

CARDINAL CADENCE

THE MAGAZINE OF LAMAR UNIVERSITY

VOL. 54, NO. 3 | FALL 2026



8
Networking

24
Fellowships

26
Internships

28
Hiring

| FROM THE **PRESIDENT** |

Sometimes you'll see them walking through the grass with their heads down, looking for a permanent survey marker. It might be a brass disk set into bedrock 50 years ago or an iron rod driven into the ground last month. Once they find it, they have a reliable place to start, and everything else can be measured from there. Once the new building or road goes in and the temporary flags disappear, it looks like the surveyor's job is finished. In reality, permanent survey markers are the most enduring part of the work. Years later, another surveyor may use that same marker, not to redo the old project, but to begin a new one.

In many ways, this is what good mentors do. They don't walk the path for someone else. They establish a place where someone else can begin. If you've heard me speak much, you know that mentorship is something very close to my heart. I believe mentors are one of the great forces for growth and success in another person's life.

Among the stories in this issue of *Cardinal Cadence*, two really stand out to me. Paul Manes '72, '83, is an internationally recognized painter. But what catches my attention isn't his artistic skill or achievement. It's his decision to open his home and studio to the next generation of artists, inviting them to work alongside him.

Mona Dearing '78 spent her career teaching high school business applications, but her quiet acts of generosity helped her students step into rooms they never thought they belonged in.

A mentor may have hundreds of conversations. Most help in the moment. But a few change the direction of someone's life. We rarely know which interaction will matter most, or how far its influence will reach. That's what makes mentorship such an incredible act of generosity and hope.

On Sept. 17-18, Cardinals around the world will come together for Red Day, Lamar University's annual day of giving. It's one of the ways we can all participate in work that will shape Lamar's future. Whether your passion is scholarships, academics, athletics or another area of the university, every gift helps create opportunities for the next generation. Not everyone will have the opportunity to mentor a student or an intern. But all of us do good work—some of it extraordinary, most of it ordinary. And sometimes we leave behind more than we realize. My hope is that Red Day will be an opportunity for you to make what comes next possible.

A permanent survey marker isn't there to commemorate the road that was built. It exists because someone else will need it years from now. Perhaps that's what legacy really is—not simply what we've built, but what others will build because we were here.

I am very glad you are here.

With Cardinal Pride,


Jaime R. Taylor, President



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| IN THIS ISSUE |



4

Carolyn J. Keating
Engineering: Engineering
success starts here

8

The spirit of
showing up: Jerry C.
Dearing Foundation

12

Mentors make
a difference

16

More than a coach:
Mentors on
and off the field

24

Crenshaw Teaching
Fellowship: Supporting
teaching's next generation

26

The ripple of one
student's experience

ON THE COVER:

Courtland Carmouche '26, left,
and Tyler Newell

Photo courtesy of
Morgan Miller, Leo Weeks
Photographers



4



8



28

28

Valero's lasting
partnership

42

Reaud Leadership
Institute: Elizabeth
Diaz Arreola

43

Champions of Education:
Teresa Wuchtor

44

Red-dy for launch
Sept. 17-18

18

Dream Makers

20

1923 Dinner



22

Cardinal Views: Teri and
Glen Morgan Baseball
Complex opens

30

LU news

32

Class Notes



Engineering success starts here

The Keating center helps students build skills, connections,
community and confidence

by BROOKE BARNETT

The Carolyn J. Keating Center for Academic and Career Success is helping Lamar University students become the kind of engineers employers want to hire—professionals who can lead, communicate, collaborate and adapt in a rapidly changing industry. Through mentorship, industry engagement and community, the center is making a lasting impact in the College of Engineering.

The Keating center was created by one of the largest endowments in LU history from Carolyn J. Keating '67 in honor of her late husband Thomas J. Keating '67. The center reflects Lamar University's commitment to provide engineering students with experiential learning opportunities and support that extends well beyond graduation.

At the heart of the center's mission is preparing students for a seamless transition into the workforce. Through partnerships across campus, center staff help students strengthen the communication skills that are essential for professional success. The center also partners with local high schools and middle schools to help encourage young students to engage with engineering, science and technology.

"We are so grateful for the support from the Keating center and strive every day to provide meaningful, life-changing opportunities for our students and prospective students," said Tracy Benson, associate dean of research and innovation. "As a result of the center, our students are now more involved than ever before."

Since opening in January 2026, the Keating center has helped students bridge the gap between the classroom and the workplace through mentorship, professional development and real-world experiences. Staff focus on helping

students develop the technical, collaborative and communication skills needed to thrive in the engineering profession.

"We are seeing our students build strong communication skills, something engineers are not always known for," Benson laughed. "These communication and leadership skills are vital to our careers, perhaps just as valuable as the technical skills that they are developing in their coursework."

The center also provides unparalleled exposure to industry professionals, many of them LU alumni. Through internships, co-ops, design projects and industry events, students gain workplace experience while building relationships with future employers.

"With the opening of the Keating center, our alumni are on campus more and more often," explained Benson. "By the time students are interviewing for jobs, they may have already interacted with those industry professionals several times, which helps students feel prepared and confident."

Modern meeting spaces, interview rooms and collaborative work areas have transformed the center into a home base where students can find tutoring, career guidance, résumé assistance, and opportunities to connect with peers and mentors. "It is a one-stop shop where students can access advising, tutoring, career preparation and the support needed to bridge the gap between the classroom and the workplace," he said.

The center also supports STEM outreach programs and summer camps that introduce middle and high school students to engineering careers. Many are staffed by undergraduate engineering students, giving them opportunities to mentor younger learners while developing leadership skills of their own.

"It is empowering to see our current students bring engineering to the next generation," added Benson. "The center helps students find their niche, their purpose, their why."

While statistics, programs and partnerships tell part of the story, the true impact of the Keating center can best be seen through the students whose lives it has touched. From exploring career possibilities to launching careers with leading engineering firms, their experiences illustrate how mentorship, opportunity and community come together inside the center's walls.

COURTLAND CARMOUCHE FINDING PURPOSE THROUGH LEADERSHIP

When Courtland Carmouche '26 accepted a position as a mechanical analysis engineer with GE Vernova, he knew his success was about more than mastering engineering coursework. It was also the result of



CARMOUCHE

mentorship, leadership opportunities and professional experiences that helped shape him into a confident young professional while he earned his degree in mechanical engineering.

“Over the course of my time in the department, the Keating center gave me opportunities to build my résumé and improve my writing,” he said. “It helped connect me to the right people and gave me lots of networking opportunities.”

One of those opportunities came through Lamar University’s engineering outreach programs. Carmouche served as a counselor for the Lamar Introduction to Engineering (L.I.T.E.) Camp and for

Project Engineer, programs designed to introduce middle and high school students to engineering concepts through hands-on learning.

“Those experiences taught me how to communicate high-level ideas in a way younger students could understand,” he said. “They also helped me learn how to lead a team and work effectively with others.”

The skills he developed during his degree program helped him secure an internship with INVISTA in Victoria, Texas, which provided valuable experience in an industrial setting and gave him clarity about the type of engineering work he wanted to pursue.

Today, Carmouche is preparing to begin his career at GE Vernova in Wilmington, North Carolina, supporting nuclear energy initiatives, a field he is passionate about. Looking back, he credits the center with helping him discover both his professional path and his larger purpose.

“The faculty and staff can help you follow your interests and learn more about yourself. That is something you can only get by being involved in the Keating center,” he said.

ABIGAIL MONTEMAYOR BUILDING CONFIDENCE THROUGH COMMUNITY

For electrical engineering sophomore Abigail Montemayor, the Keating center became a source of support as soon as she arrived at LU. During her first semester, she joined the New Engineering Student Talent (N.E.S.T.)

Program, where she connected with engineering ambassadors, received résumé critiques and began building professional skills.

“Coming in from high school, I learned how important internships and co-ops are for engineering students,” Abigail said. “The résumé and interview preparation helped me feel more confident and prepared.”

Montemayor credits Bayleigh Smith, associate director of marketing and recruitment, with helping her navigate the transition to college and identify scholarship opportunities. Montemayor is on track to graduate in 2028 and is currently gaining hands-on experience through an internship with a small Houston-based company. Upon returning to Lamar next fall, she plans to pursue a co-op opportunity to further explore her career interests.

Beyond student support, Montemayor says the center provides something equally valuable: a sense of belonging.

“It’s very welcoming,” she said. “It’s a place where students can get advice, build relationships and connect with others. Everyone at the Keating center feels like they’re in my corner.”

KIRBY KING LAUNCHING AN AEROSPACE DREAM

Kirby King’s dream of working in the aerospace industry became reality through the opportunities and connections he found at the Keating center.

King ’26 first became involved with the center through Lamar University’s Engineering Ambassador Program, where he volunteered at events and welcomed prospective students. Along the way, the center also connected him with industry professionals through experiences such as a tour of SpaceX’s McGregor, Texas, facility, where he learned



MONTEMAYOR



TYLER NEWELL CREATING CONNECTIONS FOR THE FUTURE

For Tyler Newell, a mechanical engineering sophomore, the Keating center became a place where he found community, connection and a sense of belonging.

Newell's journey with the center began through the N.E.S.T. Program, which connected him with engineering ambassadors, faculty, staff and industry professionals during his first year at Lamar.

"The center is an exceptional resource for

firsthand what employers seek in engineering graduates.

When preparing for interviews with aerospace employers, King worked closely with Haylee Burke, director of industrial partnerships and cooperative programming, to refine his résumé and prepare for technical interviews. The center provided a professional setting where he could prepare for technical interviews and practice answering complex engineering questions.

Those preparations paid off, helping Kirby secure a position as a rocket engineer for Impulse Space, where he will contribute to the design and manufacturing of components for spacecraft traveling beyond Earth's orbit.

"The Keating center allows you to connect directly to industry professionals and alumni," King said. "Those connections help you build your future."

new engineering students like me to network, learn about the field, build skills and feel part of the college community," he said. "Being a part of this environment made me feel prepared, supported and connected as I went through my freshman year."

Through N.E.S.T., Newell attended workshops focused on résumé development, communication skills and professional networking that helped prepare him for life after graduation. "What really made these experiences special was the guidance from people with practical experience in the field," he said. "Their advice was incredibly valuable."

Today, Newell serves as

a student employee at the center, a role that has strengthened his leadership skills and given him valuable insight into university operations. "I have learned that networking is a vital skill, and the center has truly helped me cultivate it. My time here has shown me that an engineering education extends well beyond the classroom," he said.

As both a student and an employee, Newell says the center helps him feel like he found his home at Lamar.

"The Keating center is much more than just a building," Tyler explains. "My time in the Keating center has helped me start my engineering journey on the right foot. It has given me a sense of belonging and a place that felt like a home away from home."





Standing from left, John Dearing, Kate Dearing Fowler and Noah Dearing with, seated from left, Rose Dearing, Jerry Dearing and Kristen Dearing

The *spirit* of showing up

A GIFT FROM THE JERRY C. DEARING FAMILY FOUNDATION
HONORS A BELOVED CARDINAL COUPLE

by SHERRI SMITH

If you have spent any time on the Lamar University campus, you've seen the red blazers. The students who wear them represent the university as its official Ambassadors, welcoming alumni returning decades after graduation and engaging with the donors and university leaders who champion the institution's future.

But representing the university at this level requires much more than a sharp jacket. Through rigorous training and hands-on experiences, these students build professional skills that shape how they engage with others for the rest of their lives.

To enhance this specialized training, the Jerry C. Dearing Family Foundation established the Tom and Mona Dearing Memorial Ambassador Endowment in 2020. The gift honors a couple whose lives reflected the same values the program seeks to cultivate.

As students in the 1970s, Tom Dearing '73, '78, and Mona (Brunet) Dearing '78 were active members of the Techsans and the Cards, spirit organizations that gave them plenty of opportunities to represent Lamar University on and off campus. There they met, fell in love, and began a lifelong connection to the university.

After graduation, they built careers, raised a family, and remained deeply connected to Southeast Texas. Tom earned two degrees in engineering from LU and worked in industrial fire safety. Mona earned a bachelor's in business administration and taught high school business

computer systems. Their professions and personalities were different, but they both became known for the way they radically invested in people.

When Tom and Mona passed away from COVID-19 in 2020, just 11 days apart, their family faced the difficult task of deciding how to honor two lives that had touched so many. Tom's first cousin, Jerry C. Dearing -88, had been working for weeks behind the scenes to ensure they had the best of care in the hospital. But when the situation turned into what Jerry calls "a tragedy beyond tragedies," his focus immediately shifted to Tom and Mona's children, Jonathan Dearing '13 and Andrea Elenz '16.

"They were young kids, and I just felt so bad that they lost their mom and dad," Jerry recalls. "I knew I wanted to do something, to let them know that we care, you know? Tom and Mona were a big part of the community, so we wanted to honor them in a good, unique kind of way."

When Jerry proposed a memorial endowment through his family foundation, Jonathan said the conversation felt serendipitous. Years earlier, at a family reunion crawfish boil, Tom had told his son that he hoped to establish a scholarship at Lamar someday. Jonathan offered to help, but the subject never came up again. As Jonathan stood at his father's graveside with Andrea and Jerry, the memory suddenly resurfaced.

"It just kind of clicked in my head," Jonathan recalls. "Dad had said this. This would be absolutely perfect. Jerry approached us with the endowment, and I'm like,



Mona (Brunet) Dearing '78
and Tom Dearing '73



Cody '16 and Andrea (Dearing) Elenz
'16 with children Leo and Hank



Tom, Jonathan, Andrea and Mona Dearing

"Look good, feel good, do good."

—MONA DEARING

"Oh God, this is perfect."

Once Jonathan and Andrea were on board, Kate Dearing Fowler, executive director of the family foundation, worked hand-in-hand with them to map out the endowment's path. Ultimately, the gift would establish an engineering scholarship honoring Tom's educational journey while also supporting the Lamar University Ambassador Program.

The choice aligned perfectly with the family's view of education and lifelong learning. "I don't believe you only learn in the classroom," Andrea says. "You also learn through opportunities and unexpected interactions."

Jonathan learned that lesson firsthand, usually when his father caught him off guard. As a teenager, he was particularly captivated by Tom's prized 1972 Corvette. When he decided to take it for a spin without permission, though, he didn't anticipate running into his dad in town. "I saw Dad admiring the Vette from a distance, then suddenly his face changed, and I'm like, 'Oh, nooo,'" Jonathan recalls. Tom was furious, but not about the car. He was worried about Jonathan driving it without insurance. After a stern lecture and a little time to cool down, Tom returned with a final verdict. "Next time, ask. Every young boy needs to learn how to drive a four-speed. I'm proud of you, but next time, ask."

Tom's way of handling people was rarely conventional. One summer while working for her father, Andrea learned that one of his employees had gotten arrested. "Oh, man, is he going to get fired?" Andrea recalls. "But he said, 'No, I'm going to go get him out of jail! He's my favorite employee!'"

Mona brought that same deeply personal, unconventional dedication to others during her own

career. As a high school business computer systems teacher, she also coached students through University Interscholastic League (UIL) academic competitions across Texas. Traveling offered many students their first real exposure to a wider world and gave Monna a window to notice quiet needs she might have missed.

"I'll never forget, there was a student who didn't have the best home life," Andrea says. "Mom would go out of her way to pick her up for UIL events and make sure she got to the bus. She made sure that student got home." Andrea laughs, "I don't even know if that was legal."

The student also struggled to afford clothing for competitions. "I think my mom bought her the appropriate clothing so she wouldn't feel left out," she says. "That's just the kind of person she was. She wanted people to look and feel their best and do their best."

One of Monna's favorite sayings has stayed with Andrea for years: "Look good, feel good, do good."

For Monna, looking presentable was never about appearance. She believed that looking and feeling prepared made it easier to step into opportunities that might otherwise feel out of reach. It was about confidence and belonging. "My college friends used to tease me about dressing up on test days, and I'd always say, 'Well, it's test day!'" Andrea says. "Now it's how they remember my mom."

That idea—that outward preparation builds inward confidence—sits



at the heart of the Ambassador Program. Roughly 50 ambassadors from a wide range of majors and backgrounds work several events each year, participating in monthly training on leadership, professional etiquette, emotional intelligence, and communication.

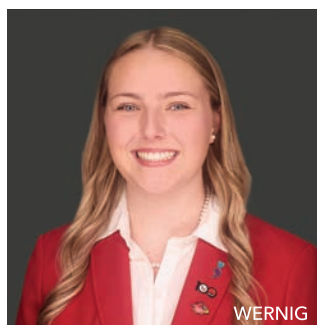
“People see us when we’re working events, but they don’t always see everything that happens beforehand,” says Sergio Mendez ’26. Ambassadors spend months training before they ever work a formal event. “We are crafted through those trainings.” Recently, Mendez served as senior ambassador for an alumni networking event. Initially he wondered if he was ready to guide the discussion at his table and mentor the newer ambassadors. “But it was clear to me that I could lead that conversation because of my previous training.”



For Elizabeth Drago ’26, an intensive workshop on emotional intelligence became a defining moment. The training challenged ambassadors to look past surface-level interactions, using

empathy to analyze communication barriers between introverts and extroverts. According to Drago, that internal work directly shapes how they wear their red blazers on campus. “The Ambassador Program teaches you that no matter where you go or how far you go, you are never just representing yourself—you’re representing your family, your employer, and your university,” Drago says. “It instills a deep pride in that responsibility.”

The training works so well because it pushes students out of their comfort zones. When Mary Wernig ’26



entered the program, she considered herself socially skilled. “I was already very comfortable talking to people my own age.” But she developed a new level of confidence and composure over the next three years.

“The Ambassador

Program really helped instill those communication skills that are necessary for engaging with people from different backgrounds and different walks of life,” Wernig says.

Jonathan ’13 and Jessica (Mayo) Dearing ’21

That lens widened even further when Wernig worked Golden Circle, an annual event honoring alumni who graduated 50 or more years ago. In a room where the generational gap is immense, learning to prioritize the emotional experience of alumni unlocked a rare and sophisticated empathy in her, and Wernig found the bond immediate. “Listening to their stories—it feels full circle,” she says.

For Andrea and Jonathan, the program’s deliberate focus on human connection is a perfect reflection of the way their parents lived. Neither of the siblings had fully realized how far their parents’ empathy and guidance had reached until after they were gone. But again and again, they encountered different versions of the same qualities they had known all their lives: a father who invested in people no matter the circumstance and a mother who noticed what stood in someone’s way—and then did something about it.

Jonathan still discovers their influence in unexpected moments. A few years ago, he was driving to work and realized he was mentally bracing against a rush of responsibilities and problems. Then he remembered a conversation he’d had with his father on the back porch as he was struggling through an adolescent disappointment. “There’s always going to be something you want or something you wish could’ve happened, but you’re here now,” Tom told him. “You have to live in the now.”

At the time, it was simply the kind of dad advice a teenager doesn’t take too seriously. But today, Jonathan understands what he meant. Wishing things were different won’t solve the problems in front of him. Deciding what to do next will.

“There are so many times now that I’m going through life and I’m going, ‘Yep, Mom was right. Yep, Dad was right.’ What I wouldn’t give for one more phone call just to tell them, ‘Yep, you were absolutely right.’”

Andrea has no doubt how her parents would react to the program and the endowment. “Mom would be so quietly proud about all this,” she says. “All I can see is her smile.”

As for Tom? “He’d say he was tickled,” Andrea laughs. “And he’d think it was marvelous.”





Mentors make a difference

by SARAH PARKER

Enriching. Encouraging. Gratifying. Transforming. A gift.

Mentoring has many meanings to the Lamar University alumni and supporters who give of themselves to shape young minds and to the mentees whose lives are forever changed by the guidance of exemplary role models.

Through simple acts—shared wisdom, constructive feedback, a kind word of support, steady friendship—these mentors help Lamar students build confidence, refine skills, discover new passions, develop unshakable morals and rise to personal and professional success.

With their unwavering dedication and selfless desire to support the next generation, these individuals prove that mentors truly make a difference.

Vernon and Johnnie Durden

Giving back is the cornerstone of life for Distinguished Alumnus Vernon Durden '69, who returned after retirement to complete his B.A. in 2004, and his wife of 56 years, Johnnie (Criton) '00.

Since their early retirement more than two decades ago, the couple has devoted themselves to community service, benefiting countless lives through volunteerism, mentoring and financial

support. For these loyal Cardinals, Lamar University and its students will always be at the forefront of their efforts.

"We both graduated from Lamar, and we decided to make Lamar part of our life's work," Vernon said. "We put our time and our money and our influence into Lamar because we realize it's a very important part of the equation for growth in Southeast Texas."

In 2013, the Durdens moved toward meeting that goal by establishing the Vernon and Johnnie Durden Scholarship in Education to support future teachers. "We believe in teachers," Vernon said. "Everyone who's ever done anything started with a teacher."

As mentors, the



DURDENS

Durdens bring a wealth of experience gained over decades in prosperous corporate careers. Vernon served 34 years as a contracts manager at ExxonMobil, and Johnnie worked as an auditor at DuPont for 27 years. They are also celebrated community leaders with active roles at organizations like the 100 Black Men of Greater Beaumont Inc. (Vernon) and Top Ladies of Distinction Inc.—Beaumont Chapter (Johnnie).

Over the years, the Durdens have taken numerous Lamar students and Southeast Texas youths under their wings.

“We all need someone to help us, and that’s what we wanted to do,” Vernon said. “The mentee chooses you. As a mentor, you become interested in their life, their life goals, their aspirations. What you hope to do is demonstrate to your mentee that giving back and volunteering is key.”

Vernon and Johnnie strive to instill core values like dignity, integrity, compassion and mutual respect in mentees, and through volunteerism, they can put those principles into practice. Through her work with the Top Ladies of Distinction, Johnnie is currently helping mentor 54 area teens.

“It makes me feel wonderful to see that these young ladies have morals and respect about themselves, and they’re interested in helping others,” Johnnie said.

One activity Vernon enjoys sharing with mentees is building beds for children in need at local nonprofit Sleep in Heavenly Peace. Current mentee Jamaal Banks has volunteered with Vernon at these builds and said he finds it inspiring to see Vernon’s dedication to community service in action.



BANKS

“Seeing his impact [at Sleep in Heavenly Peace], his leadership, and being able to help others in need is just wonderful,” Banks said. “He’s mentored me on being a leader, helping others in the community, striving to reach goals and networking. Through his connections, I’ve been able to get in touch with people that are hiring and that has boosted my impact in things like the National Society of Black Engineers.”

Banks, who is currently pursuing a bachelor’s degree in electrical engineering at Lamar, feels honored to be one of Vernon’s mentees and to have been selected as a 2025-26 recipient of the 100 Black Men of America Inc. Special Gifts Scholarship. He says working with Vernon has made him want to give back to his community and mentor younger generations.

For Fred Vernon ’12, ’13, founder and CEO of KLV Ventures Inc., Vernon Durden was not only a mentor during his Lamar days. He was a guide, a support system and a benchmark for what future success looked like.

“He was the pillar, that light at the end of the tunnel for what I could be,” Fred said. “He was always there encouraging me and teaching me how to deal with complicated situations. He taught me about life and business and people.”

Throughout Fred’s time at Lamar—where he earned a B.B.A. in accounting, M.B.A. and M.S. in accounting—Vernon was in his corner whenever he needed him. He fondly remembers companionable lunches, dinners and coffees both at Lamar and in the Durden home.

“He showed me that you can be successful whether you’re an

entrepreneur, whether you’re in corporate America or whether you’re in academia,” Fred said. “He showed me that the priority is education, the priority is in how you carry yourself, your tone, your demeanor. If you focus on the priorities and practice well, positive results will follow.”

Edwin Vallery

When Edwin Vallery ’79, B.B.A.—finance, discusses his mentoring and philanthropic work at Lamar University, a genuine passion and infectious enthusiasm resonate in his voice. It’s easy to see how, as one of his mentees noted, his compassionate commitment is making a lasting difference in many lives.

“Being a mentor to Lamar University students has been a personal joy,” Vallery said. “Mentorship is not a task—it is a gift. A gift given generously, faithfully and with commitment to the success of every student I meet.”

Helping the next generation of Cardinals meet financial needs and achieve their dreams was an easy choice for Vallery after his retirement from Shell Oil in 2019. Lamar played a pivotal role in preparing him for a successful, decades-long career as a finance manager at Shell, and he was eager to pay it forward.

Vallery established the Edwin E. Vallery Scholarships in Lamar’s College of Business, beginning with a tuition assistance scholarship and later expanding his support to include book scholarships benefiting the Collegiate 100 and National Pan-Hellenic Council.

With his wealth of experience and natural aptitude for mentoring, Vallery wanted to provide students with more than financial aid. He coordinated with the university to meet recipients of his scholarships and connect with them as a resource and role model.

“Mentorship is a transformative opportunity—for the student and the mentor,” Vallery said. “I have been blessed as the majority of the students I’ve mentored possessed a desire to gain knowledge that could advance their personal and professional development. My philosophy has been to help young adults set meaningful goals—whether related to talent development, innovation, self-motivation, financial success or their role in the community. I aim to offer tools, not prescriptions, empowering students to navigate their own pathways of pursuit.”

Since 2020, Vallery has served as a mentor for numerous students, providing guidance and helping encourage them to reach their highest potential. He also conducts workshops such as financial literacy, personal finances, effective leadership and



Vallery, left, and Wilson

diversity in the workplace, as well as one-on-one sessions on topics like time management, setting goals and community responsibility. He says the best part of these “conversations” is when the students linger to talk privately and connect personally.

“These interactions are amazing,” Vallery said. “It is the icing on the cake. This is where the real mentoring happens—where students open up, ask the hard questions and seek reassurance that their dreams are possible.”

Two of Vallery’s most recent mentees and scholarship recipients, Jordan Nelson and Blake Wilson, can attest to the meaningful influence of his guidance and support.

An aspiring neurologist with plans to attend medical school, Nelson graduated from Lamar with a B.S. in biology and minor in chemistry with a pre-medical concentration in May 2026. He describes Vallery as “the epitome of a sincere, intelligent and compassionate mentor who truly has a heart for youth.”

“Mr. Vallery is the personification of what a true mentor is,” Nelson said. “Willing to go above and beyond what’s required is just one of the many qualities he exemplified throughout interactions. This has, in turn, translated into my academics, whether seeking help when needed, networking, scholarships or even seeking additional opportunities to advance one’s career and future readiness. Having Mr. Vallery as a mentor has not only allowed me to form even more meaningful connections but has also inspired and impacted my life in a positive manner.”

Another recent Lamar graduate, Wilson earned his B.B.A. in business administration and management information systems in May 2026 and plans to pursue his M.B.A. at Lamar this fall.

When asked why he chose Vallery as a mentor, he said it felt like they “chose each other.”

“Mr. Vallery consistently reached out to check on me, ask about my grades and make sure I had a plan for my future,” Wilson said. “He genuinely cared about my success and wanted to know about my dreams, aspirations and goals. His willingness to invest his time and energy into helping me grow made it easy to trust his guidance and view him as a mentor. His guidance has helped me navigate challenges and continue moving toward my goals.”

Wilson said his time with Vallery has taught him the importance of giving back, staying involved and investing in future generations.

“Having a mentor means having someone who helps direct you when life becomes uncertain,” Wilson said. “Mr. Vallery has provided encouragement, wisdom, accountability and support throughout my college journey. His mentorship has made a meaningful difference in my life, and I am grateful for everything he has done for me and for the students he continues to support.”



BANKS

When Nelson and Wilson graduated from Lamar, Vallery was there to support them. He said it was “a joy” to see them receive their diplomas. Both young men are Reaud Honors College graduates.

“I’m so glad they’ve done so well and will be going on to do greater things,” Vallery said. “I am grateful for every young adult who has trusted me with their questions, uncertainties and dreams—also, grateful for the chance to share my professional knowledge and lived experiences, and for the privilege of helping shape futures—one conversation at a time.”

Paul Manes

For more than three decades, internationally celebrated painter Paul Manes ’72, ’83, has been leaving his mark on the art world—not

only through his exquisite oil paintings, but through the young artists he inspires. Over the years, Manes has taken numerous Lamar University art students under his wing, demonstrating the tenacity it takes to be a working artist and guiding them toward their own success.

“[Being an artist] takes a lot of work, and it takes a lot of time,” Manes said. “I teach them to keep on working. If you work hard, then you have a better chance of having a life as a professional artist and entering the art world as it exists.”

Manes made his own entry into the art world later in life, having first earned a business degree from Lamar in 1972. It wasn’t until he started painting at age 30 that Manes discovered his true passion and purpose. Under the mentorship of late Lamar professor Jerry Newman, Manes honed his skills as an artist, earning his Bachelor of Fine Arts in 1983 and moving to New York City to begin his career.

“I tried my best to learn as much as I could from Jerry Newman,” Manes said. “He was everything about art to me. I was lucky to have him in my life.”

Newman’s impact as a teacher and guide was invaluable for Manes. As he gained momentum in the New York art scene, he took on a mentoring role himself, opening his home and studio to the next generation of Lamar art students.

One of Manes’ early summer interns, Michael Kennaugh ’86, was inspired by Manes’ kinetic energy and relentless drive.

“When I met Paul, sparks were flying off his shoes...he was electric,” Kennaugh said. “I was coming into his life at the point where he was really intense and focused. I loved his intensity. That’s what I needed as a young man.”

Assisting in Manes’ studio stretching and building of canvases, Kennaugh was completely immersed in the professional artist’s creative process. Manes’ high-intensity work ethic left a lasting impact on Kennaugh,





now an accomplished abstract painter whose own works reside in the permanent collections of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, and the Art Museum of Southeast Texas, among others.

"I needed to have a mature artist share their experiences with me...to see how they live, how they operate, what they do for inspiration, how they run their studios," Kennaugh said. "[Manes] showed me if you put in the hard work early, when you're young and strong enough to build that endurance to paint long hours, it'll pay off as you get older."

In 2014, Manes traded New York City for Colorado's stunning landscapes, but his commitment to mentoring Lamar students remained unchanged. In the summer of 2024, studio art major Olivia Cobb traveled to Manes' mountain studio for an internship as his painting assistant. She says her time with Manes taught her what it takes to keep up in a highly competitive industry.

"He expanded my perspectives and opened my mind to a world I want to participate in," Cobb said. "[Manes] and I remain in contact, and he is constantly giving me critiques and feedback on paintings, which has been very beneficial in improving my work."

Motivated by the experience, Cobb hopes to serve as a mentor herself one day.

"Being exposed to new ideas or unseen realities through mentorships can be life-changing for many people," Cobb said. "It absolutely was for me."

Rob Clark

Lamar University supporter and proud patron of the arts Rob Clark is an invaluable resource for art students seeking a fresh perspective on their work. The accomplished local artist and avid art collector is a regular at exhibitions and special events on campus, using these opportunities to connect with aspiring creatives and offer his real-world expertise.

"Over the years, I could not count how many [Lamar] art students have come and visited with me and talked about their thesis projects or their paintings," Clark said. "Sometimes an artist is struggling with a clean definition of who they are, and a third party or a teacher can see that student's work and...help them to identify elements that they didn't realize were significant."

Using his impressive personal collection as a teaching tool, Clark guides students on tours of the works displayed in his home and at Edison Plaza in Beaumont. By pointing out the standards, correlations and continuity in pieces by distinguished artists like Robert Rauschenberg, Jim Dine and Lamar alumnus Paul Manes, he helps students refine their own artistic goals and overcome hurdles.

"Students get in a rut, and they're scared to experiment," Clark said. "I give them encouragement to try alternatives to accomplish what their goal is...to take another bigger step from where they were."

Clark's feedback often provides the catalyst students need to step outside their comfort zones and try something daring. Chloe Thompson '23, sought Clark's guidance after they met at Le Grand Bal, the annual College of Fine Arts and Communication fundraiser, while she was an undergraduate studio art major.

"I just always valued his advice, seeing as he is a Beaumont giant in terms of art collecting and creating work himself," Thompson said. "He has always been supportive of my work throughout my career as an artist. He has pushed me to explore different media and to challenge myself in content and presentation."

Taking Clark's insights to heart, Thompson embraced mixed media alongside her preferred ink and charcoal, experimenting with oil pastel and gold leaf. Her work has been featured in numerous regional exhibitions, including the Dishman Art Museum's 2026 "After School Special" juried exhibition of work by LU alumni.

Clark also makes an impact by instructing students in how to market and sell their work, a lesson that resonated deeply with Logan Comeaux '25, who earned double bachelor's degrees in studio art with focuses in painting and sculpture.

"I still take that advice to this day," Comeaux said. "[Clark] really helps students sell their artwork and sell themselves and stand by their work. He radiates this energy that gives you purpose as an artist."

Comeaux also credits Clark with giving him the "extra push" he needed to pursue graduate school. He is currently working toward a Master of Fine Arts degree in painting at Florida State University, with ultimate plans to be a university professor, as well as an active painter.

"[Clark] was the first person to tell me I should [get a master's degree] outside of family," Comeaux said. "He is always encouraging with true, personalized enthusiasm for what you want to do. All the students love him."

"He is always encouraging with true, personalized enthusiasm for what you want to do. All the students love him."

—LOGAN COMEAUX '25



President Jaime Taylor, Coach Jordan Fee, Vice President and Director of Athletics Jeff O'Malley

MORE THAN A COACH:

LU student-athletes find support through mentors on and off the field

by CASSANDRA JENKINS

It is no secret that being a student-athlete is one of the most demanding experiences a young adult can face after high school. Their days consist of early mornings, rigid workouts, hours of classes and coursework, team practices and late-night study sessions.

Research shows that up to 90% of student-athletes feel overwhelmed by all they have to do, but studies from the U.S. Department of Education show that having even one strong mentor can improve academic and athletic performance while helping students manage stress.

For Emily Moon, a senior volleyball player and marketing major at Lamar University, she found solace and



companionhip from two different mentors in her life—her assistant coach, Andrew Strick, and her business professor, Dr. Toni Mulvaney. “From the second Coach Strick came in, I knew that we’d have a strong connection,” Moon said. “He brings in not only a lot of volleyball knowledge, but so much knowledge about anything and everything. He has some of the best advice to offer and is one of my biggest mentors.”

Moon also pointed to her business law professor Dr. Toni Mulvaney as another mentor on campus.

“My freshman year, as soon as I got taught by her, I just loved her,” Moon said. “She’s been awesome, and now, even as a senior, I still go into her office and ask her for advice.”

Moon said the traits that make both Strick and Mulvaney effective mentors are the care they take to listen and give quality advice. She said both of them are also always around to encourage her to be her best and are ready to pick her up when she’s down.

“It’s so important to connect with people who will be in your corner even after graduation,” she said, “because I can guarantee that if I were to call either of those two people in five years, they’d pick up the phone and be ready to take whatever I throw at them.”

Ethan Ellis, a track and field athlete

working on his master's in public administration at the university, said he was also able to foster a strong relationship with his coach, Trey Clark, during his time as a student-athlete.

Coach Clark is the director of Track & Field and Cross Country at LU and is a veteran at the university who has coached at Lamar since 1999. He has led Lamar to 20 team titles and coached nine All-Americans.

However, for Ellis, he saw Clark as more than a successful head coach, but as a constant support system, one that got him through a very physically and mentally challenging time in his athletic career.

Ellis pulled his hamstring at his second collegiate meet during his first year on the track team. After pushing himself too hard following the injury, Ellis aggravated the hamstring and ended up missing the remainder of the season.

He said Coach Clark was able to help him navigate that injury and the fallout that came mentally from it.

"Having someone I could vent to who remained supportive regardless of the situation was really helpful," Ellis said. "One point of guidance that [Coach Clark] gave me when I was constantly trying to push myself to the limit, he'd ask me, 'Who are you trying to perform for?'"

"In that moment, I realized that in a lot of aspects in my life I performed to satisfy others. He helped me realize that at the end of the day, the only thing that matters is if I am satisfied with myself. That piece of motivation really helped me forgo some of my insecurities."

Ellis said he was also able to talk to Clark as a mentor and come to him with questions about student government, internships, job opportunities and more.



"Having a good support system, it helped point me in the right direction," he said. "Being able to foster that relationship with my coach, it was very beneficial to my success at Lamar."

As former student-athletes reflect on the mentors who shaped them, Lamar's newest coaches say they hope to have the same impact on the next generation.

Both Alexandra Starkova and Jordan Fee were hired in May.

Starkova was tapped to lead the women's tennis team at Lamar University. She comes from Louisiana Christian University, where she served as head coach for four seasons and led the team to top 25 finishes in the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics polls each of the past two seasons.

She said that as she begins her new role in Beaumont, she plans to center her coaching philosophy around three



things—culture, development and accountability.

"The culture comes first because that's what creates trust, as well as developing every day technically, physically, mentally and academically, not just on the court, but also off the court," she said. "Then there's accountability. We have to make sure that every player understands the standards for our program and embraces their own responsibility to the team."

Coach Jordan Fee, who was selected to lead the men's basketball team, shared a similar mindset as he says he

plans to prioritize quality time with his team from the jump since he inherited a fresh roster of 15 brand new athletes.

Since arriving at Lamar, Fee said he has invited players to meals at his home and hopes to organize team retreats and spend time with athletes outside of practice as a way to build trust before the season begins in November.

"Beyond basketball, when you create a relationship that is based on love and care for one another, it's going to go far beyond whether or not these guys are performing on the basketball court," he said. "What people on the outside might not understand is how involved we are in these guys' lives—if you do it right."

Fee said he hopes that years after leaving Lamar, his players remember more than the games they played.

"The most important thing for me is when they leave here, I hope that they remember the way we as a staff made them feel," he said. "I hope their lasting memories have a lot to do with the way they were treated and the way they were able to grow together with teammates who were special just like them."

Dream Makers

We express our deep gratitude to the alumni and friends of Lamar University who have recently established endowments or made plans to endow gifts through estate plans. These gifts encourage students to pursue a college education and support faculty in creating innovative learning environments. An endowment creates a legacy that becomes a permanent part of Lamar's history. To learn more about how you can endow a gift to Lamar, we invite you to visit our website at lamar.edu/development 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

The **Dr. Victor A. Zaloom Fund for the Department of Industrial and Systems Engineering** will benefit the faculty of and the students pursuing degree plans in the Department of Industrial and Systems Engineering. Zaloom is funding this account during his lifetime with annual gifts and has provided a transformational estate gift to transfer the funds to the Dr. Victor A. Zaloom Endowment for Industrial and Systems Engineering, establishing a permanent legacy to his life and commitment to Lamar University and its students. Zaloom's career includes more than 44 years of service at Lamar University, including more than 30 years as chair of the Department of Industrial and Systems Engineering. Additionally, he also served as director of Engineering Graduate Programs, many years as associate dean of the College of Engineering, three years as interim dean of the College of Graduate Studies, three years as interim dean of engineering and more than 44 years as professor of industrial engineering. Zaloom came to Lamar University in August 1981 as professor and chair of the Department of Industrial Engineering and director of Engineering Graduate Programs. Under his leadership, enrollment in the Bachelor of Science program increased more than 300%. He obtained approval for the Master of Engineering program, established the Lamar University Center for Ports and Waterways, started the first Department Advisory Council in the college and was instrumental in increasing the department's scholarship endowment to over \$1.6 million. Three endowed scholarships at Lamar honor him.

The **Kelly and Mike Roebuck Regents Scholarship for Construction Management** was established by an anonymous donor in honor of the 50th anniversary of Echo Group. Kelly (Hefner) Roebuck '85 and Michael "Mike" P. Roebuck Sr. '83 graduated from Lamar University with a Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education and Bachelor of Business Administration, respectively. Mike is a lifelong resident of Nederland and CEO/owner of Echo Group in Port Arthur. He has worked in the family-

owned business since the company's inception in 1976. Additionally, he is the co-owner of several other companies that provide industrial services to the petrochemical industry throughout the Gulf Coast region. Mike and Kelly have been donors to various Lamar University initiatives for over 20 years. Mike serves on the Construction Management Advisory Council and served as a trustee on the Lamar University Foundation board. They live in Nederland, continuing to serve as community leaders in Southeast Texas.

Candace (Hebert) Baumgardner '20 began her college journey in 2016 at Lamar University. She pursued and earned her Bachelor of Science in Exercise Science Fitness Management with a pre-professional focus in occupational therapy in 2020. She graduated cum laude and was recognized as Student of the Year in the Health and Kinesiology Department. Throughout her time at Lamar, Candace distinguished herself as an LU Cardinalette twirler for the marching band, Quizbowl finalist for the Annual Texas ACSM Conference, founding member of the Physical and Occupational Therapy Club, and an active member of Zeta Tau Alpha. She also worked in the Office of Admissions as a tour guide for several years as a student worker. Candace's connection to Lamar University runs deep. She is one of 12 family members to attend LU, collectively earning seventeen degrees across three generations. As a proud third-generation graduate, Candace carries forward a family tradition of excellence and commitment to education. Her parents, Carol (Patteson) '89, '90, and Mike Hebert '95, '06, were guiding influences throughout her college journey. Carol has devoted over 40 years to serving the Southeast Texas community through nonprofit work as a speech-language pathologist and during a distinguished career in public relations. Mike dedicated two decades to the oil and gas industry, rising to the role of maintenance manager at a local refinery. As a result of the success they attribute to LU and the pride they take in the legacy their daughters continue to build through LU, Carol and

Mike established the **Candace Hebert Endowed Scholarship**. Candace and Brandon '21, her husband, and fellow Lamar University graduate, stay involved with LU events to promote Cardinal pride and spirit in their home and hope to carry on the family tradition of attendance with their son, Luke.

Carol (Patteson) '89, '90, and Mike Hebert '95, '06, continued the strong bond between Lamar University and their daughters and established the **Kristin Hebert Endowed Scholarship**. Kristin Hebert '24, '26 graduated from the Texas Academy in 2022 before continuing her education at Lamar University. She earned her Bachelor of Science in Exercise Science in 2024, graduating summa cum laude, and went on to complete her Master of Business Administration in 2026. Throughout her time at Lamar, Kristin distinguished herself as the feature twirler for the marching band, a Lamar University Ambassador, a Reaud Honors College student and an active member of Zeta Tau Alpha. She was honored as a Senior of Significance and also led several research projects that deepened her knowledge of exercise science and strengthened her academic foundation. Kristin's connection to Lamar University runs deep as a proud third-generation graduate, carrying forward a family tradition of excellence and commitment to education.

Tracy Herrmann '99 graduated from Lamar University with a bachelor's in business administration. He was a student-athlete who was not on an athletic scholarship but who did obtain an academic scholarship that was helpful when it came to covering a portion of his tuition and fees. Herrmann established the **Tracy Herrmann Scholarship in Business for Lamar Athletes** to provide a similar opportunity to a current student-athlete at Lamar pursuing a business degree, specifically in accounting. His career as a public accountant created opportunities for his family beyond what he could have imagined, and he would like to create similar opportunities for others.



Phillip Fuller '81, Cheryl (Spencer) Fuller '82 and Jeff O'Malley, vice president and athletics director



Larry Eastepp '81, Distinguished Alumnus Keith Giblin '86



Judy (Walker) Linsley '67, '77, Distinguished Alumna Ellen (Walker) Rienstra '62, '80, and Jordan Williams, major gifts officer for advancement



Distinguished Alumnus Edwin Vallery '79; Brett Welch, provost and vice president; and Johnny O'Connor, dean of the College of Education and Human Development



Jerry Thacker; Rob Clark; Roy Steinhagen; and Kim Steinhagen, major gifts officer and chair, LU Public Art Committee



Peggy Zabala; Lee Ann (Dean) Garth '79; Terry Garth; Juan Zabala '07, vice president for university advancement and CEO, LU Foundation Inc.; Cynthia (Smesny) Norwood '72; Distinguished Alumnus Larry Norwood '73; Phillip Fuller '81 and Cheryl (Spencer) Fuller '82



Jami (Long) Lee '97; Gisela Houseman; First Lady Stacy Taylor; President Jamie Taylor; Distinguished Alumnus David Montagne '74; Brett Welch, provost and vice president; Ronnie Smith '78, '80; and Distinguished Alumnus and TSUS Regent Stephen Lee '89



1923 *Dinner*

Philanthropy encompasses a special kind of “giving back” to a community—taking hard-earned resources and freely choosing to support a cause. On April 24, LU recognized the unique generosity of its endowment donors during the 1923 Dinner at the Montagne Center. The Cardinal community holds in high esteem the alumni and friends who have shown such selfless commitment to a vibrant future for LU and who recognize the transformative difference education makes in the lives of students.

DEDICATION: **Teri and Glen Morgan Baseball Complex**

May 2, 2026, between a Cardinals doubleheader and after a March 2025 groundbreaking, LU held the dedication ceremony for the Teri and Glen Morgan Baseball Complex. The new 8,500-square foot facility boasts a new locker room, complete with backlit LU on the ceiling, coaches' offices, training room, film room, equipment room and lounge. The front lobby showcases Cardinal Baseball Hall of Famer flags above head, celebrating LU's history on the diamond.

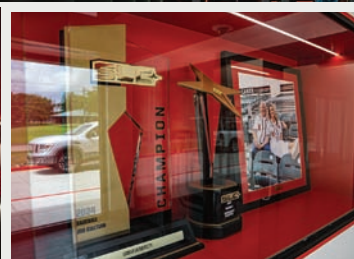
President Jaime Taylor described the significance of the complex. "Simply put, this is a standard-setting facility, one that is as good as, if not better than, any baseball facility of its kind, not only in Texas but anywhere in the country. It reflects the expectations we have for ourselves and the level at which we intend to compete. At Lamar University, our goal is simple: we play for championships in all sports. Achieving that goal requires talent, leadership and culture, but it also requires facilities that align with these ambitions," Taylor said.

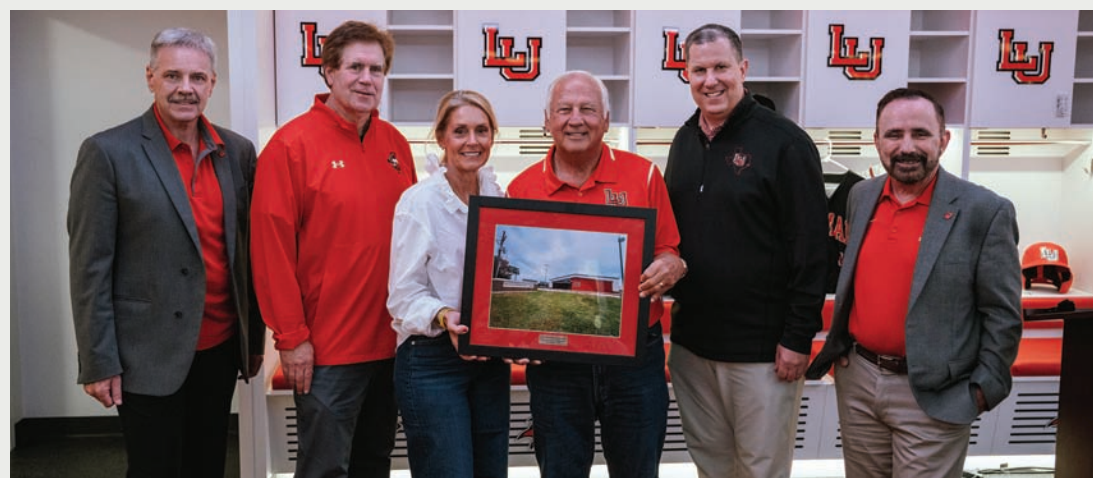
"None of this would have been possible without the extraordinary leadership and generosity of Teri and Glenn Morgan. Their impact on this university is going to be profound and lasting. From the Morgan Suites to this defining investment, their support has helped elevate Lamar athletics and has strengthened pride across our entire campus. This complex reflects not just generosity, but leadership, leadership that understands what it takes for a university to compete nationally."

Jeff O'Malley, vice president and athletics director, said, "What makes this building even more meaningful is the tradition it represents. Success here didn't start today. And it didn't start with this building. It was built over decades through championships, postseason runs, and a standard of excellence that has defined Lamar baseball for a long time. What this building does is remove obstacles and unlock potential. It elevates how we train. It enhances how we develop. And in recruiting, it changes the conversation. When prospects and their families visit campus, they won't just hear about our success—They'll see it and experience it firsthand. None of this happens without belief—and generosity. Teri and Glen, you've given Lamar Baseball a true home and a powerful recruiting advantage for generations to come. Thank you."

Distinguished Alumnus Glen Morgan said, "Teri and I would like to extend our sincere appreciation to Dr. Taylor for his enthusiasm and leadership in bringing this project to life. His dedication to Lamar Athletics has been steadfast and unwavering. That commitment is evident in the many improvements he has championed to ensure Lamar remains competitive at the highest levels. Under his leadership, Lamar continues to strengthen its reputation for excellence in both academics and athletics."

"Lamar has held a special place in our hearts since we first met at Vincent-Beck Stadium, and it is a tremendous privilege to play a role in this exciting expansion," Morgan reflected. "With this new clubhouse project and the plans for continued growth, Lamar will offer facilities that rival the very best, helping attract outstanding student-athletes and positioning the university to compete on a national stage. It has been a true honor to give back to an institution that has given so much to us and to countless others. We hope our contribution inspires others to join us in supporting Lamar University so it can continue to enrich the lives of future generations of students, providing them with the opportunities and foundation to achieve lasting success."







CRENSHAW TEACHING FELLOWSHIP:

Supporting the next generation of *teachers*

by GILLIAN LAIRD

Once an esteemed position, a career in teaching is now sometimes associated with hardship and underappreciation. Across America, teachers whether rookie or veteran can be faced with burnout and the desire to trade in their chalkboards and lesson plans for a less stressful job where they needn't struggle for district support or address behavioral issues among students. As a result, aspiring teachers maybe hesitant to pursue the profession.

Enter Lamar University's Crenshaw Teaching Fellowship. With fellowship support, graduates like Tiger Hopkins '25

and Yoselin Roberto '25 are committed to becoming the teachers the youth of America need.

In partnership with LU, the Crenshaw Teaching Fellowship provides financial assistance to the aspiring teachers of Southeast Texas. Each semester, three graduating seniors who meet a specific set of requirements are gifted \$10,000 to kickstart their careers.

Founded in honor of local philanthropists Joy (Hopkins) '69 and Will Crenshaw '67, '14, the fellowship aims to strengthen local schools by encouraging future educators to remain in the Southeast Texas area, as well as to support the future of teaching.

"I've received a lot of discouragement

from everybody—from family, from friends and from people looking at teaching from the outside," said Tiger Hopkins, a 2025 fellowship recipient. Like Hopkins, many aspiring teachers face the same struggle, with a 2022 EducationWeek poll showing that 62 % of parents advise their children against entering the profession.

Currently teaching at Beaumont school district's Roy Guess Elementary, Hopkins expressed his own concerns about his role as an educator. "I just finished my first year of teaching, and about half the class was not able to read very well," he said. "We're doing as much as we can, but it's definitely a major challenge."

Some students, Hopkins claimed,

TIGER
Hopkins '25



showed up to school “exhausted and sleeping” because they stayed up all night playing video games. “It really does start at home,” Hopkins said regarding these issues, “because I can’t go home with them.”

Crenshaw fellowship recipient Yoselin Roberto has her own concerns on teacher working conditions, as well as how they lead to eventual burnout. Currently a math teacher, Roberto said, “Many young teachers are burning out because the demands of the job often exceed the resources available to them. [Teachers] are juggling heavy workloads, emotional labor...Over time, it’s easy for even passionate educators to feel overwhelmed and discouraged.”

Heather Crenshaw Petkovsek, the daughter of Joy and Will Crenshaw, seeks to help remove some of these burdens through the Crenshaw Teaching Fellowship. “The fellowship was inspired by my parents...both of whom attended Lamar University,” Petkovsek said.

Over the years, Petkovsek’s family grew increasingly concerned regarding the many challenges facing the Beaumont school district. “We love BISD, and when the first state takeover occurred, many teachers understandably left for other districts,” Petkovsek said. “It became clear that our area needed more teachers who could stay and invest in local students.”

Supported by the belief that teaching is one of the most important professions in society, the Crenshaw Teaching Fellowship has a strict philosophy when it comes to how they choose recipients.

Inspired by the Texas Education Agency’s “Grow Your Own” concept—the idea that communities retain teachers when they recruit them from within the area—the fellowship aims to reward college graduates with ties to Southeast Texas.

“If we could help even a few future teachers stay in Southeast Texas and make a difference in children’s lives, then it would be worthwhile,” Petkovsek said.

The fellowship was created in partnership with Lamar University and the College of Education and Human Development. “The university has been wonderful to work with throughout this process,” Petkovsek said. “[Lamar] handles all of the selection and vetting. We have no role in choosing recipients.”

However, for Joy Crenshaw, the fellowship is not just about providing financial support for aspiring educators. It is also about helping future teachers become the mentors that children need.

“The fellowship,” Crenshaw said, “is really about giving future teachers flexibility and support so they can create better experiences for their students.”

She went on to say that public school districts do not always provide the funds that allow teachers to go above and beyond for their students. “For example, maybe a teacher wants to buy an incubator for a science lesson...having a little extra money could make that possible. Those kinds of experiences can have a lasting impact on children.”

In supporting future teachers, the Crenshaw Teaching Fellowship also supports the well-being of students



YOSELIN
Roberto '25

through the hope that their recipients show up with care and compassion each day. “Schools can’t do everything, but they can be a haven for children,” Crenshaw said. “Sometimes it’s their greatest source of stability and hope. I hope our fellows never lose sight of that responsibility and never waste an opportunity to impact a child’s life.”

Despite the difficulties surrounding the teaching profession, recipients Hopkins and Roberto are both fired up about their careers as educators thanks to the fellowship.

“It really took a load off of me,” Hopkins said. “It helped me create my classroom exactly how I wanted it. It helped me move to Beaumont to get my own apartment. I was also able to pay for things like storage and classroom materials that I wanted to implement with my students.”

From Roberto’s perspective, the fellowship “provides support, community and professional development that many new teachers don’t receive.” She went on to say that teachers who feel valued and supported are able to help reverse some of the negativity surrounding the profession.

“The Crenshaw fellowship shows you that teaching is truly a respected and impactful career,” Roberto said.

While the challenges facing education are still prominent, the Crenshaw Teaching Fellowship symbolizes—and acts on—the belief that teachers deserve to be supported, respected and valued as they are the greatest mentors of our society.



Lovoi, left, with Warner

One student's *experience* expands opportunities for others

by ALLISON LENNARTZ

When Mallery Warner '26 began her freshman year at Lamar University in

the fall of 2022, she didn't know exactly what she wanted to do or what kind of career she was going to pursue. A native of Vidor, she chose to attend Lamar for both practical and sentimental reasons. Her roots in Southeast Texas ran deep and she did not want to move away from her family after graduating high school. She also saw the exceptional education her mother, Plummer Award recipient and now dyslexia teacher Traci (Maines) Warner '01, received at Lamar and wanted to follow in her footsteps of success.

Though she didn't start out as a business major, Warner recalled that, after spending several semesters at LU and weighing potential options for her future, she realized that "almost every entity is a business." Consequently, she changed her major to general business and immediately started becoming more involved with the College of Business.

During her sophomore year, she worked as an intern at LU for Shannon Figueroa '02, '03, '07, director of alumni affairs and advancement services. Figueroa was able to help Warner make connections with local businesspeople who encouraged her to shadow them in their various roles so she could gain insight about possible careers to pursue in the business realm. It was through one such interaction that she met Amy Lovoi '13, '15, who earned her bachelor's degree and her MBA at LU and is president and CEO of the Greater Beaumont Chamber of Commerce.

After their initial meeting, Lovoi said "it quickly became apparent how valuable direct exposure to the business community could be for students." Lovoi said she was impressed by Warner's active participation and willingness to engage in meetings she attended as an intern. She also commended

Warner for her “genuine curiosity, enthusiasm and adaptability.”

Through her internship with the chamber, Warner became an ambassador of sorts between it and the College of Business, helping to spark some of the initial conversations between the two parties “about creating (similar) opportunities for many more students.”

Joby John became the Dean of the College of Business in September 2024. It didn’t take him long to realize the need for improvement in the way that internships were being offered to LU students. At that time, students could participate in internships and receive three credit hours for the work they performed for a business during a semester’s time, but the program was not organized or offered as a formal course. He estimates that only a few students were capitalizing on this opportunity each semester. Over the next few semesters, Dean John and his staff conducted a review of the department’s curriculum and internship program. They also took into consideration best practices from flagship institutions such as Bentley University and the University of Missouri and sought to model their approach to student internships after programs proven to be successful. As a result of some of these changes, the internship program became available as an elective course, which Lovoi agreed to teach as an adjunct professor. It officially launched earlier this year and is off to a promising start. Dean John says his hope now is that they will have 20-30 students enrolling in the program each semester, a significant increase from the previous number of participants.

Additionally, as the College of Business grows and improves the internship program, it is collaborating with the Center for Career and Professional Development to provide students with more internship opportunities.

Warner’s time as a business student overlapped with these changes as they were taking place in the College of Business, so took the opportunity to contribute to some of these improvements. She said being part of the efforts to increase internship opportunities for current and future business students “is more meaningful than (words) can say” and expressed hope that it will “benefit them for years to come.” Lovoi describes the program as being “designed to connect business students with meaningful, paid opportunities at local businesses.” The chamber and College of Business work together to match students with participating employers “based on the student’s interests and skills as well as the employer’s need.”

When Lovoi considers the future of the program, she envisions “a long-term talent pipeline connecting LU students with the employers who drive the Southeast Texas economy.” She explained that the mission of the chamber is to fortify the business community and that their participation in this program helps accomplish that goal. She lauded the way it has

resulted in stronger connections and has enhanced industry and professional development for students and businesses. She said that it “increases the likelihood that talented graduates will choose to build their careers in Southeast Texas.”

When asked to reflect on the future she foresees for LU’s internship program, Warner said she hopes it will “continue to flourish” and grow as more students and businesses become aware of and involved with its efforts. “I fully believe that students are the future of the work force” and that the “community will continue to benefit from keeping these great minds here in our area.” She encourages any current or prospective business students to “always take the meeting and always be open to new things” when they are presented with new opportunities and experiences. And, she added, “you never know what friendships, memories or experiences” you miss out on if you aren’t open to experiencing new things. Warner’s willingness to “take the meeting” with Amy Lovoi along with her efforts to further students’ connections to local businesses through her work at the chamber will serve to benefit many LU students and Southeast Texas businesses for years to come.

Additional information about the College of Business internship program in partnership with the Greater Beaumont Chamber of Commerce is available by contacting the College of Business at cob-internships@lamar.edu or by reaching out to the Greater Beaumont Chamber of Commerce at chamber@bmtcoc.org.

From left, Dean Joby John; Raeleigh Smit, who interned with the Art Museum of Southeast Texas in 2026; Maria Cisneros, who interned with Steepmeadow Solutions in spring and Neches Federal Credit Union this summer; and Associate Dean Gevorg Sargsyan.





Professor Tracy Benson; Valero representatives Carol (Patteson) Hebert '89, Chris Turbeville, Jerome Delafosse '09, Jerry Stumbo; and President Jaime Taylor

Valero's lasting partnership fuels success for engineering students

by KRISTEN BAKER



In 2009, Valero pledged \$1 million to endow the Valero Scholarship in Engineering at Lamar University. Since its creation, 153 students have received the award, with \$641,135 distributed to engineering students to date.

Valero's commitment to supporting future engineers continues to make an impact—both financially and through mentorship opportunities that connect students with industry professionals.

"The Valero Scholarship has made a huge difference for me as a mechanical engineering major," Felipe Garza '26, a May graduate who also interned with Kuraray last summer and accepted a full-time offer from them in February 2026, said. "It helped take some of the financial pressure off, which meant I didn't have to worry as much about working extra hours to cover expenses. That gave me more time to focus on my classes, labs, senior design, and getting involved on campus."

Garza said the scholarship also allowed him to take on leadership roles and more demanding coursework.

"It has given me the breathing room to take on more challenging courses and explore opportunities outside the classroom, which has helped me grow both academically and personally," he said.

Valero's generosity extends beyond scholarships. Through events such as the annual Valero Scholarship Luncheon,

students meet Valero employees and Lamar alumni now working in the energy industry.

“Companies like Valero are truly making a lasting impact on the lives of our students—past, present, and future,” Haylee Burke, director of industrial partnerships and cooperative education for Lamar’s College of Engineering, said. “At the recent Valero Scholarship Luncheon, it was inspiring to see alumni—now thriving in their careers at Valero—come back to engage with our current students. It was a powerful full-circle moment that underscored the real-world impact of their support.”

Valero also provides internship and co-op positions for students pursuing real-world experience. These roles allow engineering majors to gain hands-on training, mentorship and professional development.

“I’ve had the opportunity to intern and co-op part-time with Valero at their Port Arthur refinery,” Valero Scholar Trey Tolar ’26, B.S. electrical engineering, said. “I participated in five terms with Valero, and each rotation gave me the chance to gain hands-on experience with different technologies and a great mentorship program that helped me grow professionally.”

Many of these students connect with Valero through the university’s Engineering Career Fair, where company representatives, often LU alumni, interview the next generation of engineers.

“The career fair ultimately connected me to Valero, where I started as an intern and then transitioned into full-time work,” Joshua Theriac, LU alumnus and associate mechanical engineer at Valero’s Port Arthur refinery said.

Valero employs numerous Lamar graduates at its 15 petroleum refineries, 12 ethanol plants and two low-carbon fuel plants.

“I started my first internship at Valero in 2022, and I’ve been working there ever since,” Ngoc Phan, LU alumnus and associate process engineer at Valero’s Port Arthur refinery said. “I never felt the need to explore other companies because I felt challenged, supported and valued from my very first day.”

For many Lamar graduates, Valero’s company culture is a major reason to stay.

“Valero’s commitment to excellence, culture of teamwork and dedication to the community align with my own values,” Theriac said. “It felt like the right fit from the start.”

Valero’s guiding principles—safety, environment and community—continue to drive its partnership with Lamar University.

“Valero is committed to doing the right thing, whether that’s supporting communities, protecting the environment, or providing energy people rely on,” Theriac said. “We strive to deliver our best every day, and that sense of responsibility makes me proud to wear the Valero name.”

“I am proud to work at Valero because the company really emphasizes a ‘care culture,’” Phan added. “This attitude is reflected in our collaboration, the support we receive during challenging times and our commitment to giving back to the community.”

Lamar University’s College of Engineering values its long-standing partnership with Valero, which provides scholarships, career opportunities, and hands-on learning experiences for students.

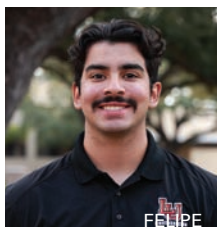
“Every day brings a new challenge, and I get to work alongside some of the best people in the industry,” Theriac said.



Dylan Lynch, left



TOLAR



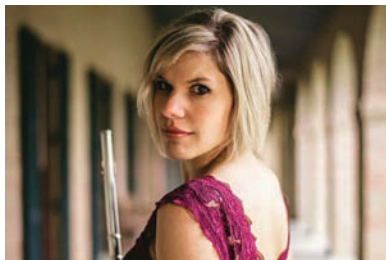
FELIPE



BURKE



Kristin (Crawford) Wescoat '16



Music professor awarded Fulbright Scholarship to teach in Sweden

Brielle Frost, associate professor of music, has been awarded a Fulbright Scholar Award and will teach in Sweden during

the Spring 2027 semester. Frost will serve as a guest instructor at the Ingesund School of Music at Karlstad University in Arvika, where she will teach applied flute lessons, coach chamber groups and flute ensemble, and lead a weekly studio class. A performer and educator with an international profile, Frost has presented master classes and performances across the United States, Europe, and South America, including in Peru, Brazil, Italy, Costa Rica and Canada. She is a substitute musician with the Symphony of Southeast Texas and has performed with the Valley Symphony Orchestra, Steamboat Symphony Orchestra, Topeka Symphony Orchestra and Midland-Odessa Symphony Orchestra, among others. She is also a founding member of the Ambrosia Flute Trio, which has toured extensively throughout the U.S. and Peru. The Fulbright Program, established in 1946, is a competitive international exchange initiative that supports scholars and educators conducting research and teaching abroad while fostering cross-cultural collaboration in more than 160 countries.

Physics student selected for prestigious international program

Physics student Alysa Patteson, a senior from Nederland, headed to Italy this summer after being selected for the 2026 cohort of the U.S. Department of Energy-Istituto Nazionale di Fisica Nucleare (INFN) Summer Students



Exchange Program. The program selected just 11 undergraduate students across the United States. The exchange program supports collaboration between U.S. and Italian researchers in nuclear and particle physics and offers students hands-on experience in advanced experimental work. Since its establishment in 2004, participants have often come from major research institutions and gone on to graduate study and research careers. Patteson said her experience at LU played a central role in preparing her for the opportunity. "The opportunities and preparation I have received at Lamar University have allowed me to compete at this level and be chosen for an international research experience," she said. Patteson is an undergraduate researcher in the Experimental Nuclear Physics Group, working under the direction of Zhaozhong Shi and Philip Cole on the EPIC luminosity detector through a Department of Energy-supported NuSTEAM program. "Through this program, I was given the opportunity to intern at Brookhaven National Laboratory and the University of Houston," she said. Cole emphasized the significance of her selection for the Italian research institute. "The mathematical acumen she brought to the research project places her in the top in the nation," Cole said. "It is a very rare thing to get an internship at INFN-Genova."



Cybersecurity training returns with hands-on ICS focus

Cybersecurity professionals, researchers and industry partners gathered at LU for a hands-on Industrial Control Systems

cybersecurity training workshop, bringing together participants from across Texas and several states to strengthen defenses for critical infrastructure. The 2nd



Annual ICS Cybersecurity Hands-on Training Workshop was hosted by the Center for Data Analytics and Cybersecurity in collaboration with Idaho National Laboratory, the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency Region 6, and academic partner Sul Ross State University. The three-day program included intensive, eight-hour courses covering Intermediate Cybersecurity for Industrial Control Systems (ICS201 and ICS202), as well as CyberStrike NEMESIS, a simulation-based exercise designed to test participant response to evolving cyber threats. Helen Lou, professor of chemical engineering and director of the U.S. Department of Energy-funded Center for Data Analytics and Cybersecurity, said the workshop has become a key training platform for professionals working to protect critical infrastructure systems. Corporate sponsors included ExxonMobil and Valero Energy Corp.

Early Bird Admission Program expands, awards nearly \$30M

LU's Early Bird Admission Program saw major growth in its second year, expanding to more high schools, reviewing more transcripts and awarding nearly \$30 million in



scholarships to prospective students. The program, designed to simplify the admissions and scholarship process for high school seniors, partnered with 17 high schools in 2026, up from 10 in 2025. Admissions staff reviewed 1,324 transcripts this year, compared to 873 in 2025, and identified 1,168 eligible students for scholarships totaling \$29.7 million. "This year we focused heavily on building stronger partnerships with school districts," Hanna Terro, director of admissions, said. "The district-level agreements allowed us to streamline the process for students while also creating new opportunities for schools and counselors." That streamlining includes application fee waivers for eligible students in participating districts and the elimination of the traditional admissions application requirement for participating students.

Cardinals soar to second-place finish at college nationals

The LU Cheer Team delivered another standout performance at the National Cheerleaders Association (NCA) College Nationals in Daytona Beach, Fla., earning a second-place finish during the April 9-11 competition and continuing the program's rise on the national stage.

In just their third appearance at the NCA College Nationals, the Cardinals have firmly established themselves among the nation's top programs, earning a spot in the winner's circle for the second consecutive year and bringing home the silver medal in D1 Spirit Rally. The team has steadily climbed the rankings each



season, improving from fourth place in 2024, to third in 2025, and now capturing a runner-up finish in 2026. "Representing Lamar University on a national stage and earning our highest finish in program history means everything to us," Megan Thompson, head cheer coach, said. "Right after awards, we went to the beach like we always do to take our team pictures and celebrate together. It was in that moment—watching them laugh, hug, and take it all in—that I realized what we had accomplished." Looking ahead, Thompson notes that the team aims to build on its current success by continuing to elevate skill level, strengthen team culture, and further expand the program's growing legacy. "When we first entered the division, people didn't know who we were," she said. "This year, teams were coming up to us at nationals saying they were rooting for us to win. That shift speaks volumes. It shows that we are building something real. A legacy. It's not just about one performance; it's about consistently showing up and proving that we belong on that stage."

LU Dance Team takes home first place at College Classic National Championship

For the first time in program history, the Lamar University Dance Team captured the Division 1 (D1) Small Hip Hop national championship at The College Classic in Orlando, Fla., in April 2026. The dance team brought three routines to nationals, earning a major milestone as all three placed in the top five.

In addition to a first-place win in D1 Small Hip Hop, choreographed by Macy Romero, the team placed second in D1 Small Jazz, choreographed by Dezja Kelly, and fourth in D1 Small Pom, choreographed by TJ Maple. "Competing and winning on a national stage in only our second year in Division 1 Hip Hop speaks volumes about the talent, work ethic and resilience of Lamar's students-athletes," Dezja Kelly, head dance team coach, said. Through mutual support, discipline, and confident, intentional performances, the team rose to the occasion and elevated Lamar University into the ranks of the nation's best dance programs.

"From the moment we began competing in 2024, earning a national title has been the goal," Kelly said. "What stood out most at nationals was their willingness to be coached and to get better in real time. They were eager to hear judges' feedback, to watch film and to make the necessary adjustments literally overnight. That takes maturity, accountability and a true desire to improve, especially when you are competing against programs with years of experience." Kelly believes the victory establishes a new benchmark for the program and hopes it will spark greater excitement and visibility for the Lamar University Dance Team while inspiring stronger community support throughout the year. The team performs at every home football and basketball game, showcases its talent during its annual spring performance each May, and continues to represent the university on the national stage.



Dockens named as a 2026 Top 50 Voice in Higher Education

Audiologist Ashley Dockens, associate provost of academic innovation and digital learning, has been named one of the Top 50 Voices to Follow in Higher Education for 2026. According to Vevox, the No. 1 rated polling and Q&A platform for educators

and businesses, this distinction honors prominent educators, academic leaders, and innovators who are advancing meaningful progress within higher education. The recognition underscores Lamar University's expanding influence in the field of academic innovation both across Texas and in broader national and international contexts, with Dockens spearheading those efforts. Dockens and her team investigate how AI is shaping higher education by conducting surveys and collaborating with industry partners to understand real-world developments. By integrating faculty feedback with their own research, they provide informed recommendations for incorporating AI into academic curricula.

Discover Engineering connects community and careers

The College of Engineering hosted its annual Discover Engineering event April 11. With the College of Engineering celebrating its 75-year anniversary, this year's event was the biggest one yet and encouraged kids

to get excited about STEM careers. The event featured a variety of hands-on STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) activities, including building College of Engineering fruit snack DNA models, participating in an egg drop challenge, constructing straw bridges, creating lava lamp bottles and slime, testing vertical jumps, exploring the engineering of pancakes, and visiting a robot petting zoo. Activities were hosted by current student organizations, Lamar University departments, and local industry partners.



"It was so much fun to see the kids enjoy learning about DNA with our candy DNA model," Nehemias Dominguez, Biomedical Engineering Club president said. "It was exciting to see kids get excited about engineering and sub-sections of engineering, like biomedical engineering. Even the parents were interested, and I feel like everyone learned something they might not have known before."



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.

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lamar.edu/alumni-update
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Distinguished Alumnus and former congressman **Nick Lampson** '68, B.S. secondary education, '74, M.Ed. educational leadership, recently spoke to students in Honors American Government. He is currently vice president of operations for Riceland Healthcare and partner in the public affairs firm Outreach Strategists. He and his wife, **Susan** '87, B.S. elementary education, '94, M.Ed. special education, live in Beaumont.

50s

Dr. Ralph Merwin '54 is 92 and proud to be a Lamar Alumnus. After graduation, he was accepted into Kirkville College of Osteopathy and Surgery (now Truman University) with full national scholarships before completing an internship in Michigan and then opening a private practice in West Orange. After 32 years and moving to an Arkansas retreat, he was coerced into "helping out for a few weeks," which led to another 13 years in practice. He fully retired in 2004 and has missed patient care for 22 years "even on a creek /ranch and home" in Branson, Mo.

60s

Don Warren Jr. '63, B.B.A. accounting, and his wife, Judith, celebrated their 50th anniversary with a date for the Tina Turner Musical at Lutch Theatre. Their first date was seeing Tina Turner in concert June 29, 1974. He is a professor and director of the School of Accounting, Finance and Economics at Lamar University. They live in Beaumont.

Charles Barrow '65, B.S. chemical engineering, is retired from ALCOA and ORMET Alumina Companies. He and his wife, Faye, live in St. George, La.

John '66, B.A. English, and **Bobby Jo Clawson** celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary in 2025. They live in Manchester, Iowa.

Thomas Van Devender '68, B.S. biology, earned his doctorate in geochronology in 1973 and is director of biodiversity programs for Greater Good. He retired as senior research scientist after 25 years with the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum, has over 150 publications and collected nearly 30,000 herbarium specimens in Sonora. He and his wife, Ana, live in Tucson, Ariz.

Congratulations to **Clayton Lau** '69, B.B.A. marketing, president and CEO of Houston Dynamic Service, on his business celebrating 50 years. He lives in Baytown.

70s

Monsignor Kelly Catholic High School honored **Debbie (Collins) Minyard** '71, B.S. health and physical education, at its 2026 Legacy Luncheon for her service as a teacher and assistant principal. She and her husband, **Jerry** '76, M.S. health and physical education, who teaches at West Brook High School in Beaumont school district, live in Beaumont.

Jay "Skip" Dickstein '72, B.B.A. economics, won an Eclipse Award for his photo "Unseated." He has covered every Kentucky Derby since 1986 and all 42 Breeders' Cup World Championships as well as other national sporting events including the National Track and Field Championships; the Olympic Trials for track and field, bobsled and luge; and the 1980 and 1996 Olympic Games. He has photographed for the Albany Times-Union for 45 years and for BloodHorse since 1978. He and his wife, Linda, live in Malta, N.Y.

John Jordan '72, B.S. industrial engineering, owns and is president and director of John P. Jordan consulting services, which provides engineering solution to the oilfield. He is an advisor to companies in China, Mexico, Turkey and Italy, having retired from a 32-year career with Halliburton. He and his wife, Mariko, live in Houston.

Warren Clark '74, B.A. government, retired after 44 years as a criminal trial and appellate lawyer. He and his wife, Cindy, live in Amarillo.

David Newsum '74, B.B.A. general business, worked evenings at Temple-Inland paper mill in Evadale while attending LU and continued his career there for 46 years until his retirement as purchasing manager. He lives in Silsbee.

The Houston Chapter of the American Board of Trial Advocates honored **Sandra Clark** '76, M.A. English, with the Sentinel of the Seventh Amendment Award, in recognition of her exceptional dedication to safeguarding the values of the Seventh Amendment and the fundamental right to civil jury trials. She is vice president of MehaffyWeber P.C. and was named a 2026 Super Lawyer. She lives in Beaumont.

The Martin Luther King Jr. Support Group of Southeast Texas named **Tom Noyola** '76, B.S. criminal justice, '05, M.S. applied criminology, '12, Ed.D. educational leadership, a 2026 MLK Jr. Honoree. He owns Global Diversity, and he and his wife, Mayra, live in Beaumont.

Ron Arceneaux '77, B.S. civil engineering, retired as partner at Arceneaux, Wilson & Cole. He and his wife, **Susan (Chevis)** '77, B.S. elementary education, who works in records management at Arceneaux, Wilson and Cole, live in Port Neches.

Jesse Doiron Jr. '77, B.A. English, '81, M.A. English, retired as instructor and lecturer of English and English as a second language after 29 years of service. He and his wife, Uliana, who is associate vice president of university advancement, live in Beaumont.

The MLK Support Group of Southeast Texas recognized **Igalious "Ike" Mills** '77, B.F.A. art, as an MLK 2026 honoree. He is a state legislative liaison with Texas Small Farmers and Ranchers, and he and his wife, Azzie, live in Port Arthur.

Michael Preston '77, B.B.A. accounting, is a certified public accountant and controller. He and his wife, **Eileen (Gregory)** '76, B.B.A. accounting, who also is a controller, live in Fulshear.

The City of Port Neches named a street for the late **Mayor Glenn Johnson** '78, B.B.A. accounting, who was a former LU Alumni Advisory Board member. He retired from Motiva Enterprises and FivePoint Credit Union.

Nutrition and Services for Seniors named **Zim Morris** '78, B.S. energy resources management, a 2026 Deliver the Difference Honoree. He is a sales representative for Thermo Sensors Corp, and he and his wife, Linda, live in Port Neches.

Hal Evans '79, B.A. English, hosted a Black History Month reading of his book Come Day in Night at the Silsbee Ice House Museum Feb. 20, 2026. He lives in Spring.

Nutrition and Services for Seniors named **Lee Ann (Dean) Garth** '79, B.B.A. accounting, and her husband, Terry, 2026 Deliver the Difference Honorees. She is office manager for Provost Umphrey Law Firm, and she and

her husband, Terry, live in Beaumont.

The Martin Luther King Jr. Support Group of Southeast Texas named **Joyce (Trahan) James** '79, B.A. sociology, a 2026 MLK Jr. Honoree. She owns Joyce James Consulting and is associate deputy commissioner for the Center for the Elimination of Disproportionality and Disparity. She and her husband, John, live in Round Rock.

80s

Kathy Palombo '80, B.S. elementary education, retired as an English as a second language teacher at C.O. Wilson Middle School in Nederland school district. She lives in Port Arthur.

Beaumont school district named Paul Brown Learning Center teacher **Helen Sutton-Tegbe** '80, A.A.S. business data processing, as a 2026-2027 Teacher of the Year. She lives in Beaumont.

Beaumont school district named Dishman Elementary School teacher **Sharon (Syrie) Carrington** '81, B.M. music, '90, M.Ed. elementary education, as a 2026-2027 Teacher of the Year. She lives in Beaumont.

Anthony Theriot '81, B.S. communication, retired as director of trade development for the Port of Port Arthur. He and his wife, Brenda, live in Nederland.

Edythe Kirk '85, B.S. nursing, '91, B.S. psychology, '93, M.S. psychology, '98, M.S. biology, retired as associate professor of psychology at Lamar University with 24 years of service. She lives in Port Arthur.

The Youth Young Adult Fellowship Alliance in Silsbee honored **Yolanda (Johnson) Avery** '86, B.S. dance, '91, M.Ed. counseling and development, in February 2026. She and her husband, Alton, live in Beaumont.

Susan (Ahlgren) Ellis '86, B.S. secondary education, '08, M.Ed. secondary education, teaches robotics at Central Middle School. She and her husband, **Keith** '13, B.A. history, live in Orange.

Maria (Malick) Boudreaux '87, B.S. family and consumer sciences, retired after 31 years of service from Sour Lake Elementary School in Hardin-Jefferson school district. She and her husband, **Randall** '87, A.A.S. mid-management, live in Beaumont.

Brenham High School named Craig Bradford -87 to its Track Hall of Fame. He lives in Stafford.

Martin Benoit '88, B.B.A. business management, is site manager of Data Center San Antonio for the Department of War Defense Information Systems Agency at Lackland Air Force Base. He lives in San Antonio.

Michele (Yennie) Smith '88, B.B.A. accounting, is an attorney with MehaffyWeber and was named a 2026 Super Lawyer. She and her husband, Mitch, live in Beaumont.

Lori (Irby) Walker '88, B.B.A. business administration, is campus technologist supervisor for Galveston school district. She and her husband, Darrin, live in Dickinson.

Bret Babineaux's family business, Air Comfort Inc., celebrated 25 years of BBB accreditation. **Bret** -89 and his wife, Monica, live in Beaumont.

West Oso school district honored **Adrian Caldwell** -89 with the West Oso ISD Legacy Award. He played in the NBA for the Houston Rockets, Indiana Pacers, New Jersey Nets, Philadelphia 76ers and Dallas Mavericks. He teaches special education in Sheldon school district and lives in Houston.

After retiring from a long career in journalism, **Kathy Portie** '89, B.S. communication and media, '94, M.A. visual arts, is co-author, photographer and editor of the book *Best Birds of Big Bear Lake Field Guide*, which features the top 100 birds sighted in the Big Bear area. She lives in Big Bear Lake, Calif.

90s

LaJuan (Brown) Addison '90, B.S. elementary education, retired as superintendent of Deweyville school district in September 2025. She lives in Deweyville.

The Art Studio hosted an exhibition by sculptor **Sandra (Myers) Laurette** '90, B.S. art, titled "Retrospective: 42 Years at The Art Studio Inc. Feb. 7. She and her husband, Richard, live in Beaumont.

Stuart Kieschnick '91, B.S. kinesiology, '99, M.Ed. administration, '12, Ed.D. educational leadership, retired as superintendent of Nederland school district in December 2025. He and his wife, Jodi, live in Nederland.

Janci (Smith) Kimball '91, B.S. speech, is executive director for nutrition and services for seniors. Out of 110 TRIO kitchens around Texas, the NSS kitchen was ranked No. 1 nationally. She and her husband, Thad '91, B.B.A. marketing, who is project manager for American Electric Technologies Inc., live in Beaumont.

Robin (Slott) McCutcheon '91, B.S. elementary education, retired as president and CEO of Samaritan Counseling Center of Southeast Texas. She lives in Nederland.

Bradley McEachern '91, B.S. kinesiology, '02, M.Ed. administration, retired as superintendent of Hardin-Jefferson school district. He and his wife, Jana, live in Kountze.

Beaumont school district named Marshall Middle School teacher **Yolanda (Isom) Smith** '91, B.S. elementary education, as a 2026-2027 Teacher of the Year. She and her husband, **Russell** '10, B.S. industrial technology, who works for Kinder Morgan Pipeline Co., live in Beaumont.

Beaumont school district named Beaumont United High School CTE teacher **Monroe Pierre Jr.** '92, B.S. computer science, as a 2026-2027 Teacher of the Year. He lives in Beaumont.

J.R. Richardson '92, B.A.A.S. applied arts and sciences, joined the board of governors for The Club at Falcon Point. He is senior channel manager for Consolidated Communications, and he and his wife, **Kaye Williams** '91, B.S. kinesiology, M.S. kinesiology, who earned a doctorate in clinical psychology and is principal of Cinco Ranch High School in Katy school district, live in Katy.

Gregory Whiting '92, B.B.A. accounting, is CEO of Pilot Water Solutions, vice president of energy supply operations for Pilot Flying J and CEO of Whiting F2B Solutions. He and his wife, Shannon, live in Houston.

Gary Holcombe '93, B.B.A. general business, retired as an information technology manager with Steinhagen Oil Co. Inc. He and his wife, **Vicki (Glasgow)** '85, B.S. communication and media, who retired at director of volunteer services for Baptist Hospitals of Southeast Texas. They live in Colorado Springs, Colo.

John Burt '94, B.S. physics, '01, M.Ed. educational administration, is district attorney for Jasper County. He and his wife, Cathy, live in Buna.

Port Arthur school district named **Angela Dugay** '94, B.S. criminal justice, 2026-2027 Teacher of the Year. She teaches criminal justice at the Career and Technical Education Center and lives in Port Arthur.

Waco proclaimed Nov. 21, 2025, Bridget Fuselier Day in honor of Baylor University Law School professor **Bridget (Blanchard) Fuselier** '94, B.A. political science, for her legal service to families across central Texas. She and her husband, Paul, live in Waco.

Jodi (Trahan) Orta '94, B.S. interdisciplinary studies, has taught for 30 years and currently teaches at Tyrrell Elementary School in Port Arthur school district. She and her husband, Manuel, live in Groves.

The Association for Career and Technical Education in December 2025 named **Donna Prudhomme** '94, B.S. criminal justice, 2026 National Administrator of the Year. She is CTE director for Beaumont school district and president of the Career and Technical Administrators of Texas Golden Triangle. She and her husband, Michael, live in Beaumont.

Shannon Slocum '94, A.A.S. computer electronics and robotics, '96, B.S. industrial technology, is executive vice president and chief operating officer of Halliburton, responsible for global operations; business development; health, safety and environment; and global technology. He and his wife, **Kimberly (Durio)** -96, live in Tomball.

Denise (Gay) White '94, B.A.A.S. applied arts and sciences, earned National Board Certification as a teacher, an achievement of less than 1 percent of teachers in Texas. She is a dyslexia specialist at Port Neches Intermediate, and she and her husband, Aaron, live in Port Neches.

Lucrecia Harris '95, B.A.A.S. applied arts and sciences, earned her Ph.D. in educational leadership in December 2025. She is principal of Booker T. Washington Elementary School in Port Arthur school district and lives in Beaumont.

Beaumont school district named King Collegiate Academy teacher **Jodi (Beasley) Broussard** '96, B.S. dance, as a 2026-2027 Teacher of the Year. She and her husband, Chad, live in Port Neches.

Flowserve Corp. elected **Brian Savoy** '97, B.B.A. accounting, as a member of the board of directors and appointed him to the Audit Committee and Technology, Innovation and Risk Committee. He is CFO and executive vice president of Duke Energy. He and his wife, Sabrina, live in Waxhaw, N.C.

Tammy (Novak) Landry '98, B.S.W. social work, is the nursing home administrator for Beaumont Health Care Center. She lives in Port Arthur.

Alumni lead press club

Seven alumni and one alumna-to-be serve on the board of directors of the Press Club of Southeast Texas for 2026: **Andy Coughlan** '01, B.A.A.S. applied arts and sciences; '05, M.A. English, past president; **Hannah LeTulle** '18, B.S. communication-corporate, '25, M.S. strategic communication, secretary; **Sarah Parker** '07, B.S. communication, vice president of public relations; **Rayna Christy**, student; **Hilary Deville** '13, B.S. geology, '17, M.B.A. business administration; **Olivia Malick** '21, B.S. communication-journalism; **Stephan Malick** '95, B.S. communication, '18, M.Ed. digital learning and leading; **Kevin McGee** '16, B.S. communication, '20, M.B.A. business administration.

Joe Wilson '98, B.S. civil engineering, retired as partner at Arceneaux, Wilson & Cole. He and his wife, Beth, live in Orange.

Rebecca Cascio '99, B.B.A. marketing, is photo curator and creative director with her consulting company, Rebecca Cascio Creative. She worked in advertising in New York and lives in Rome, Italy.

Victoria McGee '99, B.A. history, is human resource manager for Poolcorp and lives in Covington, La.

Kevin Morrison '99, B.S. kinesiology, '02, M.Ed. administration, '14, Ed.D. educational leadership, is principal of Center Middle School in Nederland school district. He and his wife, **Angela (Morgan)** '10, B.A.A.S. applied arts and sciences, who is CTE/BIM teacher at Nederland High School, live in Nederland.

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Aime (English) Daigle '00, B.S. communication, is a financial advisor with Bluebonnet Financial Advisors. She and her husband, Dwight, live in Fannett.

Kim (Cessac) Hawkins '00, B.S. interdisciplinary studies, teaches kindergarten at Langham Elementary School in Nederland school district. She and her husband, Reagan, live in Port Neches.

Anne (Attaway) Spears '00, B.S. sociology, earned certification as a fundraising executive from CFRE International. She is senior manager of campaigns for Creative Fundraising Advisors. She and her husband, **Kenyon** '01, B.S. communication, who is athletics director for Newman University, live in San Antonio.

The Texas Elementary Principals and Supervisors Association named **Torrey Gomez** '01, B.S. kinesiology, '09, M.Ed. administration, 2026 Region 5 Assistant Principal of the Year. He is principal of Hillcrest Elementary School in Nederland school district, and he and his wife, **Natalie (Neumann)** '02, B.A. English, '09, M.Ed. administration, who is principal of Nederland High School, live in Port Arthur.

Nederland school district named **Kara (Hammonds) Smith** '02, B.S. interdisciplinary studies, 2026 Teacher of the Year at Highland Park Elementary School, where she teaches third grade. She and her husband, **Jared** '02, B.S. criminal justice, who is a probation officer in Hardin County, live in Lumberton.

Marco Villasana '02, B.B.A. general business, is senior enablement and communications manager at Alianza. He and his wife, **Sarah (Stephenson)** '04, B.S. interdisciplinary studies, '13, M.Ed. school counseling, who is the fifth-grade counselor at Vidor Middle School, live in Beaumont.

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

Tiffany (Farina) Collins '02, B.G.S. general studies, '20, M.Ed. administration, teaches fourth grade math at Pine Forest Elementary School in Vidor school district. She lives in Orange.

Erica (Allen) Gauthier '02, B.B.A. general business, '13, M.Ed. administration, is assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction for Nederland school district. He and his spouse, Bryan, live in Port Neches.

Stephanie (Chesson) Joslin '02, B.S. criminal justice, is senior executive director of Houston and East Texas for the American Cancer Society. She and her husband, Will, live in Houston.

Chris Kovatch '02, B.S. criminal justice, is a board member of the Better Business Bureau of Southeast Texas Foundation and vice president of commercial lending for Rave Financial. He and his wife, Christi, live in Orange.

Lamar University's chief information officer **Patrick Stewart** '02, B.B.A. management information systems, '20, M.S. management information systems, was elected to statewide LEARN leadership. He and his wife, **Karen (Wood)** '93, B.S. speech, who is human resources administrator for Interim Customer Care Solutions, live in Beaumont.

Beaumont school district named Smith Middle School teacher **Matthew Bean** '03, B.G.S. general studies, '14, M.Ed. administration, as a 2026-2027 Teacher of the Year. He and his wife, **Marilyn (Allen)** '19, M.Ed. clinical mental health counseling, live in Beaumont.

Beaumont school district named Pietzsch-MacArthur teacher **Lorita (Tyler) Chambers** '03, B.S. sociology, as a 2026-2027 Teacher of the Year. She lives in Beaumont.

Kym (Brantley) Johns '03, B.S. interdisciplinary studies, owns and is vice president of Plumbing Solutions. She lives in Beaumont.

Congratulations to **Collier (Christian) Thompson** '03, B.B.A. management information systems, and her husband, Brian, on the birth of their son, Michael, in February 2026. She is a clinical field specialist with Natera, and they live in Lakewood, Colo.

Randy Thompson '03, B.B.A. management information systems, is chief information officer for Neches Federal Credit Union. He and his wife, **Summer (Schwertner)** '04, B.B.A. management information systems, '05, M.B.A. business administration, who is media buyer for e. Sullivan Advertising & Design Inc., live in Port Neches.

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension named **Paul Lemoine** '04, B.S. criminal justice,

2025 Intern of the Year. He also earned his certificate as a master gardener. He and his wife, Sharon, live in Port Neches.

Brandy (Smith) Antill '05, M.Ed. administration, has 25 years of service with Vidor school district and is director of curriculum and the gifted and talented program. She and her husband, Nelson, live in Beaumont.

Andrew Brooks '05, B.S. political science, '22, M.Ed. administration, is education administrator for the Federal Bureau of Prisons Central Office in Washington, D.C. He and his wife, Candace, live in the Washington D.C./Virginia area.

Burnie Cook '05, B.S. communication, words at H.E.B. Grocery Co. and lives in Leander.

Hamshire Fannett school district named **Jayne (Morgan) Dennis** '05, B.B.A. human resources management, Campus Educator of the Year at Hamshire Fannett High School. She and her husband, Chris, live in Sour Lake.

Kim (Holbrook) Lowrie '05, B.S. professional pedagogy, teaches in Port Neches-Groves school district. She and her husband, Dwayne, live in China.

Dr. Christine (Cappel) Murphy '05, B.S. biology, is the medical director of pediatric developmental disabilities with Scottish Rite for Children in Dallas. She and her husband, Michael, live in Richardson.

Haylea (Rollo) Barrow '06, B.B.A. accounting, teaches math at East Chambers High School. She and her husband, Cade, live in Winnie.

Silver Waves Media named **Brandon Chappell** '06, B.B.A. marketing, to its annual 100 Most Impactful: Men's High Major Assistants list for 2026. He is assistant coach of men's basketball for the University of Arizona Wildcats, and he and his wife, Catherine, live in Tucson, Ariz.

Kyle DuBose '06, B.S. history, is assistant vice president of commercial lending for Neches Federal Credit Union. He lives in Orange.

Grady Welborn '06, B.A. history, '12, M.Ed. administration, is superintendent of Deweyville school district. He and his wife, **Lindy (Richardson)** '06, B.A. history, '11, M.Ed. administration, who is CTE coordinator for Bridge City High School, live in Orange.

The Best of the Best Contest by the readers of the Beaumont Enterprise named Jack's Pak-It Best Meat Market for 2025. **Sam Blanda** '08, B.B.A. finance, co-owns and manages Jack's Pak-It. He and his wife, Lori, live in Beaumont.

Raymond Edwards Jr. '08, B.B.A. marketing, is co-owner and business development manager for The Avenue Coffee Café and Buckstin Brewing Co. Beaumont and Nederland. He and his wife, **Briann (Fiorenza)** '12, B.S. nursing, who is co-owner of The Avenue

Coffee Café and is a registered nurse with Christus Health Foundation of Southeast Texas, live in Beaumont.

Congratulations to **Mallory (Hebert) Rose** '08, B.M. music, and her husband, **Robert** -20, on the birth of their son, Rowan, in December 2025. She teaches music at Port Neches Primary School, and they live in Beaumont.

Somto Anyanwu '09, B.S. biology, is completing a residency in internal medicine at Leonard J. Chabert Medical Center. He lives in Beaumont.

Julia (Moore) Soniat '09, B.S. family and consumer sciences-fashion retailing and merchandising, is an editorial photographer working in fashion and branding based in Philadelphia, Penn. Her husband, **Michael** '10, B.S. chemistry, earned a Ph.D. in molecular biophysics in 2016 and is assistant professor of biochemistry and molecular biology at Thomas Jefferson University, where his lab studies how genome instability contributes to aging, neurodegeneration and cancer. They live in Philadelphia, Penn.

Louisiana State University at Eunice named **Charles Stewart** '09, Ed.D. educational leadership, vice chancellor and provost of academic affairs. He lives in Lake Charles.

Gerri Williams '09, Ed.D. educational leadership, is a partner with CarterBaldwin Executive Search, has led complex, cabinet-level searches and has partnered with administrators, trustees and search committees to deliver mission-aligned leadership placements. She lives in Durham, N.C.

Beaumont school district named Regina-Howell Elementary School teacher **Dephane (Hollier) Wilson** '09, B.S. interdisciplinary studies, as a 2026-2027 Teacher of the Year. She and her husband, **William** '91, B.S. chemical engineering, who is HSSE manager for Motiva Enterprises, live in Beaumont.

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Ira Brooks '10, B.A.A.S. applied arts and sciences, retired as assistant basketball coach at Silsbee High School after 32 years of coaching in the district. He and his wife, Irene, live in Silsbee.

Beaumont school district named Homer-Drive Elementary School teacher **Elizabeth (Jones) Buxton** '10, B.A.A.S. applied arts and sciences, as a 2026-2027 Teacher of the Year. She and her husband, Alton, live in Beaumont.

Beaumont school district named Fehl-Price Elementary School teacher **Pamela "Pam" (Jones) Chavis** '10, B.A.A.S. applied arts and sciences, as a 2026-2027 Teacher of the Year. She and her husband, Michael, live in Beaumont.

Katelyn (Cox) '10, B.S. exercise science and fitness management, married Daniel

Rigney in November 2025. She is a midwife with Surrender Midwifery, and they live in College Station.

Charline Sam '10, B.S. industrial technology, founded and is CEO of Exalted Royalty, a consulting service. She lives in Beaumont.

Jessica Branch '11, M.Ed. education technology leadership, is assistant superintendent of human resources for Wylie school district. She lives in Wylie.

Gabi Blanco '11, Texas Academy, is co-owner of Buckstin Brewing with her husband, Justin Buchanan-Lopez, and owns Blanc on Boston. Buckstin won gold and silver medals at the Craft

Brewers Cup in Austin. They live in Nederland.

Congratulations to **Rebekah (Maxwell)** '11, B.B.A. retail management, and Michael DeGarmo on their marriage in February. She is a distance learning adjunct for the College of Business at Lamar University and owner of ReStep Marketing. They live in Beaumont.

Thaddeus Green '11, B.S. communication, married Sumalee Bloxham in December 2025. He is vice president of development and asset management for Fort Worth Housing Solutions. They live in Fort Worth.

Gov. Henry McMaster of South Carolina appointed **Marcus Myers** '11, Ed.D. deaf studies and deaf education, to serve as Deaf At-Large member on the South Carolina School for the Deaf and the Blind Board of Commissioners. He and his wife, **Sallye (Hunter)** '01, B.A.A.S. applied arts and sciences, live in Spartanburg, S.C.

Port Arthur school district named **Angela Suitt** '11, M.Ed. elementary education, 2026-2027 Teacher of the Year. She teaches fourth grade English, language arts and reading at DeQueen Elementary School and lives in Beaumont.

Ana (Barrientos) Valerio '12, B.A.A.S. applied arts and sciences, '23, M.Ed. teacher leadership, is English as a Second Language and Language Other Than English curriculum supervisor for Port Arthur school district. She lives in Beaumont.

Distinguished Alumnus **Fred Vernon II** '12, B.B.A. accounting, '13, M.B.A. accounting, '13, M.S. accounting, earned his law degree in January 2026. He is an attorney with the Jefferson County District Attorney's Office. He and his wife, **Wafa (Hammad)** '8, B.G.S. general studies, who is a registered nurse with Christus St. Elizabeth Hospital, live in Port Arthur.



Sabrina Jolin '25, Jane Sepulveda '25, Cameron Niedenthal '24, Brooke Davis '24, Rose Gonzales '25



Head Women's Softball Coach Amy Hooks, Michele Gonzalez '88, Kim (Glawson) Smith '90, Susan Pence '85, Becky Dale '86, Marci Anderson '91, Donna (Dugas) Crowley '88

LU softball alumni weekend

Former softball players came to the LU vs. SFA softball games March 13-14, 2026, for a chance to reunite and cheer on the Lady Cardinals for their weekend tournament.



Senior Send Off

Spring 2026 graduates were invited to a Send-Off party May 14, the night before commencement. This event, held at the Sheila Umphrey Recreational Sports Center patio, is an exclusive pre-graduation celebration for soon-to-be graduates sponsored by the Division of Student Affairs. Attendees came to celebrate with food, drinks and giveaways. The Office of Alumni Affairs had the opportunity to congratulate the soon-to-be graduates.

Shannon (Copeland) Figueroa '02, '03, '07, director of alumni affairs; Rohini Rai '26; and Evie Clifton, coordinator of alumni affairs



The Big Event

The Big Event is a nationwide day of student-led community service that connects college students with local nonprofits and other organizations to complete meaningful service projects. While there were many other teams of LU students scattered around the county volunteering with various organizations, these two photos capture the LU Ambassador/alumni team working at Buckner Children and Family Services March 28, 2026.

Ryan Servantes, Daniella Lopez-Rosa '26, Riley Trent, Mari Cardenas, Evie Clifton, LU Ambassador Bailey Broussard '20, Ashton Rainey, Dennis Tran, Grace Gause '26, Faith Cheng, Rohini Rai '26, Tanya (Freeman) Drago '98, Lawrence Drago, and Shannon (Copeland) Figueroa '02 '03 '07

Distinguished Alumni Awards

Established in 1970 by the Lamar University Alumni Association, the award recognizes alumni who have excelled in their careers or life service, enhancing the university's reputation. It also honors those who have made significant contributions to their communities, state and nation through civic involvement and professional and public service. "These honorees exemplify excellence at the highest levels of their professions while remaining dedicated supporters of Lamar University and its students. Their impact extends far beyond campus, and we are proud to recognize the difference they continue to make in their communities and beyond," Shannon Figueroa '02, '03, '07, director of alumni affairs and advancement services, said. The June 5 dinner celebrated the accomplishments of this year's honorees: **Brian Babin, D.D.S.**, '73, U.S. House representative, Texas District 36; **Jane C.K. Fitch, M.D.**, '78, retired anesthesiologist and former professor and chair, University of Oklahoma College of Medicine; **Tom Long** '79, CEO, Energy Transfer Partners; and **James Robert "Bob" McLendon, Ph.D.**, '64, retired president, Texas Instruments Inc.



Dr. Bob McLendon '64, Dr. Jane (Crandall Knott) Fitch '78, Rep. Dr. Brian Babin '73, and TSUS Board of Regents Vice-Chair Tom Long '79



Grady Crawford '64, Michael Ann (Agee) Crawford '64, Susan (Terry) McLendon '64, Dr. Bob McLendon '64



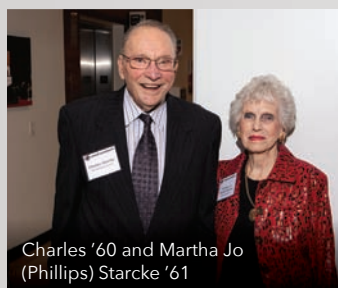
Regina Miller, Donta Miller '18, '21, Distinguished Alumnus The Honorable Keith Giblin '86, Kristi Giblin



Distinguished Alumna Elaine (Norman) Shellenberger '74; Distinguished Alumna Paula (Tate) O'Neal '69, '79; Distinguished Alumnus Stephen Lee '89, TSUS Board of Regents chair; and Vernice Monroe, associate professor emerita of sociology



Loyce Pumphrey, Distinguished Alumnus Don Pumphrey '88, Alumni Advisory Board President-Elect Hetty (Green) Brown '79



Charles '60 and Martha Jo (Phillips) Starcke '61



Patti McSpadden, Floyd McSpadden, Rebecca Boone, dean, College of Arts and Sciences



2026 Distinguished Alumnus Tom Long '79 with longtime friend Cliff Harris, former Dallas Cowboys safety, 1970-1979



2026 Distinguished Alumnus Congressman Brian Babin '73, Gisela Houseman, Kim Steinhagen, Roy Steinhagen



Regina Rogers '14, Dr. Brian Babin '73, Mary (Scott) Young '94, '01, Tea (Nguyen) Do '08



Marilyn Burger, LU SGA president, LU Ambassador Carsen Barrett and John Burger '71



Mark '78 and Lisa (Golemon) Vise '79



John Burger '71, Melody (O'Reilly) Parsons '71, J. Pat Parsons '71, Rogers '14



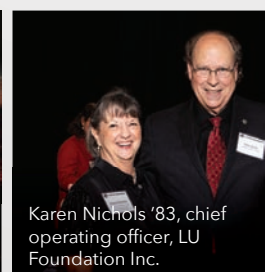
President Jaime Taylor; Tom Long '79; Jeff Darby '88, mayor, City of Nederland; Dr. Ray Callas; Brian Babin '73



Amy Lovoi '13, '15, Patrick Outlaw, April (Sterling) Keith '02, Payton Keith



Dr. Ray Callas, President Dr. Jaime Taylor



Karen Nichols '83, chief operating officer, LU Foundation Inc.



Mike Barfield, coordinator of university sponsorships; Lauren Broussard '18, major gifts officer; Gevorg Sargsyan, associate dean, College of Business; Uliana Trylowsky, associate vice president for university advancement



Gwendolyn (Johnson) Lacy '72, Yolanda (Johnson) Avery '86, '91, Shawn Webb '03, '12, Regina Miller and Donta Miller '18, '21



Mary (Scott) Young '94, '01, Regina Rogers '14, Annette Raggette, Kenneth Raggette, Norma (Roddy) Sampson '75



Peggy Zabala; Juan Zabala '07, vice president for university advancement and CEO, LU Foundation Inc.; Regina Rogers '14



Vernice Monroe, associate professor emerita of sociology, Annette Raggette, Kenneth Raggette



2026 Distinguished Alumna Dr. Jane (Crandall Knott) Fitch '78 and John Fitch



Terry '71 and Gay Brown



Dr. Bob McLendon '64; Distinguished Alumnus J. Donald Warren Jr. '63, director and professor, School of Accounting, Finance and Economics; and Grady Crawford '64



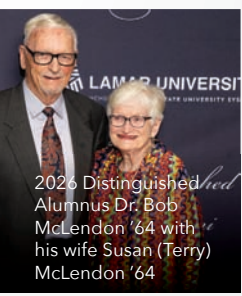
Theresa (Storey) Hefner-Babb '04, '16, associate dean, Mary and John Gray Library; Joe Tacy, dean, College of Nursing and Health Professions; Vivienne McLendon, dean, Mary and John Gray Library; Eleanor Jator, chair, Department of Medical Laboratory Sciences



LU Alumni Advisory Board President Christopher Graham '90, Amy Graham, Usha (Balaratnam) Beckman '87



Lanie Brown and Lachelle (Lavalais) Edwards '14



2026 Distinguished Alumnus Dr. Bob McLendon '64 with his wife Susan (Terry) McLendon '64



Patti McSpadden, Michael Ann Crawford '64, Gisela Houseman



Jack Fitch '08, senior video/photography coordinator, and Stacey (Hines) Fitch '96



Past and current Distinguished Alumni Award recipients: Hester (Briscoe) Bell '61, Elaine (Norman) Shellenberger '74, Paula (Tate) O'Neal '69, '79, Keith Giblin '86, Jane (Crandall Kott) Fitch '78, Bob McLendon '64, Brian Babin '73, Tom Long '79, Stephen Lee '89, President Jaime Taylor, J. Donald Warren Jr. '63, Don Pumphrey '88



Alan Hefty '69; Cherrie (McVey) Hefty '70



Terry Morris, Distinguished Alumna Hester (Briscoe) Bell '61



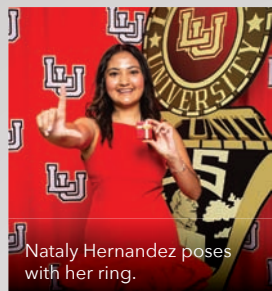
First Lady Stacy and President Jaime Taylor



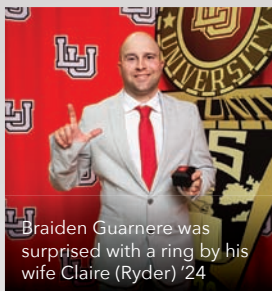
Division of University Advancement staff, from left, Juan Zabala '07, vice president; Shannon (Copeland) Figueroa '02, '03, '07, director of alumni affairs and advancement services; Peggy Zabala; Lauren Broussard '18, major gifts officer; Mike Barfield, coordinator of university sponsorships; Karen Nichols '83, COO, Lamar University Foundation Inc.; Jordan Williams, major gifts officer; Uliana Trylowsky, associate vice president; Kim Steinhagen, major gifts officer

Lamar University Ring Ceremony

Current students and alumni received their official class rings at the April 18 LU Ring Ceremony.



Nataly Hernandez poses with her ring.



Braiden Guarnera was surprised with a ring by his wife Claire (Ryder) '24



Ross Guerra '26 won the ring donated by Balfour.



Alumni Board President Chris Graham '90 with Emily (Everett) Allen '98, '04, past president who received her ring in the ceremony



LU alumni who participated in the ceremony from left: Roslyn Pittman-Scott '05, Lea Ann Bauer '24, '26, Emily (Everett) Allen '98, '04, Tammy Howard '19, '26, Cassandra Stanley '25, Patricia Castanon '24, Phe'Licia Sterling-Thompson '17, '18, '26 and Keiara Kearns '20



Shamodre Green, student organizations coordinator; Jennifer Jones, assistant director, Setzer Student Center; and Center for Career and Professional Development staff Christy (Morgan) George '18, career consultant; Amy (Pumphrey) Dillow '10, '16, assistant director; and Haley (Murphy) Tyson '08, '17, director



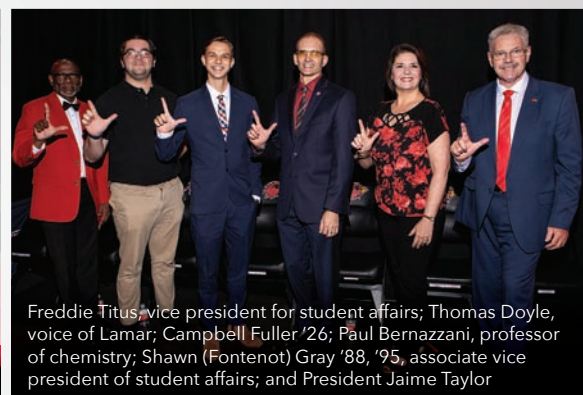
Big Red, Adam Bajan, Jessica (Beaty) Bajan '26, Lu



Keiara Kearns '20 receives her ring from President Jaime Taylor.



Blake Wilson '26, Nancy Wilson



Freddie Titus, vice president for student affairs; Thomas Doyle, voice of Lamar; Campbell Fuller '26; Paul Bernazzani, professor of chemistry; Shawn (Fontenot) Gray '88, '95, associate vice president of student affairs; and President Jaime Taylor



Big Red, Kaitlin Howard, Tammy Howard '19, '26, Lu (Mother and daughter participated in the ring ceremony together. Tammy is a graduate and Kaitlin is a junior.)



Basil Smith '95, Nikki Smith, Allie Sanford, Jonah Smith '24, '26



Briggs Guarnera, Braiden Guarnera, Hadleigh Guarnera and Claire (Ryder) Guarnera '24



Big Red and Lu with LU Ambassadors, back from left, Big Red, Alyssa Harper, Kathy Nguyen, Calvin Ncube, Mario Miguel, Bilal Alani '26, Clara (Schreck) Martin '26, Lu; front from left, Taylor Bui, Brianna Brottem, Madison McGuire and Daniella Lopez-Rosa

LaToya (Myles) Guillory '12, B.S. nursing, is a clinical operations administrator at UTMB-League City Campus and a senior associate with TPC–The Peoples Company. She lives in League City.

The Kilgore College Board of Trustees has appointed **Jennifer Hattaway** '12, M.Ed. school counseling, to serve on the board through 2029. She is lead counselor at Kilgore High School and lives in Kilgore.

Bobby Brasuell '13, B.S. environmental science, owns a water and wastewater utility service company, Dr. Doo Doo On Site Sewage Facilities Services. He and his wife, **Candy (Breux)** '02, A.A.S. nursing, who is a nurse with Cronin Plastic Surgery, live in Beaumont.

Beck Redden promoted **Garrett Brawley** '13, B.S. political science, to the partnership. He is a trial specialist and maintains a commercial litigation practice, representing large corporations in antitrust, securities, non-compete and other complex business disputes. He and his wife, Maranne, live in Houston.

Jordyn Davis '13, B.S. interdisciplinary studies, '25, M.Ed. school counseling, is a counselor at Little Cypress Elementary School. She lives in Orange.

Megan (Richard) Leday '13, B.S. interdisciplinary studies, '18, M.Ed. administration, is assistant superintendent for East Chambers school district. She and her husband, T.W. live in Winnie.

Beaumont school district named Caldwell Elementary School fourth-grade teacher **Amanda (Delgado) Magdaleno** '13, B.A.A.S. applied arts and sciences, as a 2026-2027 Teacher of the Year. She and her husband, Jose, live in Beaumont.

Beaumont school district named Pietzsch-MacArthur teacher **Genia (Melton) Miles** '13, B.S. interdisciplinary studies, as a 2026-2027 Teacher of the Year. She and her husband, Albert, live in Beaumont.

Long Nguyen '13, B.S. chemical engineering, is a process engineer for INEOS Olefins and Polymers USA. He lives in Houston.

Leanne (Rose) Norris '13, M.Ed. education technology leadership, is director of human resources for Plano school district. She and her husband, Kenneth, live in Allen.

Loni (Lilley) Gaither '14, B.S. graphic design, is marketing manager of Visit Tyler. She and her husband, **Matthew** '21, B.S. exercise science and fitness management, '26, M.S. applied nutrition, live in Tyler.

Congratulations to **Alycia (Ulrich)** '14, B.S. graphic design, and **Phillip Konvicka Jr.** '14, B.G.S. general studies, on the birth of their daughter, Millie, in February 2026. They live in Schulenburg.

Mitchell Pate '14, M.Ed. administration, teaches fifth-grade math in Fairfield school district and is the Texas local media regional sports reporter for The Cameron Herald. He and his wife, Katy, live in Fairfield.

Congratulations to **Molly (James)** '14, B.S. speech and hearing sciences, '16, M.S. speech-language pathology, and **Stefan Salinas** '18, B.S. chemical engineering, on their marriage in April 2026. She is a speech-language pathologist for Expressable, and his is project manager and sales representative for Architectural Division 8 Inc. They live in Austin.

Katie Sanders '14, M.Ed. administration, is principal of Bridge City Middle School. She lives in Bridge City.

Michael Thompson '14, B.S. kinesiology, is a teacher and coach at Hillcrest Elementary School in Nederland school district. He and his wife, **Mandy (Chatagnier)** '13, B.S. interdisciplinary studies, who teaches math at Central Middle School in Nederland school district, live in Nederland.

Congratulations to **Alyssa (Conway)** '15, B.S. exercise science and fitness management, and Chris Barahona on their marriage in February 2026. She is a personal trainer for Equinox River Oaks, and they live in Houston.

Congratulations to **Megan (Ogden)** '15, B.S. exercise science and fitness management, and **Alan Hanks** '18, B.B.A. management information systems, on the birth of their daughter, Colette, in January 2026. She is community impact manager for Neches Federal Credit Union, and he is senior data engineer for Teredata. They live in Port Neches.

Asha Minix '15, clinical mental health counseling, is director of healthcare and social services for Harris County Precinct 2. She lives in Crosby.

Congratulations to **Andrew Bruney** '16, B.B.A. marketing, and his wife, Lauren, on the birth of their son, Hollis, in March 2025. He is neurology sales territory manager for Bausch Health Companies Inc. They live in Bastrop.

Robyn (Winkle) Burdette '16, B.S. exercise science and fitness management, is dean of instruction for Lamar State College–Orange. She and her husband, **Chris** '15, B.S. kinesiology, who is a teacher and coach for C.O. Wilson Middle School in Nederland school district, live in Port Arthur.

Maegan Collins '16, B.S. political science, '18, M.P.A. public administration, '23, Ed.D. educational leadership, is associate professor and chair of the Department of General Education and Developmental Studies at Lamar Institute of Technology. She is vice president of the board of directors for the Humane Society of Southeast Texas and lives in Nederland.

Congratulations to **Jordan (Lynch)** '16, B.S. nursing, and Phillip Fountain '14, M.B.A. marketing, on the birth of their daughter, Bonnie, in December 2025. Jordan is a nurse at Texas Children's Hospital, and they live in Lumberton.

Licensed professional counselor **Vicki Gardiner** '16, M.Ed. school counseling, authored *Caroline's Treasure Chest*, written for ages 4-11 and focusing on developing confidence and resilience to manage feelings. She lives in Georgetown.

Congratulations to **Amanda (Prince)** '16, B.F.A. graphic design, and Darin Lopez on their marriage in March 2026. She is brand manager for Americom Marketing, and they live in Beaumont.

Amber (Brown) McNeal '16, B.S. health education, '25, M.Ed. administration, won a STEAM Teacher Grant from Indorama and the Beaumont Children's Museum. She teaches at Thomas Jefferson Middle School in Port Arthur school district. She and her husband, Rossi, live in Port Arthur.

The Texas Catholic Herald published an article by **Colton Morris** '16, B.B.A. management, '19, M.B.A. business administration, "In the one, we are one." He is associate director of development and stewardship for the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston, and he and his wife, Kelsey, live in Anahuac.

Levi Morris Jr. '16, B.S. mathematics, '23, M.P.A. public administration, teaches at Nederland High School. He and his wife, **Maci (Reeves)** '16, B.S. biology, who teaches science in Nederland school district, live in Groves.

The Orange Leader readers voted **Erica Rone** '16, B.S. family and consumer sciences–fashion retailing/merchandising, Orange County's Best Makeup Artist of 2025. She owns Merle Norman and Milli Kids Boutique as well as Jewel Luxury Lashes. She and her husband, **Jacob** '17, B.B.A. management information systems, '23, M.B.A. business administration, M.S. management information systems, who is an engineer with Scallon Controls Inc., live in Orange.

Congratulations to **Hannah (DeRouen)** '16, B.S. psychology, and **Spencer Shipman** '17, M.S. applied psychology, on the birth of their son, Marshall, in November 2025. They live in Little Elm.

Beaumont school district named Jones-Clark Elementary School teacher **Ursula Thomas** '16, B.A.A.S. applied arts and sciences, as a 2026-2027 Teacher of the Year. She lives in Beaumont.

Port Arthur school district named **La'Shea Antoine** '17, B.A.A.S. applied arts and sciences, 2026-2027 Teacher of the Year. She teaches first grade at Booker T. Washington Elementary School and lives in Port Arthur.

Congratulations to **Ariana (Jones)** '17, B.S. communication–broadcasting, '21, M.Ed. administration, '25, M.B.A. business administration, and

Distinguished Alumnus **Chris Bates** '08, B.G.S. general studies, on the birth of their son, Colton, in December 2025. Chris is a constable for Jefferson County and Ariana is an instructional coach at Port Acres Elementary in Port Arthur school district. They live in Port Arthur.

Ashleigh (Sadler) Bordeman '17, B.S. psychology, '25, M.B.A. business administration, is associate dean of statewide partnerships at Lamar State College-Orange. She and her husband, Nicolas, live in Orange.

Congratulations to **Brittany (Lopez) Cozad** '17, B.A. American Sign Language, and her husband, Jesse, on the birth of their son, Landon, in January 2026. She teaches ASL at Port Neches-Groves High School, and they live in Port Neches.

Congratulations to **Carson Earp** '17, B.B.A. economics, B.B.A. finance, '18, M.B.A. business administration, and his wife, Jade, on the birth of their son, Ace, in January 2026. He is the young adult and small groups pastor for Encounter Church. They live in Nederland.

Scouting America named **Jeanna Gonzales** '17, B.S. communication, acting director of Three Rivers Council. She lives in Bridge City.

Congratulations to **Taylor McDonald** '17, B.S. exercise science and fitness management, and his wife, Grace, on the birth of their daughter, Marie. He is an inside sales representative for Wholesale Electric Supply, and they live in Port Neches.

Micah Murdock '17, B.S. chemical engineering, owns Miles Rubber and Gasket. He and his wife, Olivia, live in Cleveland, Ohio.

Congratulations to **Jessica (Colton) Parker** '17, B.G.S. general studies, and her husband, Zakkary, on the birth of their son, Daemon, in February 2026. They live in Knoxville, Tenn.

Emily (Carl) Rhine '17, B.B.A. marketing, is assistant vice president of marketing at Education First Federal Credit Union. She and her husband, Justin, live in Port Neches.

Dr. T.J. Senters '17, Texas Academy, '21, B.M. music performance, is completing a residency in general surgery at Vanderbilt University Medical Center. He earned a master's degree in biomedical sciences in 2022 and his doctor of osteopathic medicine in 2026. He lives in Beaumont.

Mason Vizena '17, B.B.A. marketing, is account manager at Scallon Controls Inc. He and his wife, **Savanna (Porter)** '18, B.B.A. marketing, who is inside sales representative for United Rentals, live in Nederland.

Congratulations to **Bethani (Lee) Webre** '17, M.S. family and consumer sciences, on the birth of her daughter, Callahan, in December 2025. She and her husband, Kyle, live in West.

Mike Wilkinson '17, Ed.D. educational leadership, is chief of staff at Wharton County Junior College. He and his wife, Rais'a, live in Mobile, Ala.

Carlie Arabie-Rexroat '18, B.S. nursing, earned her master's degree in nursing in 2025 and is a cardiovascular intensive care nurse at Children's Memorial Hermann Hospital. She and her spouse, Shelby, live in Baytown.

Greg Bower '18, Ed.D. educational leadership, is superintendent of Union Grove school district. He lives in Big Sandy.

Shelby (Dryden) Brannan '18, B.S. theatre and dance, is executive director of the Beaumont Heritage Society and a marketing consultant with Envie Media. She and her husband, Rodney, live in Beaumont.

Victoria (Cornell) Carmona '18, B.S. nursing, earned her certification as a registered nurse anesthetist and is an ICU travel nurse with Fusion Medical Staffing.

husband, **Grant** '18, B.S. mechanical engineering, live in Beaumont.

Congratulations to **Kamryn (McMillian)** '18, B.S. interdisciplinary studies, and **Aaron Uribe** '20, B.S. mechanical engineering, on the birth of their son, William, in December 2025. She teaches fourth grade science and social studies at Sallie Curtis Elementary School in Beaumont school district, and they live in Beaumont.

Congratulations to **Whitney (Hayes)** '18, B.S. family and consumer sciences—nutrition, dietetic, hospitality; '21, M.S. nutrition, and **Ehson Zare** '20, B.S. biology, on the birth of their son, Micah, in January 2026. She teaches consumer science, culinary and nutrition at John Jay High School in Northside school district, and he is a dentist with Silsbee Family Dentistry. They live in Silsbee.

Josh Bonnette '19, B.S. mechanical engineering, is project services specialist at Scallon Controls Inc. He and his wife, **Jayna (Lacy)** '19, B.S. communication—

Darby Reed-Pilant '19, B.S. psychology, '22, M.S. applied psychology, founded her own practice, Resilient Minds, and she and her husband, Caleb, live in Vidor.

Congratulations to **Emily (Sumrall) Stoddard** '19, B.S. communication—advertising, and her husband, Lance, on the birth of their son, Bennett, in January 2026. She teaches dance at Porter High School in New Caney school district, and she and her husband, Logan, live in Conroe.

Emily (McNight) Streeter '19, B.S. nursing, earned her master's degree in nursing and midwifery in 2025. She is a certified nurse and midwife for Southeast Texas OB GYN Associates. She and her husband, **Brandon** '18, live in Beaumont.

Thanh Tsan '19, B.S. mechanical engineering, and her husband, Dennis Vo, on the birth of their son, L.T. She is senior maintenance engineer with Dow Chemical Co., and they live in Pearland.

Beaumont school district named Guess Elementary School teacher **Claydra Woodside** '19, B.A.A.S. applied arts and sciences, as a 2026-2027 Teacher of the Year. She lives in Beaumont.

Beaumont school district named Blanchette Elementary School teacher **Shaylyn Young** '19, B.S. interdisciplinary studies, as a 2026-2027 Teacher of the Year. She lives in Beaumont.

'20, B.B.A. finance, B.B.A. economics, on the birth of their son, Kysen, in October 2025. She teaches English at Port Neches Middle School. They live in Groves.

Osha Jones '20, B.S. speech and hearing sciences, earned her master's degree in communication science disorders and is a speech language pathologist with MedCare Pediatric Group. She lives in Sugar Land.

Congratulations to **Shelby (Harris) Quinn** '20, B.S. nutrition—dietetics, and her husband, Connor, on the birth of their son, Joseph, in February 2026. She is an industrial relations representative for Bechtel Corp., and they live in Beaumont.

Congratulations to **Francesca (Gaspard) Redwine** '20, B.S. interdisciplinary studies, and her husband, Austin, on the birth of their daughter, Chloe, in April 2025. She teaches math, science and social studies at Hillcrest Elementary in Nederland school district. They live in Dickinson.

Licensed professional counselor **Christina (Flores) Segura** '20, B.S. communication—corporate, earned her master's degree in clinical mental health counseling in 2025 and owns Segura Therapy and Wellness. She and her husband, Mark, live in Dayton.

Emily (Briggs) Sturm '20, B.S. biology, earned her master's degree in physician assistant studies and is a physician assistant at Deer Park Family Clinic. She and her husband, **Trever** '19, B.S. mathematics, '20, M.B.A. business administration, live in Friendswood.

Lance Taylor '20, B.B.A. accounting, B.B.A. finance, '21, M.S. accounting, is founder and owner of Tailored Financial Solutions, helping small and growing businesses manage and understand their finances. He is senior manager of the transportation finance team for Walmart Corp. He lives in Rogers, Ark.

Kenan Washington '20, B.G.S. general studies, is a police corporal with the Lamar University Police Department. He and his wife, **Alexis (Hines)** '20, B.G.S. general studies, '24, M.Ed. teacher leadership, live in Port Arthur.

Congratulations to **Madison (Roy) Woolls** '20, B.S. psychology, and her husband, Hunter, on the birth of their son Roy in February 2026. They live in Nederland.

Jana Evans '21, M.P.A. public administration, is CEO and executive director of Thriving Hearts Crisis Center. She lives in Schertz.

Matt Fowler '21, M.Ed. administration, is principal of East Chambers High School. He lives in Goodrich.

Port Arthur school district named **Joes Gonzalez Jr.** '21, B.S. mathematics, 2026-2027 Teacher of the Year. He teaches math at Thomas Jefferson Middle School and lives in Port Arthur.

Forbes recognizes team

Forbes named STIFEL-Turley-Hall-Albanese Wealth Management Group as a 2026 Best in State Wealth Management Team. LU alumni are among team members **Ryan Citrano** '18, B.B.A. general business and management; **Lee Turley**; **Mark Hall**; **Dustin Albanese** '13, B.A.A.S. applied arts and sciences, and **Clarke Baker** '12, M.B.A. business administration.

She and her husband, **Mario** '16, B.S. communication, who is an inside sales representative with H&E Equipment Services Inc., live in Baytown.

The National Academy of Public Administration and Local Gov. 250 selected **Demi (Laney) Engman** '18, M.P.A. public administration, as one of America's 250 Public Service Champions. She is planning manager for the City of Beaumont. She and her husband, **Chase** '15, B.S. political science, who earned his law degree in 2018 and is assistant city attorney for Beaumont, live in Beaumont.

Charlee (Chelette) Fitzgerald '18, B.B.A. marketing, '19, M.B.A. marketing, is community impact supervisor for Neches Federal Credit Union. She and her husband, Jake, live in Port Neches.

Ryan Sherer '18, B.B.A. management, is an attorney with the Porter Law Firm. He lives in Beaumont.

Angelica (Figueroa) Smith '18, B.S. family and consumer sciences—nutrition, dietetic, hospitality, '19, M.S. nutrition, is a registered dietitian for WIC in Port Arthur. She and her husband, **Michael** '17, B.S. nursing, who is a registered nurse with Medical Center of Southeast Texas, live in Port Neches.

Karli (Pittman) Stansbury '18, B.A. history, is museum educator at the Beaumont Heritage Society. She and her

corporate, who is assistant director of health education in the Student Health Center at Lamar University, live in Port Neches.

Erica (Wilson) Brown '19, M.Ed. administration, is principal of Northside Elementary in Waxahachie school district. She and her husband, Jeremy, live in Waxahachie.

Sakurah Fisher '19, B.A. psychology, is community and organizational development facilitator at Peace Corps. She lives in Port Arthur.

Jenora Haynes '19, B.S. family and consumer sciences—fashion retailing and merchandising, teaches business entrepreneurship at Westbury High School in Houston school district and is head fashion designer at Incassable Fashion. She lives in Missouri City.

Tammy (Vanwickle) Howard '19, B.A.A.S. applied arts and sciences, '26, M.Ed. administration, teaches life skills at Vidor High School. She lives in Vidor.

Emily Lawrence '19, B.S. political science, is an associate attorney with Shane Phelps Law. She lives in Bryan.

Gov. Greg Abbott appointed **Oscar Ocuto** '19, D.E. deaf education, assistant professor of education at Gallaudet University, to the governing board of the Texas School for the Deaf. He lives in Manchaca.

20s

Kaci (Blackshear) '20, B.S. nutrition—dietetics, '23, M.S. nutrition—dietetics, married Barry "Weston" Allen in September 2025. She is a dietician with Riceland Healthcare, and they live in Beaumont.

Emma Benson '20, B.S. kinesiology, is head volleyball coach and teaches history at Lumberton High School. She was named the Beaumont Enterprise's Super Gold Volleyball Coach of the Year and lives in Lumberton.

Port Arthur school district named **Precious Boone** '20, B.A.A.S. applied arts and sciences, '22, B.S. family and consumer sciences—family studies, 2026-2027 Teacher of the Year. She is a head start 3 teacher at Wheatley School of Early Childhood and lives in Port Arthur.

Bailey Broussard '20, B.S. communication, joined the cruise staff of Disney Entertainment's Disney Fantasy Cruise Ship in December. She lives in Houston.

David Clubb Jr. '20, M.S. management information systems, owns Innovative Business Solutions. He and his wife, Sheila, live in Winnie.

Congratulations to **Savana Guidry** '20, B.S. kinesiology, and **Diondre Frank**

Congratulations to **Jasmine (Le)** '21, B.B.A. marketing, and **Trevor Hoffpauir** '16, B.B.A. management, on the birth of their son, Brooks, in February 2026. They live in Orange.

Courtney Kelly '21, M.B.A. business administration, has published her third children's book, *Celeste Paves the Way*, a story that educates readers on aspects of construction management in the aviation industry. She is project director for H.J. Russell & Co. She lives in Dallas.

Port Arthur school district named **Cindy Lopez** '21, B.S. interdisciplinary studies, 2026-2027 Teacher of the Year. She teaches math and science at Tyrrell Elementary School and lives in Port Arthur.

Congratulations to **Margaret (Fazio)** '21, B.S. interdisciplinary studies, '25, M.Ed. teacher leadership, and her husband Noah Oates on their marriage. She teaches science and social studies at Hamshire-Fannett Intermediate School and owns Shining Star Embroidery and Coloking with Margaret. They live in Beaumont.

Chelsy (Rediske) Rainwater '21, M.Ed. administration, is principal of Reeves Creek Elementary in Killeen school district. She and her husband, **Joshua** '13, M.Ed. administration, who is principal of Union Grove Middle School in Killeen school district. They live in Harker Heights.

Garrett Rountree '21, B.S. exercise science and fitness management, earned his doctor of physical therapy in 2024 and is a physical therapist and orthopedic and sports rehabilitation specialist for Federal Injury Centers of Utah. He lives in Orem, Utah.

Crystal Smith '21, M.Ed. administration, is principal of Hay Branch Elementary School in Killeen school district. She lives in Killeen.

Congratulations to **Tianna Rainey** '21, B.S. health education, '22, M.B.A. business administration, on the birth of her son, Trayson, in December 2025. They live in Cedar Hill.

Beaumont school district named Bingham Head Start teacher **A'Riona (Robinson) Rawlins** '21, B.S. criminal justice, as a 2026-2027 Teacher of the Year. She and her husband, Chanion, live in Beaumont.

Keith David Reeves '21, Ed.D. educational leadership, is principal of Gainesboro Elementary School in Frederick County, Va. He lives in Front Royal, Va.

Chelsea Taylor '21, M.Ed. school counseling, won the 2025 CREST Award for Counseling Excellence from the Texas School Counselor Association. She is district lead counselor for Fort Bend school district. She and her husband, Everett, live in Houston.

Congratulations to **Hannah (Bell)** '21, university studies multidisciplinary, and **Nathan Toutloff** '08, B.S. chemical

engineering, on the birth of their son, Henry, in January 2026. She teaches fourth grade science and social studies at Ehrhart School, and they live in Beaumont.

Baptist Hospitals of Southeast Texas named **Ashlynn Wenger** '21, B.S. nursing, Employee of the Year. She is a nurse in the Behavioral Health Unit and lives in Nederland.

Congratulations to **Ryan Billeaud** '22, B.S. nursing, and his wife, Hallie, on the birth of their daughter, Harper, in December 2025. He is a registered nurse at Altus Lumberton Hospital, and they live in Groves.

Taylor (Carter) '22, B.S. university studies multidisciplinary, married Jacob LeBlanc in December 2025. She teaches kindergarten in Port Arthur school district, and they live in Groves.

Congratulations to **Nyah (Sciarrilla)** '22, B.S. biology, '22, B.S. speech and hearing sciences, '24, M.S. speech-language pathology, and **Edward Long III** '17, B.S. communication-broadcasting, '24, M.B.A. business administration, M.S. management information systems, on their marriage in March 2026. She is a speech-language pathologist for Christus Southeast Texas Health System, and he is an associate instructional designer for the Division of Distant Learning at Lamar University. They live in Beaumont.

Maissa Salibi '22, B.S. political science, is a legal assistant with the Ferguson Law Firm. She lives in Beaumont.

Jaqueline (Rodriguez) '22, B.S. biology, and Jacob Smith were married in December 2025. She is an admissions counselor for Lamar University, and they live in Port Neches.

Dion Tran '22, B.B.A. accounting, '23, M.S. accounting, is accounting manager at RESA Power. He lives in Port Arthur.

Kaleigh Wortham '22, B.S. university studies multidisciplinary, is assistant vice president of consumer lending and is a certified credit union financial counselor. She and her husband, Jacob, live in Port Arthur.

Melissa Cox '23, M.Ed. administration, is assistant principal of Bridge City Intermediate. She and her husband, James, live in Orange.

Kiera Figgins '23, B.A. psychology, won first place for best oral advocate of the 2026 Texas Tech Law School Board of Barristers Advanced Solo Negotiations Competition. She lives in Fred.

Gabby Gaspard '23, B.S. communication studies, is enrollment coordinator senior for marketing and recruitment in the Lamar University Office of Admissions. She lives in Beaumont.

Rainey Knox '23, B.A. history, is executive assistant for the Southeast Texas Nonprofit Development Center. She lives in Beaumont.

Alicia Leviege-Vargas '23, B.S. university studies-multidisciplinary, teaches math and science at Tyrrell Elementary School in Port Arthur school district. She lives in Port Neches.

Congratulations to **Taylor (Broussard)** '23, B.S. nursing, and Jackson Puckett on their marriage in April 2024. She is a registered nurse at Houston Methodist Hospital. They live in Baytown.

Kenadi (Hagan) '23, B.S. studio art-education, and **Matt Schuldt** '20, B.S. physics, B.S. mathematics, '23, M.E. mechanical engineering, were married in October 2025. She teaches art at James Bowie Middle School in Fort Bend school district. Matt is a systems engineer at Octabo Systems, and they live in Richmond.

Deepak Shrestha '23, M.S. computer science, is senior software engineer at American Airlines. He lives in Frisco.

Megan Woodard '23, B.B.A. management, is vice president of digital services for Neches Federal Credit Union. She and her husband, Paul, live in Bridge City.

Congratulations to **Gavin Zumo** '23, B.S. construction management, on his marriage to Meagan Mankin in February 2026. They live in Houston.

Tyra Arredondo '24, B.S. nursing, is a registered nurse in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit of Children's Memorial Hermann Hospital. She lives in Montgomery.

Ashleigh Culver '24, B.S. sociology, teaches at Silsbee High School. She lives in Silsbee.

Congratulations to **Abby Gautreaux** '24, B.S. mechanical engineering, on the birth of her son, Dax, in February 2026. She lives in Orange.

Paul Ivory '24, B.S. chemical engineering, is engineering chair of the foundation BEE's Believers to provide high school students of underrepresented communities with opportunities in athletics and STE(A) M. He is an improvement engineer with Dow Sabine River Operations and lives in Orange.

Congratulations to **Reagan (Alston)** '24, B.S. nursing, and **Keaton Jones** '22, B.B.A. finance, on their marriage in March 2026. She is a registered nurse with Children's Memorial Hermann Hospital, and they live in Orange.

Taylor Justice '24, B.S. communication-broadcasting, is deputy sheriff and public information officer for Jasper County Sheriff's Office. She lives in Kirbyville.

Beaumont school district named Pathways Alternative Learning Center teacher **Lauren Simmons** '24, M.Ed. administration, as a 2026-2027 Teacher of the Year. She lives in Beaumont.

Bradley Stone '24, B.S. computer science, is a software developer with Reynold and Reynolds Co. He lives in Port Arthur.

Jennyfer Zarate '24, B.S. biology, is pursuing a master's degree at Rutgers University. She lives in Philadelphia, Penn.

McMillan Junior High inducted **Akasha Davis** '25, B.S. public health in healthcare administration, into the Wylie Hall of Honor in February. She earned Southland Conference first-team honors in 2023 and 2024 and was named the conference's Player of the Year in 2024. She lives in Wylie.

Beaumont school district named Fletcher Elementary School teacher **Baylee (Campbell) Davis** '25, M.Ed. special education, as a 2026-2027 Teacher of the Year. She and her husband, Chandler, live in Nederland.

Michelle Lane '25, B.S. exercise science, is a registered behavior technician with Action Behaviors Center in Houston, where she lives.

Folasade (Asoro) '25, B.S. university studies multidisciplinary, married Collin Martinez in December 2025. They live in Spring.

Gov. Greg Abbott appointed **Gregorio Mata** '25, M.P.A. public administration, an operations and data associate at Activating Change, to the governing board of the Texas School for the Deaf. He lives in Edinburg.

Congratulations to **Jill (Stokes)** '25, B.S. communication-public relations, and Kyle McGee on their marriage in March 2026. She is stewardship coordinator for the Office of Development at Lamar University. They live in Beaumont.

Kimberley Riley '25, B.S. university studies multidisciplinary, is senior administrative assistant to the dean of the College of Engineering at Lamar University. She lives in Beaumont.

Shofiul Azam Tarapder '25, M.E.S. industrial engineering science, is an industrial automation and controls engineer at Motorola Solutions, Chicago. He lives in Des Plaines, Ill.

Ainsley Thompson '25, B.S. communication, '25, M.P.A. public administration, is marketing manager for the Beaumont Convention and Visitors Bureau. She lives in Beaumont.

Frances (Clark) Thompson '25, B.S. corporate communication, is communications specialist and deputy public information officer for the City of Beaumont. She and her husband, Travis, live in Beaumont.

Brittany (Bautsch) Vaclavik '25, M.Ed. clinical mental health counseling, is LIDDA service coordinator for Spindletop Center. She and her husband, Justin, live in Bridge City.

Cody Wulf '25, B.S. construction management, is assistant quality manager at G&G Enterprises. He lives in Beaumont.

Boundless achievement

by SARAH PARKER

A simple philosophy has guided Reaud Honors student and Presidential Scholar Elizabeth Diaz Arreola on her road to academic success: You can do anything you want as long as you're willing to put in the work.

"College is what you make of it. Everything is on the table, and you're allowed to explore everything you want," Arreola said.

That mindset has been a driving force for the first-generation college student as she has navigated the myriad opportunities available at Lamar University for an undergraduate of her academic aptitude. In addition to her coursework as an exercise science major, Arreola is always striving to expand her horizons through active roles in numerous organizations and programs, including serving as a Lamar University Ambassador, an ambassador for the College of Education and Human Development and as a New Student Orientation leader.

During her freshman year, Arreola was part of the inaugural class of Reaud Fellows within the Reaud Leadership Institute (RLI). Launched in 2023 through the generous support of Beaumont attorney and philanthropist Wayne A. Reaud and the Reaud Honors College, the institute taps Lamar's best and brightest to participate in unique professional opportunities and rigorous academic exercises designed to hone their leadership skills and critical thinking.

"Going into the institute, we talked a lot about what it meant to be an honors student, the different challenges you face, the struggles you may put upon yourself and how to work through those. What I've gotten out of it the most is the opportunity to grow," Arreola said.

Throughout her college journey, Arreola has seized upon countless opportunities to grow and push boundaries. One of her most ardent advocates and influential mentors has been Tilisa Thibodeaux, dean of the Reaud Honors College. She credits Thibodeaux with encouraging her to explore pursuits beyond the confines of her major and to not be afraid of reaching for greater heights.



"When I first got into the Leadership Seminar, it was so reassuring to have this guiding adult that I could go to for advice," Arreola said. "No matter what, Dr. Thibodeaux has always been super supportive of literally anything I have brought to her. There's been so many opportunities that she's told me about."

One of those opportunities was applying for a legislative internship at the state capitol sponsored by the Beaumont Foundation of America through the Texas Leadership Institute.

"Dr. Thibodeaux took the time to explain it to me and tell me that she thought I would be a great fit, and I shouldn't let my major or my designation stop me from applying," Arreola said. "She gave me constant

guidance and reassurance. I ended up getting accepted."

During the legislative session running from January to July 2025, Arreola served as a policy analyst intern for a Texas House representative from San Antonio, experiencing the inner workings of state government firsthand and working on the front lines of policy issues like children's welfare and affordable housing. "It was a great experience, very boots on the ground," she said.

One of the highlights of her time in Austin was meeting Lamar University alumni at networking and social events where she says the "real bond-building and personal connections" happen.

"Meeting alumni really motivated me because it showed me what you can do with the opportunities Lamar gives you," Arreola said. "It was really inspiring for me to see that there were people who had attended Lamar, and that were in my shoes not that long ago, who were getting to achieve their goals and dreams."

More recently, Arreola has been appointed by Gov. Greg Abbott as student regent for the Texas State University System, an honor she thought "unattainable" but achieved with a little encouragement from Dr. Thibodeaux.

"No matter what I do in the future, I think my biggest goal is to be a public servant," Arreola said. "I really like helping people. It's my biggest motivator."



BARLOW LEGACY:

A clean audit and *evergreen* commitment

by ULIANA TRYLOWSKY

Growing up in a family of five girls, Teresa (Ralston) Wuchter '88 was always seen as “the smart one” and encouraged by her father to pursue something no one else had done—go to college. After working at a local bank for several years doing accounting tasks on the basis of her “math through trigonometry” high school knowledge, Wuchter realized that perhaps a degree in accounting was in her future.

“A large part of my job was creating the accounting entries to close the books daily and review required regulatory liquidity to make recommendations on purchase or sale of funds,” she said. “Bank auditors would come and I would work with them.”

Five years of working to save money for college led her to Lamar University, where she entered the College of Business as an accounting major and met H.A. Barlow—a man who would change her trajectory in life.

Barlow taught accounting at Lamar University for more than four decades, from 1951 until his death in 1994. He had a profound impact on the lives of thousands of students. Barlow was not solely an accounting instructor. He was a mentor, someone who, according to Wuchter, “could be found in his office early in the morning and at the end of the day, regardless of whether he had classes to teach. His door was always open to students, and he truly cared about their ability to succeed.”

While Barlow was considered a tough instructor, “he was loved because he was also kind and caring. He had a special ability to teach us complicated standards which we needed to understand to be successful in the future,” continued Wuchter.

Always a “numbers person,” Wuchter gravitated to jobs where her attention to detail and knowledge of accounting standards would be appreciated. She also had a tenacious spirit (perhaps encouraged by Barlow) that ensured Wuchter was always prepared for all possibilities at work.

Wuchter recalls a time when, unable to understand material in a chapter, she reached out to Barlow for help. He asked if she brought a list of questions (she had not). Barlow told her to



reread the chapter until she had a list of specific questions and then he would address the questions.

It was this same approach that Wuchter would later apply to her professional career. When responsible for the implementation of Oracle at her place of employment, Wuchter read the proposed agreement—approximately 200 pages long. She then put together a list of questions for the partner of the consulting firm to address. Over several meetings, her questions were answered, and the

language in the agreement was updated as she requested. The corporate CFO and the company’s legal counsel executed the agreement without any concerns.

Wuchter first reached out to Lamar in 2021 to ask whether LU had a fund honoring Barlow. After learning that such a fund did not exist, Wuchter chose to make a gift of \$20,000 to start the process. Five years later, the H.A. Barlow Faculty Scholar in Accounting has an endowed value of approximately \$500,000 and continues to grow. Now, Wuchter has committed to continued funding for the next 10 years and hopes that her story will inspire others to also support this worthy effort. Wuchter feels that there must be many LU alumni like her, whose lives were touched by the kindness and mentoring of Barlow.

Don Warren '63, chair of the School of Accounting, Finance and Economics, also knew Barlow as a student and later as an adjunct instructor of accounting at LU. Warren has worked diligently to promote the fund and encourage alumni to support. He describes the importance of the fund this way: “The H. A. Barlow Faculty Scholar in Accounting is a long-term investment in academic excellence. It will provide the resources and recognition necessary to attract and retain distinguished scholars, expand high-impact research and enhance the quality of teaching and mentorship for students. It will elevate the visibility, credibility and reputation of the entire accounting program.”

In 2025, the first milestone in this journey was reached when Timothy McCoy was named the first H.A. Barlow Faculty Scholar in Accounting.



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Red-dy for Launch: Choose the cause you care about most Sept. 17-18

by ARON ARCENEUX

Lamar University's annual virtual day of giving, Red Day, returns Sept. 17-18, 2026, under the banner **Red-dy for Launch!**

This year's campaign aims to build on the momentum of last year's record-breaking success while encouraging Cardinals everywhere to help launch the next generation of Lamar University students toward a bright future.

Following an outstanding 2025 campaign, Red Day is poised for another exciting year. Last year, 610 generous donors made 727 gifts, setting new participation records and demonstrating the incredible Cardinal spirit of the LU community. This year, giving will be open for 1,923 minutes—a tribute to Lamar University's founding year of 1923—with a goal of reaching 550 total donors during the campaign.

Since its inception in 2021, Red Day has grown into one of LU's most meaningful traditions, bringing together alumni, students, faculty, staff, parents and community supporters in a shared effort to invest in the university's future. Participants may support the causes they care about most by directing their gifts

to any of Lamar University's six academic colleges, athletics programs, scholarships or university-wide initiatives and endowments such as the LU Forever Fund. Every contribution, regardless of size, helps provide scholarships, enhance academic programs, expand hands-on learning opportunities and strengthen the student experience across campus.

"Red Day is a full-circle moment for our LU alumni and friends," said Aron Arceneaux, annual giving officer. "It's an opportunity to celebrate the impact Lamar University has had on their lives while helping ensure current and future students have access to the same life-changing experiences. Every gift, whether large or small, makes a meaningful difference and demonstrates the strength of the Cardinal community."

As Red Day continues to grow each year, Lamar University invites alumni, friends and supporters to join the mission and help make the 2026 campaign its most successful yet. Together, Cardinals can fuel student success, strengthen the university's future and show the power of giving back.

