golf, basketball, football-Lamar is showing up across the board. Cheer is part of that too."

ove stories #matchmadeatlu

Kristin (McClure) '75, '77, and Larry Hamilton '84

Larry, who earned a B.B.A. in accounting, and Kristin, who holds a B.A. mathematics and M.Ed. in secondary education with emphases in math and science, met in the Setzer Student Center through a mutual friend in 1973 and got to know one another through many card games with their friend group. In addition, they spent one-on-one time together as Kristin helped Larry with his trigonometry, which he had a natural knack for already. What began as a friendship grew into love, and they began dating in the fall of 1973. That courtship led to becoming engaged at the end of 1974, followed by their wedding at Woodcrest Baptist Church in Groves on Aug. 22, 1975. Larry went on to work for Texaco in 1988 and then Huntsman Chemical Co. in 1995. Kristin began her teaching career at Beaumont Charlton Pollard then worked for Groves Middle School as a pre-algebra and algebra I teacher beginning in 1977. Their many adventures have been devoted to raising their three children and making joyful memories as a family. All three of their children, Jenny '04, '21, Robert '13 and Jill '09, '11, are not only Lamar alumni but also have worked for LU in different capacities. Larry and Kristin both retired in the spring of 2008 and now spend their time taking well-deserved mini vacations and living their best retired life. Some of their favorite pastimes are lunch and dinner dates at Olive Garden and regularly attending concerts of the Symphony of Southeast Texas. On Aug. 22, 2025, Larry and Kristin celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary.

Tiffany Ballard '13, '17, and Christopher Horner '15

We met through our roommates who were dating at the time. I wasn't interested at first, but then we ended up working together at the mall, and his great personality and humor won me over! Our love story is ever growing since 2010.

Catherine (Marchand) '74 and Manuel Nerios '75

I met my sweetie (Cathy) at Lamar in September of '71 at Brooks Shivers Hall. Our first date was Oct. 23. We dated off and on until my second semester when we realized we were in love. We've been together ever since, with Cathy graduating in May '74 with a B.S. in education. I graduated in December '75 with my B.B.A. We married in Galveston in April 1976 and now live in Seabrook, Texas. We celebrated 49 wonderful years of marriage in April with three children and three grandchildren. I am really glad we both decided to attend Lamar!







Neha (Sharma) '09 and Rasesh Patel '08

In Fall 2007, I came to Lamar university from India to pursue a master's degree. In a few months, I met Neha at an international student gathering. She had recently arrived for her master's program. We kind of hit it off and started hanging out as friends. Our first official date was at Spindletop museum, followed by a movie at Tinseltown and dinner at Johnny Casino's, thanks to my buddy who let me borrow his car for the day. I think we simply started falling for each other. During our time

> at Lamar, we experienced a couple of hurricanes that evacuated the town. Those were the times we became closer and committed to each other for rest of our lives. We married in 2013 and are blessed with a beautiful daughter (Risha) and son (Vraj). We look forward to spending the rest of our lives together and cherish every moment with loved ones. Special thanks to Lamar University and hurricanes for making this happen.

Wendy (Hudman) '92 and John Rice '09

My name is Wendy (Hudman) Rice, daughter of Carl and Carol Hudman. I graduated from Lamar in August of 1992. My husband, John Charles Rice, graduated from Lamar in 2009. Our daughter, Katie (Rice) Mayfield, graduated from Lamar in May of 2023 (summa cum laude) and is currently pursuing her master's degree in public administration at, you guessed it, Lamar. Our son John Charles Rice Jr. is currently working on his bachelor's in mechanical engineering, also at Lamar. Julie (Pack) McMahon, Katie's best friend who lived with us for three years after high school, graduated from Lamar in May 2024. As you can see, my parents have passed their love of Lamar down through the decades to their descendants. I am so grateful that Carol Overman met Carl Hudman all those years ago in the Baptist Student Union at Lamar College.



PATEL

This story is actually about my parents, Carl and Carol Hudman. They met at the old Baptist Student Union. My dad was playing hearts and saw my mom walk by when he decided he wanted to ask around about her. Someone told him she was in the band. Who knows where that came from because the only instrument she has ever played is the piano. The next day he started talking to her at the BSU and asked her to go see *The Sound of Music* at the movie theater. (It was the first time this movie was released.) She said yes because she'd already been eyeing him from afar. He even gave her a corsage that night. They were married in August of 1966 and celebrated their 58th anniversary last August.



HUDMAN

CLASS NOTES



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 P.O. Box 10011 Beaumont, TX 77710

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

YOU & LU A lifelong relationship.

The Office of Alumni Affairs is your connection.

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

Page Publishing has released a new book by Bette Stead '57, B.B.A. general business Why Precious the Cat 'Owns' a Retirement Home, a story about the adventurous Precious who finds a home away from home with retirement community residents. She lives

Don Eastham '59, B.S. chemical engineering, retired from DuPont as an engineering fellow. He and his wife, Amy, live in Victoria, taking care of two horses and paying tuition for two daughters.

LeRoy Schlechte '59, B.S. chemical engineering, lives in Kerrville with his wife of 63 years, Joyce. He works on Habitat for Humanity houses 2.5 days each week and both are active in their church, with LeRoy leading an adult Bible study group every Sunday morning.

60s

The Houston Bar Association Auxiliary has honored David J. Beck Sr. '61, with the 2025 Leon Jaworski Award for Community Service, recognizing his extraordinary career, his dedication to public service and his lasting contributions to the legal profession and the community. He is founding partner of Beck Redden LLP and lives in

The Texas Farm Bureau honored Don Fuchs '69, B.S. mechanical engineering, for his contributions to agriculture and the organization with the 2024 Texas Farm Bureau Pioneer Award. He and his wife, JoAnn '70, B.S. speech, live in West Columbia.

70s

Randall Rice '73, B.B.A. accounting, retired as county auditor and chief financial officer of Galveston County in March. He and his wife, Debbie '82, B.B.A. office administration, live in Dickinson.

The Southeast Texas Coaches Association named retired Nederland High School coach and physical education teacher Delbert Spell Jr. '73, B.S. health and physical education, to its Hall of Honor. He and his wife, Sharlyn, live in Nederland

The Southeast Texas Coaches Association inducted Tom Woolley Jr. '73, B.S. secondary education, into its 2024 Hall of Honor. He is assistant principal of Little Cypress-Mauriceville High School. He and his wife, Sharon (Womack) '75, B.S. home economics, live in Orange.

Mark Foreman '75, B.S. health and physical education, is interim athletic director of Maypearl school district. He and his wife, Vickie, live in Waxahachie.

Congratulations to Dianne (Smith) Timberlake '78, B.S. elementary education, '07, M.Ed. administration, on her retirement from Hardin-Jefferson school district as principal of China Elementary School. She and her husband, Glenn '86, B.S. secondary education, live in Beaumont.

For the second time in six years, Manuel Moreno Jr. '79, B.S. communication, is the recipient of the U.S. Tennis Association-Texas Section's Lloyd Sessions Educational Merit Award, which recognizes his significant contributions to promote the game of tennis statewide. He is head tennis coach and teacher at J. Frank Dobie High School in Pasadena school district. and he and his wife, Rebecca, live in Galveston.

80s

Jill Scoggins '80, B.S. communication, retired in February as director of external communications for the University of Louisville. She and her husband, David, live in Pooler, Ga.

The Southeast Texas Coaches Association named retired Bridge City High School athletic trainer Gene McKinley '81, B.S. health and physical education, to its Hall of Honor. He is an athletic trainer for Christus Health Foundation of Southeast Texas and lives

Bob Mahalik -82 retired from the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas in September 2024 and is senior vice president, director of strategic initiatives and M&A advisor of Vista Bank. He and his wife, Angie, live in Coppell.

Melissa (Miller) Wong '82, B.B.A. management retired as business manager from Nederland school district after 36 years of service. She and her husband, David '97, B.A.A.S. applied arts and sciences, who is women's tennis head coach at Lamar University, live in Nederland.

Bill Lindsey '84, B.B.A. general business, '99, M.B.A. business adminsitration, earned a Ph.D. in information systems and human factors and is a senior financial analyst with Sophic Synergistics. He and his wife, Tricia, live in League City.

Michael Wood '85, B.B.A. marketing, is chaplain for Heart to Heart Hospice. He and his wife. Lisa, live in Vidor.

Ester Holloman '86, A.A.S. food service management, is an administrative specialist for Division of University Advancement at Lamar University. She received the 2025 TSUS Regents Staff Excellence Award and lives in Beaumont.

John Via III '86, M.E.S. engineering science, serves on the board of directors of the American Society for Engineering Management and is also the associate director of the Master of Engineering Management and Leadership Program at Rice University. He and his wife, Jennifer, live in Morgan's Point.

Jessica (Ford) Johnson '88, B.S. health and kinesiology, retires in December 2025 as superintendent of Dayton school district after a 37-year career in education. She and her husband, John, live in Dayton.

The Assistant Coaches Hall of Fame inducted University of Maryland Men's Basketball Assistant Coach Steve Roccaforte '89, B.A.A.S. applied arts and sciences, into its 2025 class. He lives in College Park, Md.

90s

DeMonica Gladney '90, married Judge Robert Johnson in December 2024. She is senior counsel of chemical commercial and operations law with ExxonMobil Corp. They live in Houston.

Kellie (Dale) Rogers '91, B.A. English, '18, M.Ed. school counseling, is a licensed professional counselor at HOPE Services Mental Wellness and Life Coaching. She and her husband, Duanne, live in Winnie.

Mary (Sanders) Wickland '92, B.B.A. accounting, is vice president of operations and chief financial officer of Lamar University. She and her husband. Kevin, live in Beaumont.

Amtech Systems Inc. appointed Asif Jakwani '93, B.S. electrical engineering, to its board of directors. He and his wife, Thanh-Tan, live in Scottsdale, Ariz.

Theron Williams '93, B.B.A. marketing, owns Expert Appraisal Group. He and his wife, Dana, '91, B.B.A. general business-law, who is a trial attorney with The Williams Firm and chief tribal court judge for Alabama Coushatta Indian Reservation, live in Livingston.

Jamey Harrison '96, B.S. political science, '02, M.Ed. administration, is executive director of University Interscholastic League. He and his wife, Chelle '03, B.S. communication, live in Georgetown.

Yolander (Gatlin) Valrie '96, B.S. interdisciplinary studies, '18, M.Ed. administration, is principal of Fehl-Price Elementary School. She and her husband, Vernon, live in Beaumont.

George Johnson '99, B.G.S. general studies, is chief workforce operations officer for Advantage Solutions Inc. He and his wife, Yelena, live in Fort Mill, S.C.

Gina (Blinkenberg) Tilker '99, B.B.A. marketing, retired from the University of Texas at Arlington in February. She and her husband, Mark, live in Arlington.

From left, James Han, professor and director of choral activities; Michael McAndrew, instructor of music collaborative piano/music theory; Golden Wright '21, dean, College of Fine Arts and Communication; Michael Bartnik, chair, Mary Morgan Moore Department of Music; Logan Banister, assistant professor of saxophone and director of jazz band; Jeannette Fresne, associate dean, College of Fine Arts and Communication; Reese Maultsby, assistant professor of percussion; Tim Pallone '07, '09, instructor of music education

Texas Music Educators Association re

LU music alumni and friends gathered Feb. 14 at the TMEA Conference in San Antonio for an afterhours networking social hosted by the College of Fine Arts and Communication, Mary Morgan Moore Department of Music and the Office of Alumni Affairs.





















00s

Michael McGee '00, B.B.A. finance, '03, M.B.A. business administration, is chief landing officer for PrimeWay Federal Credit Union. He and his wife, Lisa, live in Cypress.

Jenny Placette '01, B.M. music, '21, M.Ed. administration, is a career and technology education coordinator and dual credit culinary arts instructor at Sidney Lanier High School in San Antonio school district. She earned principal certification and lives in San Antonio.

Brant Dews '02, B.B.A. management, is regional manager of industrial services for Sunbelt Rentals Inc. He and his wife, Allana (Rehfuss) '01, B.S. interdisciplinary studies, '19, M.Ed. administration, who teaches at Port Neches Primary, live in Port Neches.

LaShanda James '02, B.S. communication, married Phillip Allen in March. She teaches in Sheldon school district, and they live in Houston.

The Southeast Texas Coaches Association named **Cody Knight** '02, B.S. kinesiology, 2024 Boys Cross Country Coach of the Year. He is a teacher and coach at Middle School North in Barbers Hill school district. He and his wife, Lauren, live in Dayton.

Edward Sturrock '02, B.B.A. management information systems, is the Ben J. Rogers Chair in Entrepreneurship and Chief Entrepreneur at Lamar University. He lives in Vidor.

Belinda (Richardson) George '03, B.S. interdisciplinary studies, '08, M.Ed. administration, '15, Ed.D. educational leadership, is director of Spindletop Boomtown Museum at Lamar University. She and her husband, Melvin, live in Beaumont.

The Southeast Texas Coaches Association named Vidor High School math teacher and tennis coach **Ericka (Breaux) Richard** '03, B.G.S. general studies, '22, M.Ed. educational technology leadership, 2024 Girls Tennis Coach of the Year. She and her husband, **Randall** '92, B.A. history, who teaches special education at Vidor High School, live in Bridge City.

The Southeast Texas Coaches Association named **Chris Theriot** '03, B.S. kinesiology, 2024 Assistant Coach of the Year. He is assistant football coach and head boys track coach at Bridge City High School. He and his wife, **Lindsay (Robichau)** '04, B.S. nursing, who is a registered nurse in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit of

Christus St. Elizabeth Hospital, live in Orange.

Felicia Alexander-Branch

'05, B.A.A.S. applied arts and sciences, completed the Bank of America Cornell University certificate program in women's entrepreneurship in January. She owns Dependable Angel Services and lives in Port Arthur.

Tamara (Hanks) Grantham '05, B.A. English, authored book four of her Harleigh Sinclair Series, Harleigh Sinclair and the Kingdom of the Bristol Skull, in February. She and her husband, **Dr. David Grantham** '05, B.A. chemistry, live in Andover, Kan.

Michael Thomas '05, B.G.S. general studies, is head basketball coach at West Brook High School in Beaumont school district and the Texas Association of Basketball Coaches named him 2025 Coach of the Year. He lives in Beaumont.

Rachel (Martinez) Sexton '06, B.S. kinesiology, teaches physical education at Highland Park Elementary School in Nederland school district. She and her husband, Cody, live in Port Neches.

Will Ammerman '07, B.S. communication, was selected for Navy Operational Aviation Command. He and his wife, Andrea, live in Newcastle, Okla.

John Morrell '07, M.B.A. business administration, is chief credit officer and advisory director at Texas First Bank. He and his wife, Briannen (Mirabella) '04, B.S. nursing, live in Beaumont.

Scott Hawk '08, B.S. kinesiology, is a financial advisor with Beaumont Wealth Advisors. He and his wife, Amber (Baxter) -06, live in Beaumont.

Aron Arceneaux '09, B.S. communication, is the annual giving officer in the Division of University Advancement at Lamar University. He and his wife, Mandy (Dowden) '10, B.S. communication, who is brand and marketing manager for Ritter at Home, live in Nederland.

The Greater East Texas Panhellenic Council presented its 2024 Martin Luther King Jr. Humanitarian Award to Marshall school district assistant superintendent **NaTasha Crain** '09, M.Ed. administration. She lives in Tyler.

Caitlin (Kruger) Hardegree '09, B.S. communication, B.S. political science, and her husband, Jacob, welcomed their son, Hudson, in October 2025. She is marketing and communications manager with Metrocrest Services. They live in Keller.













LU brought together accomplished alumni, current students, and faculty and staff members for an evening of engaging conversation over dinner Feb. 17. Hosted by the Office of Alumni Affairs, the event provides

students with valuable insights into

the professional landscapes of their

chosen fields.



Pre-Med table: bottom row from left, Brianna Brottem; Sarah Schreck; host Dr. Dan Thompson, orthopedic trauma surgeon with Beaumont Bone and Joint, attended LU; alumni host Dr. Lauree (Ripple) Thompson '91, neonatal medial director at Christus St. Elizabeth; Ana Christensen, chair of biology; and Alyson Vu; back row from left, DeAnna Gilmore '25, Grace Roy, Miguel Arevalo, Jenny Tu, Bilal Alani, Folasade Asoro '25, Saad Mohammed, Faith Cheng, Dylan Pardo, Mariana Cardenas, Riley Trent, Daisy Calero Estrella, Sergio Mendez, and Ashton Rainey



Pre-Dental table: bottom row from left, Estrella Balderas, Helena Bautista-Mathias, Waverlee Cooper '25, Rima Shaaban '25, Lillian Sink, Nga Nguyen; back row from left, Rehan Hamdan; Maryah Javed; Ashwini Kucknoor, assistant professor of biology; alumni host Dr. Trey Lacy '93, owner, Lacy Dentistry; Natalie Dickens;



Madison LeBlanc '25, Audrey Vincent-Eze, Krista Hollier '25; back row from left, Bianka Paciorek; Michael Smith '25; Sara Gubala; instructor of political science; alumni host Matthew Minick '11, county attorney for Hardin County; Peyton McLaurin '25; Antonio Lopez Maldonado



Leadership table: Zoey Ludwig; Olivia Manibo; Emily Robinson '22; alumni host Naomi Showers Doyle '10, '12, justice of the peace for Jefferson County Precinct 1 Place 1; Hannah Thrash '25; Hayden Jackson; back row from left, Natalie Bean, Julia Bourgeois, Spencer Cheng, Drake Rothenberger, Ryan Servantes, Rohini Rai



School; Carsen Barrett, and Cameron Hood



Speech and Hearing Sciences table: bottom row from left, Mary Wernig, Harvest Prater, Kayla Smith, Harleigh Pirtle, Audrey LeLeaux, Madison Hunt '25; back row from left, Dallas Lopez, Lana Leggett '25, alumni host Julie (Turner) Weldy '98, speech language pathologist for Hardin-Jefferson school district; Johanna Boult, chair of speech and hearing sciences; Soleih Gonzalez '25; Hannah Shearin '25

| CLASS NOTES |

Ashley (Crawford) Odom '09, B.S. kinesiology, '10, M.S. kinesiology, is associate head coach of Arizona State University women's basketball. She and her husband, Derrick, live in Tucson, Ariz.

Comedian, writer and actress **Kate Robards** '09, B.S. communication, appears in the short narrative film *Introvert Club*, which screened at the Jefferson Theater during the Boomtown Film and Music Festival in the Texas Proud block in February. She lives in New York, N.Y.

10s

Justin Griffith -10 is lead software engineer at Salient Systems. He and his wife, Katherine, live in Leander.

Adrianne (Meengs) '10, B.B.A. general business, '11, M.B.A. business administration, and Andrew Hamilton '15, B.B.A. marketing, welcomed their son, Arthur, in January. She is senior subcontracts administrator for S&B Engineers and Constructors, and they live in Boerne.

Amy Collins '11, M.B.A. business administration, is a certified public accountant and president of Richmond Bennett & Co. She lives in Village Mills. **Chad Crowson** '11, M.Ed. administration, is general counsel for Lake Travis school district. He lives in Midland.

Congratulations to **Christine (Felix) Herndon** '11, B.S. chemistry, and her husband, Brent, on the birth of their daughter, Maia. She earned her doctorate in dental surgery in 2015, and they live in Austin.

Ephraim Hill Jr. '11, B.S.

communication disorders, owns Southeast Texas Speech Pathology. He lives in Port Arthur.

Heather (Coody) Landers '11, B.S. nursing, a nurse at Baptist Hospitals of Southeast Texas, received the 2025 Baptist Way award for her work ethic and dedication. She lives in Orange.

Matthew Robertson '11, B.S. criminal justice, and Krista Adams '15, B.S. fashion retail merchandising were married in May. Matt is a football and softball coach at West Orange Stark High School, and Krista is a purchaser V at Texas Department of Transportation. They live in Pine Forest.

Congratulations to **Kiana Lewis** '12, B.S.W social work, on the birth of her daughter, Kaylani. She is special education coordinator for Holland Middle School in Houston school district. They live in Crosby.



Madison (Moody) Bell '12, B.G.S. general studies, and her husband, Joseph, welcomed her son, Max, in May 2024. She is an AdvoCare independent distributor, and they live in Jasper.

Markessa (Hayes) '12, B.S. health education, and James Cooper '11, B.A.S. applied arts and sciences, welcomed their daughter, Jazzlynn, in February. She is a telecommunications analyst for University of Texas Health Science Center Houston, and he is a chemist for INEOS Olefins and Polymers USA. They live in Manvel.

Raina (Tucker) Ellis '12, M.Ed. school counseling, is director of college, career and military readiness. She and her husband, David, live in Bastrop.

Jasmin (Duck) Landry '12, B.S. psychology, is a development coordinator for the Lamar University Foundation Inc. She lives in Bridge City.

Karie Singleton '12, A.A.S. nursing, is infection prevention lead at CHRISTUS Southeast Texas—St. Elizabeth Hospital and president of the Texas Society of Infection Control and Prevention. She lives in Lumberton.

Tania Castelan '13, B.A.A.S. applied arts and sciences, welcomed her son, Ruben, in March. She is a real estate agent with Connect Realty. She lives in Beaumont.

Derrick Conley '13, M.Ed. administration, is superintendent of Alto school district. He and his wife, Rena, live in Longview.

Lindsay (Rothschild) Cross '13,

B.A. American Sign Language, owns Cross Communication Interpreting Service, a sign language interpreting and translation agency. She and her husband, John, live in Lumberton.

Casey Ford '13, B.A. English, '15, M.A. English, is assistant director of faculty success at Lamar University. She lives in Nederland.





















The "True North" sculpture project in the Houston Heights neighborhood displayed a sculpture titled Nature Reclaims: Wood Pile, by Amanda Barry Jones '13, B.F.A. studio art, as one of eight in the Heights Boulevard esplanade. Amanda is a ceramicist and sculptor and is program coordinator and instructor of fine arts at Galveston College. She lives in Houston.

Megan (Fournerat) Mistric '13, B.G.S. general studies, earned her master's degree in social work in May. She is a hospice liaison for Amedisys. She and her husband. Nathan '13, B.B.A. entrepreneurship, B.B.A. management, B.B.A. general business, '21, M.B.A. business administration, who is a technical account manager with AWC Inc., live in Nederland.

Jacqueline Hams '14, B.A. American Sign Language, '25, M.Ed. special education, welcomed her daughter, Evelyn, in February. She teaches at Hartman Elementary School in Wylie school district, and she lives in Sunnyvale.

Loni Lilley '14, B.S. graphic design, is marketing manager for Visit Tyler. She and her husband. Matthew Gaither '21, B.S. exercise science and fitness management, live in Emory.

Gerald Love '14, M.Ed. administration, is principal of public charter school Gem Prep. He and his wife, Megan, live in Rigby, Idaho,

Tricia (Masten) Lutkenhaus '14, M.Ed. administration, is principal of Barksdale Middle School in Northwest school district. She and her husband, George, live in Justin.

Congratulations to Ashley (Tran) '14, B.S. biology, and her husband, Phuoc Nguyen '15, B.A. biochemistry, on their marriage in April. They live in Groves.

Brooke (Crowell) Tanton '14, B.S. speech and hearing sciences, '16, M.S. speech-language pathology, is a speech-language pathologist and owns Tanton Therapy Solutions. She and her husband, Stephen '19, B.S. chemistry, B.S. mechanical engineering, live in Lumberton.

Bryan Vardeman '14, M.Ed. administration, is head football coach at Cadar Ridge High in Round Rock school district. He and his wife, Keiko, live in Flower Mound.

Scott Bicknell '15, M.Ed. administration, is superintendent of Muleshoe school district. He and his wife, Brooke, live in Muleshoe.

Meg (Baertl) Brown '15, M.S. nursing, is 2025 Mrs. Texas United World. She is a neurology nurse practitioner at Neurocare of the South, and she and her husband, Jarrod, live in Beaumont.

Elizabeth Cunningham '15, M.Ed. administration, is principal of Chaparral High School in Killeen school district. She and her husband, Jonathan, live in Harker Heights.

Wendy (Kitchens) Elmore '15, Ed.D. educational leadership, is president of Lamar State College Orange. She and her husband, Brad, live in Orange.

Mark Gotcher Jr. '15, Ed.D. educational leadership, is a strategic growth partner with ROYBI. He and his wife, Laura, live in Russellville, Ark.

Sara (Bellard) Hollier '15, B.S. nursing, is a family nurse practitioner for Riceland Healthcare. She and her husband, Anthony, live in Port Neches.

Maritza (Aquilar) '15, B.S. biology. and Dr. Brandon Hood '15, B.S. biology, welcomed their daughter, Ana, in November. Maritza is a radiation therapist at MD Anderson Cancer Center, and Brandon specializes in internal medicine in Houston, where they live.

Daniel Martinez '15, M.Ed. educational technology leadership, is principal of Lockhart PRIDE High School and Lockhart Discipline Management Center. He lives in Pharr.

Katrina (Cruz) '15, B.S. exercise science and fitness management, and Ray Nunez '15, B.B.A. management information systems, welcomed their son, Ralph, in March. She is a physical therapy technician with Triangle Therapeutics, and he his branch manager with Enterprise Rent-A-Car. They live in Beaumont.

Anna (Bedford) '15, B.S. graphic design, and Reagan Stanley '13, B.B.A. management, B.B.A. general business, welcomed their son, Crew, in January. Anna is administrative assistant with Lamar Consolidated school district. They live in Rosenberg

Congratulations to Katherine Tatum '15, B.S. speech and hearing sciences, '17, M.S. speech-language pathology, on the birth of her daughter, Sylvie. She is a speech pathologist for Magnolia Manor, and they live in Port Neches.

Brittni Thibodeaux '15, B.B.A. finance, '16, M.B.A. business administration, is vice president and senior underwriter at Bellwether Enterprise Real Estate Capital. She lives in Beaumont.

Kelsey Young '15, B.S. psychology, earned a master's degree in sports management in 2017 and is the stewardship and donor engagement manager at Houston Parks Board. She lives in Houston.

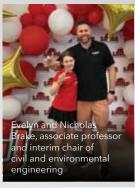
Taylor (Stockton) Cihan '16, B.B.A. accounting, '17, M.S. accounting, is a CPA and audit assistant with Deloitte Services. She and her husband, Erman '15, B.S. mechanical engineering, who earned his master's degree in mechanical engineering and is an aerospace engineer with NASA Johnson Space Center, live in League City.

Brian Curran '16, B.S. biology, is product manager for Strata Decision Technology. He lives in Memphis, Tenn.

Emily (Blanke) '16, B.B.A. marketing, and Robert Ehrlich '16, B.S. chemical engineering, welcomed their son, Lucas, in January. Robert is an attorney with

Discover Engineering is a free community event for K-8th grade students that provides fun, engaging activities to teach children and inspire them about engineering and other STEM careers. At the event this year, in conjunction with the Office of Alumni Affairs, the College of Engineering hosted an Alumni Circuit hospitality suite for alumni and their families where they could network with each other, take fun photos, win door prizes, receive LU giveaways, have refreshments and sit, relax and cool off while attending the event.



















| CLASS NOTES |







Softball Alumni Weekend

Former softball players attended the LU v. McNeese softball games on March 7-8 for a chance to reunite and cheer on the Lady Cardinals softball team.



Ambassadors Executive Leadership Training

LU Ambassadors attended an executive leadership training with Jared Boudreaux '98, president, CEO and managing partner of Vector Controls and Automation Group, March 27. Jared shared invaluable insights on leadership, drawing from his remarkable career journey.



Front from left, Alyson Vu, Jada Thrash, Daisy Calero Estrella, Jared Boudreaux '98, Estrella Balderas, Elizabeth Drago, Folasade Asoro '25, Rohini Rai; middle from left, Kathy Nguyen, Grace Roy, Alyssa Harper, Rima Shaaban '25, Waverlee Cooper '25, Jordan Nelson, Lucia Ortiz '25, Harvest Prater, Jah'Kya Rucker, Kadence Garlington, DeAnna Gilmore '25; back from left, Sergio Mendez, Logan Morris, Hannah Trash '25, Bryce Sheffield, Grace Gause, Peyton Jones, Mary Wernig, Blake Wilson, Miguel Arevalo, Clara Schreck, Ryan Shugart '25, Carsen Barrett, Riley Trent, Ryan Servantes, Saad Mohammed









The Big Event

Lamar University students, faculty, staff and alumni gathered on Saturday, March 22, 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. The Alumni Team along with LU Ambassadors served at Pelican Bay Assisted Living Community to help clean windows for the residents.









Ortiz '25, Riley Trent, Ashton Rainey, Fonda (Woodsmall) Sanders '08, Shannon

(Copeland) Figueroa '02, '03, '07, and Yolanda Morris-Wiltz '08, '21

Morgan, Lewis and Bockius, and Emily owns Rainy Day Embroidery. They live in Spring.

Congratulations to Morgan (McClain) '16, B.S. nursing, and Austin Greenway '11, B.G.S. general studies, '17, B.S. industrial technology, on the birth of their son, Noah, in April. She is a nurse with CHRISTUS Southeast Texas-St. Elizabeth, and he is girls soccer coach and teaches science at West Brook High School in Beaumont school district. They live in Beaumont.

Congratulations to Jocelyn (Causer) Hastings '16, B.S. nursing, and her husband, Vincent, on the birth of their daughter Brylianna. Jocelyn earned her master's degree to become a psychiatric and mental health nurse practitioner in 2019 and is a Psychiatric nurse practitioner. They live in Dickinson.

William Hill '16, B.A.A.S. applied arts and sciences, and his wife, Lily, welcomed their daughter, Aurora, in February. He teaches biology at Hamshire-Fannett High School. They live in Beaumont.

Cory Laxen '16, M.Ed. administration, is head football coach at C.E. King High School in Sheldon school district. He lives in Humble.

Matthew McBride '16, M.B.A. business administration, id director of project management for Westwood Contractors. He lives in Waxahachie.

Congratulations to Juan Mejia Jr. '16, B.B.A. economics, and his wife, Alexandra, on the birth of their son, Julian. Juan is senior manager for federal government affairs with Specialty Equipment Market Association. They live in Chesapeake Beach, Md.

Taylor Pace '16, B.B.A. management, '18, B.B.A. finance, is an associate analyst at AML RightSource. He lives in Beaumont

Rebecca (Higginbotham) '16, B.B.A. marketing, and Quade Robertson '17, B.S. mechanical engineering, welcomed their daughter, Sutton, in January, Ouade is associate project manager for Hanson Professional Services Inc., and Rebecca is a liability claims adjuster for Farmer's Group Inc. They live in Hockley.

Congratulations to Robyn (Summers) '16, B.A.A.S. applied arts and sciences, and Blake Root on their marriage in January. She coaches girls' tennis for Beaumont school district, and they live in Beaumont.

Gov. Greg Abbott has reappointed Michael Slaughter '16, M.Ed. education technology leadership, to the Texas School Safety Center Board for a term to expire Feb. 1, 2027. He is assistant principal of Princeton High School and lives in Wylie.

Dr. Kristi (Sonnier) Sparkman '16, B.S. biology, and her husband, Mason, recently welcomed their daughter, Carrington. Kristi is a dentist with Nederland Smile Docs, and they live

in Beaumont.

Haley (Hooker) Zick '16, B.B.A. accounting, is a partner with Wathen, DeShong and Juncker. She and her husband, Colby, live in Orange

Congratulations to Dusti (Brothers) Aguiar '17, B.F.A. graphic design, and her husband, Frankie, on the birth of their daughter, Eliana. Dusti is a digital media teacher at Caney Creek High School in Conroe school district. They live in Cleveland.

Congratulations to Katelyn (Parent) '17, B.S. nursing, and Jack Dillard IV '21, B.S. chemical engineering, on the birth of their son, Caden, in April. She is a registered nurse with Houston Methodist Willowbrook Hospital, and he is an automation engineer with Hargrove Engineers and Constructors. They live in Magnolia.

Kayla (Brown) Gearen '17, B.S. nursing, is a family nurse practitioner with Allegiance Medical Clinic in DeQuincy, where she and her husband, Jonathon, live.

Michele (Berryhill) Josselet '17, M.Ed. administration, is principal of Clack Middle School in Abilene school district. She and her husband, Cody, live in Abilene.

Amanda Marshall '17, B.S. communication, is an intake attorney with Melmed Law Group. She lives in Baton Rouge, La.

Matthew Nichols '17, M.Ed. administration is a pre-construction contractor with North Texas Contracting. He lives in Haslet.

Amanda (Cox) Rand '17, B.S. interdisciplinary studies, '20, M.Ed. administration, and her husband, Nic, welcomed their son, Barrett, in January. She teaches at Bingman Head Start in Beaumont school district, and they live in Beaumont.

Kaitlyn (Hamm) Read '17, B.S. nursing, earned her doctorate in nursing practice and is a DNP and certified nurse midwife for Southeast Texas OB Gyn Associates. She and her husband, Tommy, live in Silsbee.

Tessa Runte '17, B.B.A. accounting, '19, M.S. accounting, married Joe Furhman in February. She is a senior associate with The Siegfried Group, and they live in Houston.

Bekah (Wells) '17, B.S. communication-corporate, '21, M.B.A. business administration, and Adrian Woodard '18, B.M. music education, welcomed their son, Desmond, in January 2025. She is an academic recruiter for the School of Health Professions at UT MD Anderson Cancer Center, and he is assistant director of bands for Magnolia High School. They live in New Caney.

Brooklyn Bingaman '18, B.S. psychology, '23, M.S. accounting, married Manuel Martinez in December 2024. They live in Liberty.

Ryan Donina '18, B.S. environmental science, is an environmental, social and governance specialist for Devon Energy. He lives in Houston.

Matthew Cooper '18, M.Ed administration, is principal of McAdams Junior High School in Dickinson school district. He lives in League City.

Cara (Ortiz) '18, B.S. nursing, and Blake Galloway '19, B.A. English, welcomed their son in February. Cara is a travel and registered nurse at CHI St. Vincent Infirmary. Blake earned his law degree in December 2024, and they live in Vidor.

Rickie Harris '18, Ed.D. educational leadership, will retire Dec. 31 as superintendent of West Orange-Cove school district. He and his wife, Shalawn, live in Orange.

Jennifer Joosten '18, B.S. speech and hearing sciences, and Tyler Copeland '18, B.S. mechanical engineering, were married in March. They live in Houston.

Jeremiah Kelly '18, B.S. criminal justice, is marketing coordinator for Lamar Institute of Technology. He lives in Beaumont.

Tuka Loomma '18, married Spencer Roberts. She is an analyst with the Texas Department of Agriculture. They live in

Taylor Martin '18, B.S. nursing, earned her family nurse practitioner master's degree in 2024. She and her partner, Gabbie Pea '16, B.S. nursing, live in Beaumont.

Katie (Leavins) McGee '18. B.S.W. social work, is a licensed clinical social worker and owns her own practice as a therapist. She and her husband, Kevin '16, B.S. communication, '20, M B A business administration who is a multimedia specialist for the City of Beaumont, live in Port Neches.

Sam Perry '18, M.Ed. administration, is assistant superintendent of Eustace school district. He and his wife, Courtney, live in Graham.

Brianna (Sanders) Thomer '18, B.A.A.S. applied arts and sciences, and

her husband, Jonathan, welcomed their son, Lucas, in January. They live in Beaumont.

Vanessa Turcios '18, B.A.A.S. applied arts and sciences, '21, B.S. health education, '24, M.Ed. counseling and development, is a bilingual counselor and owns Simply Her Counseling Services, which offers counseling services for women and teens in Texas. She lives in Port Arthur.

Madison (Marino) Doan '19, B.B.A. finance, B.B.A. economics, is policy analyst at The Heritage Foundation. She and her husband, Edward '20, B.S. chemical engineering, who is an MBA associate with Anacapa Partners, live in

Gabriel Fitch '19, B.S. criminal justice, is a police officer with the Nederland

Police Department. He lives in Beaumont.

Brixie (Gallier) '19, B.G.S. general studies, and Zach Friesz '21, B.S. construction management, welcomed their daughter, Ronnie, in January. Brixie teaches at C.O. Wilson Middle School in Nederland school district, and they live in Nederland.

Derek Inoma '19, B.S. industrial engineering, is a logistics production system engineer with Kuehne+Nagel. He lives in Decatur, Ga.

Emily McCall '19, B.S. biology, earned her medical degree in May and is completing her psychiatry residency at the University of Texas Health Science Center-Houston. She lives in Houston.

Bianca Rangel '19, B.S. biology, earned her medical degree in May and is completing her family medicine residency at the University of Texas Health Science Center-San Antonio. She lives in San Antonio.

Taylor Reasons '19, B.S. biology, earned her medical degree in May and completing her residency with JPS Health Network in Fort Worth. She lives

Cheyenne (Ross) Shell '19, B.S. chemical engineering, and her husband, Chad, welcomed their son, Kyler, in January 2025. They live in Vidor.

Congratulations to Kaitlyn Smith '19, B.S. political science, and Jackson Provost '19, B.S. political science, '22, M.P.A. public administration, on their marriage in January. She earned her law degree in 2024 and is an associate attorney for MehaffyWeber. They live in Port Arthur.



Cardinal Adventures: Ireland

Alumni and friends traveled to Ireland March 26 through April 3 with Lamar University's travel partner Trips Inc.

Margaret (Fazio) Gibson; MaryE Wilkinson, LU retiree; Ann Wagner; Kevin Wagner; James Gibson '69; Don Duesler -71; Eula Sonnier and Marita (Mueller) Duesler '72



20s

Congratulations to Kayla (Clifton) Adams '20, B.B.A. management, on being named 2025 LU Greek Advisor of the Year. She is purchase order coordinator for Cat5 Resources, and she and her husband, Tanner '15, B.S. exercise science and fitness management, who is inside sales associate for Coastal Welding Supply Inc., live in Nederland.

Courtney Ard '20, B.S. communicationfilm and theater, '22, M.B.A. business administration, is marketing specialist at DuGood Federal Credit Union. She lives in Lumberton.

Ashlyn Ellison '20, B.B.A. marketing, '23, M.B.A. business administration, is assistant director of student recruitment at Lamar University. She lives in Port Neches.

Anna Fazio '20, M.S. applied psychology, married Miguel Martinez in March. She is a licensed psychological associate with Anew Psychological Services, and they live in Pearland.

Sam Gillispie '20, M.Ed. administration, is athletics director for Tyler school district. He and his wife, Mandy, live in Tyler

Madison Hamby '20, B.A. psychology, married Brant Louis Hardisty Jr. in March. She earned her master's degree in applied behavioral analysis and is the wellness program director at Samaritan Counseling Center of Southeast Texas. They live in Port Neches.

Congratulations to Omar Hamza '20, on earning his medical degree in May. He is completing a residency in psychology as a clinical fellow at Harvard Medical School and Cambridge Health Alliance. He lives in Cambridge, Mass.

Congratulations to Taylor (Havard) '20, B.G.S. general studies, and Nathan Huckaby on the birth of their son Hayden. Taylor teaches at C.O. Wilson Middle School in Nederland school district. They live in Nederland.

Keiara Kearns '20, B.S. hospitality administration-culinary arts, is cofounder of The Give Gala and is human resources coordinator Aramark NRG Park. She lives in Houston

Jordan Kenfack '20, earned his medical degree in May and is completing physical medicine/ emergency medicine residency at Harvard University. He lives in Cambridge, Mass.

Fizzah Khan '20, B.S. psychology, earned her doctorate in occupational therapy in 2024. She lives in Port Neches.

Brittney Little '20, B.B.A. economics, B.B.A. finance, '22, M.B.S. business administration, is assistant vice president and senior lending assistant of Texas First Bank. She lives in Beaumont.

Congratulations to Maegan (Myers) '20, B.B.A. accounting, '22, M.B.A business administration, and Cody Sasser '21, B.S. chemical engineering, '24, M.B.A. business administration, on the birth of their son Noah. Maegan is an accountant with Indorama Ventures, and Cody is a production engineer with Indorama. They live in Groves.

Congratulations to Ashlee (Wilson) '20, B.S. health education, '22, M.B.A. business administration, and Montevious Stevenson '20, B.S. computer science, on the birth of their son Micah. Montavious teaches computer science in Sheldon school district. They live in New Caney.

Lance Taylor '20, B.B.A. accounting, B.B.A. finance, '21, M.S. accounting, is supply chain finance manager at Walmart Corporate Office. He lives in Rogers, Ark.

Betzabel Gonzalez '21, B.B.A. management information systems, is social media manager at Pool-Aid. She lives in Port Arthur.

Joissy Grimaldo Hernandez '21, B.S. chemical engineering, married Charlie Millinder in December. She is a process engineer for Kimberly-Clark Corp. They live in Houston

Karlton "K.J." Johnson '21, B.S. kinesiology, '25, M.Ed. administration, is head boys basketball coach at Hamshire-Fannett High School. He lives in Beaumont.

Madison (Foster) Krautz '21, B.S. nursing, earned her master's degree as a family nurse practitioner in 2024 and is a nurse practitioner at Port Neches Family Medicine. She and her husband. Austin '20, B.S. construction management, welcomed their daughter, Adeline, in March and live in Nederland.

El Paso Locomotive FC Youth Soccer named Jair Olivares '21, M.Ed. administration, as academy coordinator. He lives in El Paso.

Sarah Roden '21, B.S. nursing, is retention assistant in The Caring Place of the JoAnn Gay Dishman School of Nursing at Lamar University. She lives in Lumberton.

Kelsey (Loyacano) Shofner '21, B.S. nursing, and her husband, Nicholas, welcomed their daughter, Sienna, in February. She is an intensive care unit nurse at HCA Houston Healthcare

Kingwood. They live in Porter.

Congratulations to Emily (Butcher) '21, M.Ed. school counseling, on her marriage to Kyle Thomas. They live in Tomball

Daniel Arndt '22, M.B.A. business administration, is project manager at BlueAlly. He and his wife, Cassidi, live

Cameron Hargroder '22, B.B.A. general business, is a legal secretary for Quinn Emanuel Urquhart & Sullivan LLP. She lives in Groves.

Shirley (Clary Pura) Hernandez '22, B.S.W. social work, earned her master's degree in social work in February. She is a child protective specialist with the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services, and she and her husband, Chelo, live in Beaumont.

Libbie (LeJeune) Hughes '22, B.B.A. human resource management, '23, M.B.A. business administration, and her husband. Preston, welcomed their daughter, Lyla, in February. She is human resources assistant and event coordinator for the City of Groves. They live in Port Neches.

Former LU soccer standout Hollie Massev '22. B.S. exercise science. '23. M.B.A. business administration, signed with the FC Bulleen Lions of Victoria Premier League's first division. She lives in Cheshire, Australia,

Eric Stegall '22, B.B.A. management, is president and CEO of Gulf Coast Educators Federal Credit Union. He and his wife, Samantha, live in Pasadena

Catarina Tran '22, B.M. music education, earned her master's degree in conducting in May 2024. She is personnel manager for Canton Symphony Orchestra, and lives in Kent, Ohio.

Hallie Burden '23, B.S.W. social work, and Luis Ortiz '20, B.S. chemical engineering, '22, M.E. chemical engineering, were married in December 2024. He is a control systems engineer with Motiva Enterprises. They welcomed their daughter, Naomi, in May and live in Lumberton.

Marisa (Kiser) '23, B.S. university studies multidisciplinary, and R.J. Carver, welcomed their daughter, Emersyn, in February. They live in Beaumont.

Michayla (Newsome) Davis '23, B.B.A. management, is a financial analyst for the Jefferson County Auditors Office. She and her husband, Chance, live in Kountze.

Tracy Ramirez '23, B.S. communication-broadcasting, is lifestyle show host at KFDM News Channel 6 and owns TR Media. She lives in Port Arthur.

Kimberly Russell '23, B.B.A. general business, B.B.A. management, '24, M.B.A. business administration, is a senior accountant at ROSEN and was named 2024 Employee of the Year. She lives in Cypress.

Jayci Wong '23, B.S. exercise science and fitness management, '25, M.S. kinesiology, earned certification from the Global Professional Tennis Coach Association. She lives in Nederland.

Travis Young '23, Ed.D. educational leadership, is superintendent of Dayton school district. He and his wife, Atina '19, Ed.D. educational leadership, who is director of human resources at Channelview school district, live in Dayton.

Annette Addo-Yobo '24, M.B.A. business administration, was crowned Miss Texas June 29, 2024, and in January 2025 was first runner up to Miss America. She lives in Richardson.

Lvnda Barner '24, B.S. criminal justice. is a career technology education intern at Kountze High School. She lives in Kountze.

Brooks Caple '24, B.B.A. general business, pitches for the Chicago Cubs organization on minor league team Myrtle Beach Pelicans. He lives in Gunter.

Jacob Garza '24, M.B.A. business administration, M.S. management information systems, is senior buyer at OCI Global. He lives in Beaumont.

Kristin (Hebert) Robinson '24, B.S. exercise science, is stewardship coordinator for the Division of University Advancement at Lamar University. She and her husband, Greg, live in Nederland.

Aimee (Nelson) Jones '24, M.Ed. school counseling, and her husband, William, welcomed their son, Jackson, in January 2025. They live in Grand Prairie.

Vavah Kamasa-Quashie '24, B.S. psychology, is an administrative associate for allied health at Lamar Institute of Technology. She lives in Beaumont.

Cedar Hill school district named Kimetri Kirk '24, M.Ed. administration. 2024-2025 STEM Teacher of the Year. She teaches at Collegiate Prep Elementary, and she and her husband, Theodore, live in Cedar Hill.

Likhith Chowdary Mandava '24, M.S. computer science, is a software engineer with Equifax in Atlanta, Ga. He lives in Edinburg.

Chloe Raborn '24, B.S. nursing, married Grant Humphrey in December 2024. She is an infusion nurse for Texas Oncology, and they live in Port Neches.

Brynn Baker '25, B.S. electrical engineering, is an I/E reliability engineer with Chevron Phillips Chemical. She lives in Lumberton.

Rafael Gutierrez III '25, B.S. mechanical engineering, is a mechanical engineer with Chevron Phillips Chemical. He lives in Port Neches.



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ALUMNA LEADS:

Strengthening individuals and the community

by ALLISON LENNARTZ

pproximately one hundred years ago, several prominent citizens of Beaumont sought to establish an organization that they hoped would serve as "a vehicle to help local citizens in need." At the time, it was known as the Beaumont Community Chest, but it would undergo several name changes and would eventually become the United Way of Beaumont & North Jefferson County in 1979.

Over a century's time, the organization's goal has remained the same: it seeks to build a stronger community in Beaumont and Jefferson County by providing financial resources to those in need. Karyn Husbands '93, '95, serves as the organization's president and CEO. She had this to say when she was asked about their work: "Most recognize United Way as a global brand but may not realize that our mission is to be a champion for our local community." She said that, through the United Way's fundraising and use of volunteers, it is able to help fund services and programs that focus on improving educational and career outcomes for at-risk youth, and also to support families who are striving to attain financial stability. Some specific ways it achieves these outcomes are by supplying students with books and resources to enhance learning while also striving to assist families who are working to become homeowners or who are in need of access to healthcare. In addition to their efforts to contribute to a stronger and healthier community, the United Way also desires to promote resilience among the citizens of Beaumont and Jefferson County. For instance, when individuals are faced with personal tragedies or local cities suffer a powerful hurricane or some other natural disaster, United Way directs its efforts toward alleviating the distress of those who are directly disadvantaged by

Karyn Husbands completed her bachelor's degree in marketing

in 1993 and went on to earn her B.B.A in accounting in 1995 and obtain her license as a CPA in 2000. She began working with the United Way of Beaumont as a college student and returned to serve as the finance director in 2000. She was appointed the organization's president and CEO in 2012. During her time as an undergraduate at Lamar, she recalls finding a part-time job for the United Way posted in the Galloway building. She said this led her to an unexpected, albeit fulfilling, career with the organization. Reflecting on her daily work, she said, "Each day is unique in the nonprofit world." She explained that one day her job may consist of meeting with leaders within the local community to discuss ways they can partner with and support the United Way's mission, while the next day may be spent working directly with one of their partner agencies. Regardless of how her duties may vary, she said that all of her tasks are "equally important to ensure the United Way is embedded in the community and ready to help address (its) needs."

Having spent more than 25 years with the United Way of Beaumont and North Jefferson County, Husbands is able to speak to some of the unique ways she has witnessed Southeast Texans respond in times of crisis and need. She attests to numerous memories of "neighbors helping neighbors" through anything from hurricanes to historic floods or pandemics and economic hardships. She said that some of her "most heartbreaking and heartwarming memories" took place after the significant damage Hurricane Harvey wreaked upon Southeast Texas. She still vividly remembers how quickly the United Way and its partners responded to the crisis and worked together "to encourage, support one another and to help make a difference" in the midst of such a tumultuous time for so many individuals and for the community as a whole. No matter what the circumstances may be, Husbands reiterated the same message that the United Way of Beaumont also clearly states on their website: all of the funds



it raises through its efforts and partner agencies are always funneled back into the community and used to further their mission of strengthening the community through providing critical resources to those who are in need.

Husbands recognizes the significant support that Lamar University's faculty, students and alumni have offered to the United Way of Beaumont and North Jefferson County. She said that Lamar has consistently attended fundraising events, supplied personnel to serve on its board of trustees, and promotes direct participation in volunteering efforts among its faculty and students.

One way that Lamar has just recently partnered with the United Way is through its involvement in a literacy initiative the organization implemented in 2023. This program began by installing vending machines at all 14 of the elementary campuses located in the Beaumont school district. By increasing the access students have to age-appropriate reading, Husbands says that the United Way hopes to "help build at-home libraries for students and foster a love of reading." She speculated that this initiative may even be creating some "future Cardinals" too!

She expressed deep and genuine gratitude toward the Cardinal community for serving as a firm pillar and support to the United Way of Beaumont and North Jefferson County for nearly 75 years. As she wrapped up her thoughts on the organization's work and the role Lamar has played in supporting its mission, Husbands emphasized the necessity of volunteers in completing that work. She said that they rely heavily on volunteer efforts to maximize their impact upon those who are in need. More information about volunteering with the organization is available by visiting its website at uwbmt.org to learn more about the services they offer. She strongly encourages any members of the LU community to reach out to their office and find out ways they may partner with the United Way to improve the strength and health of the local community as a whole. She considers herself fortunate to "witness the caring nature of the people who call Southeast Texas home," and views the community as being filled with "community-minded individuals and companies that prioritize giving back in ways that make a difference."

P.O. BOX 10011 BEAUMONT, TX 77710



CHAMPIONS OF EDUCATION

One act of generosity can echo across generations

bγ KRISTIN HEBERT

ichael Lindsay, a Colorado native, became part of the Southeast Texas community when he moved to Beaumont on Dec. 25, 1976. During the past five decades, Beaumont has become home, not only for Michael, but also for his children and grandchildren.

Michael and his wife, Cindy, have been steadfast supporters of Lamar University for 30 years. Their philanthropic efforts reflect a deep belief in the power of education and their love of the Beaumont community. "For communities to move forward, they need an educational base for young people," he said. "Lamar really meets that need in this area."

Lindsay's dedication to student scholarships is rooted in personal experience. As a young man attending Baylor University, he received a grant that he described as life changing. "I made a promise to God that if I was ever in a position to pay it forward, I would do so," he recalled. That promise has since blossomed into a legacy of giving.

The Lindsays have established five scholarships at Lamar University, each designed to support students in achieving their academic and professional goals. Their most recent gift, the Michael and Cindy L. Lindsay Scholarship in Audiology Honoring Dr. James Connor Sullivan, was inspired by Lindsay's own health journey. After suffering a severe ear infection, Lindsay underwent a 16-hour reconstructive surgery performed by Dr. Sullivan, whom he credits with saving his hearing. During his recovery, Lindsay met several Lamar University students pursuing their doctorates in audiology and completing their externships under Dr. Sullivan's guidance. Even in Houston, he felt the presence of the Beaumont community through these students.

One of the scholarship's recipients this year is Jovianna Gonzales, a third-year audiology doctoral candidate originally from Arizona. "Lamar University felt like a second family, and I signed right up," she said. Gonzales has worked multiple jobs



throughout her academic career, and the scholarship has eased financial pressures, allowing her to focus more on clinical work and preparing for her fourth-year externship. In the future, Gonzales also hopes to support a student through scholarships. "It's a vote of confidence for me," she said. "Hopefully in the future, I can do something similar for a student."

Looking ahead, the Lindsays plan to continue their support of Lamar University, driven by their enduring belief in the power of education and community. Their legacy lives on through the students they've empowered, proof that one act of generosity can echo across generations. Through their scholarships, the Lindsays are not just funding education, they're investing in futures, strengthening Southeast Texas and inspiring others to give back.