

Carolyn Phelan's Dedication of the 2017-2018 Year and Directory  
April 7, 2017

In 1862 President Abraham Lincoln said, "The Land-Grant University System is being built on behalf of the people who have invested in these public universities their hopes, their support, and their confidence." President Lincoln then signed the Morrill Land-Grant College Act of 1862 into law. The Texas legislature accepted this obligation and in 1871 began working to create the Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas. This college opened its doors to students in 1876 and was the state's first public institution of higher education. In the years since 1876 this institution has grown and changed its name to Texas A&M University, but it still educates students in agriculture and the "mechanic arts" as well as in dozens of other areas.

Today the University's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences has 14 academic departments, offers 30 undergraduate degrees, 34 master's degrees, and 23 doctoral degrees. It is the largest agricultural and natural resources college in the United States, has an overall enrollment surpassing 7,700 students, and last year awarded 2,171 degrees. The number of agriculture graduates since the beginning of the university makes up just over 60% of the total student body. Graduates are doctors, veterinarians, lawyers, bankers, farmers, ranchers, agricultural engineers, environmental consultants, bankers, classroom teachers, County Extension agents, plant and animal breeders, government officials, military officers, business men and women, and leaders in so many other professions. This all from a college that had its start with only 6 students when its doors first opened.

At this time I would like to dedicate my year as Federation president and the accompanying 2017-2018 Directory to the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences. Sometimes you go through life and there is one pivotal moment that changes your world forever. Mine was way back in 4<sup>th</sup> grade. I was in 4-H and a close friend was on something called a "grass judging team." Even in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade I knew that grass judging sounded funny, but I soon learned that this grass was already legal in all 50 states! At the time I had no idea what it was and certainly no idea how it would bring me to today. Coming from a very long line of Texas farmers and ranchers dating back to 1844, I thought it sounded fun. Grass judging is a contest where you are given a list of grasses that are important on Texas rangelands, and then you have to learn these plants. I found this to be very cool and awesome and easy. My team from Comal County competed in judging contests for the next 9 years, and it was at these contests that I came to meet Dr. Barron Rector and Dr. Robert Knight, professors in the Department of Ecosystem Science and Management. They conducted the various judging events, using them as valuable instructional opportunities to teach these youth about rangelands, conservation, natural resources, agriculture, and about Texas A&M University. I became hooked on agriculture and on Texas A&M. When it was time to go to college, I only applied to Texas A&M, and my chosen major was Range Science. I quickly joined the collegiate

Range and Pasture Plant Identification team which was coached by Dr. Knight. With him our team competed internationally, winning many awards. But more importantly than the ribbons and the trophies, Dr. Knight and Dr. Rector and all of the professors in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences taught us young college students how important it is to care for the world we live in. The faculty and staff in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences arm their students with the knowledge and the basics and the cutting edge science that not only inspires but nurtures each and every student that walks through their doors. And it isn't just students with ag majors that are touched, but thousands of students from other colleges take courses in this college to meet some of their basic degree requirements each year. This college touches so many students *every day*.

Now back to how the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences touched me and my family. After graduation with my Range Science degree, I married Howard, an Army officer, and we left Texas and moved around the country. I did the stay-at-home mom/Army wife "thing" for my husband's 23 year Army career. During all of this time I used many of the lessons I learned from Dr. Knight and Dr. Rector and my other college professors. They taught me the basics of the Core Values that are emphasized so much still today. My kids grew up hearing about stewardship and caring for what God has blessed us with especially in the natural world; they grew up learning THEIR grasses, and they grew up wearing maroon. We finally ended up back in Texas. The older two joined 4-H immediately and Kimi did when she was old enough, and I became a 4-H club leader and range project leader. All 3 of my kids were on the grass judging team that I coached, and we got back in that competition circuit that I had been part of so many years before. And guess who was still there teaching young 4-Hers at every possible opportunity – Dr. Rector and Dr. Knight. So now my kids were able to receive agricultural instruction from them, too. When Sandee was ready for college, the only place she applied was Texas A&M. We visited with Dr. Knight who advised her to start out in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences – surprised? Absolutely not. Her major was Nutrition, and I became an Aggie Mom! Sandee '11 entered Texas A&M in the Fall of 2007 and took a class from Dr. Knight who had also taught me. She worked for Dr. Stephen Hatch in the University Herbarium where I had worked when I was in school. The College of Agriculture was now nurturing and inspiring my daughter as it had me years before. Sandee ended up graduating with a degree in another college on campus, but the warm atmosphere she felt in the College of Agriculture has stayed with her ever since. When it was time for Kimi to go to college, she, too, only applied to Texas A&M (it became a family tradition to only apply to one college). By this point Kimi '19 had 10 full years of 4-H behind her. She had attended just about every camp, contest, convention, state and national trip that 4-H offered; she was involved with projects from clothing and textiles to poultry to the infamous grass judging contests. Kimi knew that what she wanted to do was to give back to the program that had nurtured and inspired her so much in her first 18 years. She wants to be a County Extension Agent. Now in her sophomore year as an Agricultural Leadership and Development major, she has also taken Dr. Knight's class. She spends her days on West Campus moving between the buildings of the College of Agriculture. Our son, Brad, chose

the Air Force Academy, but was still touched growing up with stories of rangelands and the grasses that grow there, of stories of Dr. Knight and Dr. Rector and Dr. Hatch, and Brad can identify Sideoats grama, the State Grass of Texas, cruising down a highway at 55 miles per hour. My husband understands the College of Agriculture and its impact when he comes home from work, and I am at the kitchen table surrounded by fourteen 4-Hers studying range plants and management techniques. *This College matters to us.*

When it came time for me to choose a person or entity at Texas A&M to dedicate my year and my directory to, it was an easy decision. In December I met with Dr. Mark Hussey, Vice Chancellor and Dean of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, and some of his staff to include Ms. Angel Futrell '11, Alumni and Donor Relations Coordinator for the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences. We visited about the reasons why this college mattered to me and to the thousands of students enrolled in it. We talked about ways I could highlight some of the spectacular accomplishments in the college. I also asked Dr. Hussey for help in thinking up a theme and logo for me to use this year. I had been tossing ideas around in my head for some time, but Dr. Hussey suggested, "Aggie Moms: Nurturing and Inspiring." I knew immediately that was it. The College of Agriculture and Life Sciences had nurtured and inspired me as a student, as a parent, and as an adult 4-H leader. It had nurtured and inspired both of my daughters. And it nurtures and inspires thousands of students every day as it has tens of thousands of students since 1876. The staff and faculty of this college not only nurtures and inspires its students, but the students learn to be nurturing and inspiring in their careers after they leave the university – they nurture lambs and calves and plant seedlings and they even nurture and inspire a new generation of young people just through their presence in the world.

Now I needed a logo. Dr. Hussey offered to have his staff help me with that, but about halfway through our meeting, he got very excited and suggested that we conduct a contest within the College, particularly targeting the students in the Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education and Communications –where you find the Aggies who are looking towards careers in journalism and advertising. And so it was. I put together what I wanted the logo to encompass and then through the help of Angel and other staff, the logo design contest commenced at the beginning of the spring semester. Dr. Hussey's office provided an iPad as an incentive to the person who created the winning design. There were some very awesome designs submitted; it was hard to choose. But the one by Aggie Jensen Martinez '18 had something that made me know it was the one. Jensen's design has the hands of an Aggie Mom anchoring the bottom of the design. A mother's hands nurture her child. These hands also represent everyone who plays a part in nurturing and inspiring our Aggies along their college journey. Coming out of the hands is a tree which is represented by a main trunk and two side branches. This tree trunk and its strong branches represent all of our Aggies, those that are here now, all of those that have come before, and all those still to come. The strong trunk represents, also, the strength that an Aggie possesses;

strength that is gained through time spent here in Aggieland. The leaves at the end of the branches represent how Aggies go forth into the world and spread out to continue nurturing and inspiring future generations. And the tree is a very “agricultural” symbol so it also represents the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences. Many thanks and congratulations go to Jensen for taking the time to engage with the Aggie Moms.

I want to close this dedication with two quotes. “The truth is, the American people have yet to commence the study of agriculture as the combination of many sciences. Agriculture is the most profound and extensive profession that the progress of society and the accumulation of knowledge have developed. Whether we consider the solid earth under our feet, the invisible atmosphere which we breathe, the wonderful growth and decay of all plants and animals, or the light, the cold, or the electricity of heaven, we contemplate but the elements of rural science.” This quote tells of the importance of the study of agriculture in our world. But the interesting thing is that this was written by the editor of the Southern Cultivator newspaper in Augusta, Georgia – in 1852 which was 10 years before President Lincoln put his signature on the Morrill Act! It is still so true today. I found this in a book that Dr. Hussey gave me in December titled “The Land-Grant Legacy in the Lone Star State.” It is a beautiful book on the history of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences.

The final quote I want to leave you with was said by Melanie Jones Toler '76 and P. William “Bill” Toler '76, “With deep roots in agriculture, Texas A&M understands the value of seeds. Most universities plant seeds of learning; A&M also plants seeds of character that flourish for a lifetime.” This year I hope that we as Aggie Moms will be reminded that while we have nurtured and inspired our children to be good, productive citizens, this amazing University that they attend that has made us Aggie Moms, it is also planting in them other seeds that will be nurtured while they are here and also after they are gone from this campus, but that because of the strong foundation which was laid back in 1876 when the Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas was birthed, our Aggies’ character will shine wherever their lives take them.