



As a result we have added a verse to the alma mater to make our school song more reflective of our unique university; partnered with Taylor Publishing under a new "Milestone" program to revive the student yearbook, *The Alcalde*; and established an official university ring program. Our first ring ceremony was held on a beautiful early evening in conjunction with the April 125th anniversary celebrations on the south portico of Austin Hall.

Several alumni from as early as the 1960s decided to acquire the new ring and participate in the ceremony. It was truly a grand event!

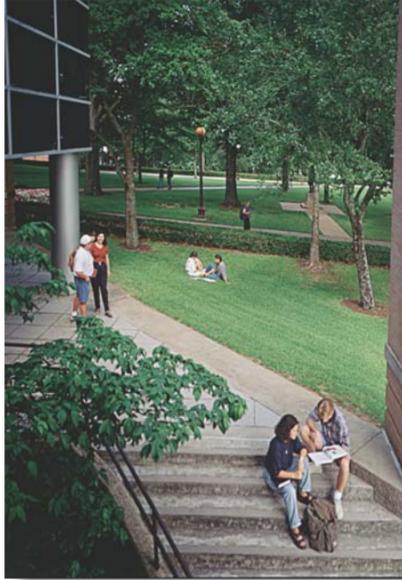


One of our older traditions is the march to Sam Houston's grave on his birthday. In this, our 125th year, a hearty group of students, faculty and administrators met at Austin Hall and made their way down the hill, past the town square, to Oakwood Cemetery and the gravesite. As the ceremony drew to a close, an eagle circled high above, reminding us of December 2, 1832, when Sam Houston splashed across the Red River into Texas for the first time. He also noticed an eagle that day and, as an adopted son of the Cherokee tribe, considered it a good omen. Perhaps the spirit of "Old Sam" was nearby, blessing us and the university that bears his name. 🦅



A sense of relief and profound gratitude literally swept over me. I thanked him and asked if I might do something to repay him for his understanding. Maybe I could assist him grading papers next semester? He said that that was not necessary, but went on to say that in my life I would have the opportunity to assist others. When I did, I could tell them this story and ask that they do something for someone else down the line, that is, “pass it on.” I have been fortunate to have spent my life in a profession in which those opportunities do present themselves, and I have often told the “Bill Lawler story” to those students that I have been able to help. So Bill Lawler not only helped me, but through the years, certainly countless others have benefited from that one act of trust and understanding.

The story does not end there. The first year of my presidency, Nancy and I were walking from our car to Bowers Stadium for a football game, when we ran into Bill Lawler. After brief greetings I reminded him of what he did for me, and told him that I had tried to “pass it on” through my career at Notre Dame and the University of Texas at San Antonio. Nancy and I could tell that he was touched by the story. We visited for a short while and then went our separate ways to the game. Shortly after that chance meeting, Bill Lawler died. It was special to know that I was able to tell him of the significance of his act of kindness before he passed on.



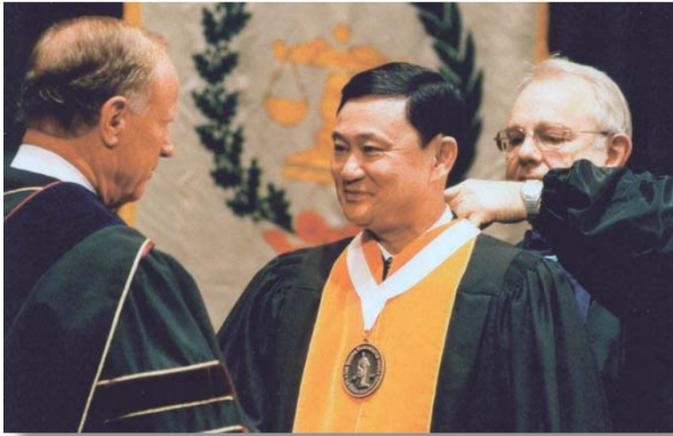
In my time as president of Sam Houston State, I have heard *countless* stories from alumni and current students of exceptional and compassionate treatment from faculty and staff. We have so much to be proud of over the one hundred and twenty five years that this special university has existed, but probably nothing we have done can compare to the true care and concern that has been exhibited throughout the university community over that time. It is our legacy and greatest tradition.

Any institution that has been around 125 years is certain to have other traditions as well. Some of the most significant include the singing of *Auld Lange Sine* at commencement with all of the graduates holding hands and raising them with the last verse, our “funky” homecoming parade, and the Christmas “Tree of Lights,” when students bring gifts for the needy. In recent years I’ve encouraged our campus leadership to build on our traditions.

more removed you become from the reason you entered the profession in the first place—to associate and work with students.

Every president must focus on leadership, development, and supervision. But in addition, it is vital that he have a vision for the future and the ability to persuade his constituents to share and achieve that vision. Consequently the president must be a doer as well as a philosopher. In my judgment, he must constantly remember to communicate with university constituents and friends. This communication includes everything from official university convocations to personal notes to colleagues.

Many professors greatly influenced me during my years as an undergraduate student at Sam Houston State Teachers



Alumnus Thaksin Shinawatra, Prime Minister of Thailand, receives the Sam Houston Humanitarian Award, 2002

College. Among those were Jewel Gibson who patiently taught creative writing, Lee Olm who demonstrated a true passion for his honors history course, and Rita Huff who combined professionalism and accessibility in a most unique way.

However, it is an incident that involved Bill Lawler, who then taught the second basic accounting course, that I remember most vividly. I had taken Mr. Lawler's course and

was on my way to take the final. When I entered the room scheduled for the exam I knew that it was highly unusual that I was the only student there! I waited for some time, and when no one else arrived, I knew I was in trouble. The secretary in the departmental office verified my worst fear — the exam had been given earlier and I had missed it! I asked the secretary for Mr. Lawler's home address and called to let him know I was on my way over.

I drove my Volkswagen the few blocks to the Gintz apartments, and pulled up in front of Mr. Lawler's door. I knew that he could legitimately give me a zero on the exam because it was unquestionably my fault for getting the times confused. So, to say that I was concerned is a gross understatement. Mr. Lawler answered the knock and listened patiently as I explained that I had gotten the times confused. Without even hesitating, he said: "Jim, I believe you. The final is being given again tomorrow morning. You can take it then."



SHSU Visitor Center,
scheduled for completion
in 2005

of wood, so that a desperate mountain man caught in a snowstorm could build a fire immediately. When a trapper completed his stay it was the tradition that he cut firewood to replace what he had used. One of the most complimentary epitaphs for a mountain man was that “he left the woodpile a little higher than he found it.” Certainly each chief executive of this wonderful university could have that epitaph. We all strive to leave the university a little better than we found it.

The early principals and presidents such as Mallon, Smith, Baldwin, Pritchett and Estill certainly dealt with routine curriculum, course content, student attendance and department issues, as well as substantive issues like faculty relations, plant expansion, and legislative concerns. More recent presidents have been forced to delegate more and to deal exclusively with strategic issues. Currently the position requires that the president spend a significant amount of time on external relations with university friends, alumni, potential donors, and legislators. *I have heard it said that it is the president’s job to brag about the university, and everyone else’s job is to be sure that he is right!* The vice presidents and I meet at least once a week to discuss issues that they believe should come to my attention, and vice versa. In these meetings we alternate weeks between the more formal president’s cabinet, and one-on-one meetings in my office. Because of the significant building on campus in recent years, construction issues now require a considerable amount of time.

Of course, faculty and student relations are always high priority issues with any president. *It has always seemed paradoxical to me that the higher you move in the university administration, the*

very fortunate indeed to conclude it not simply at the university I love, but in the same space where it all began.

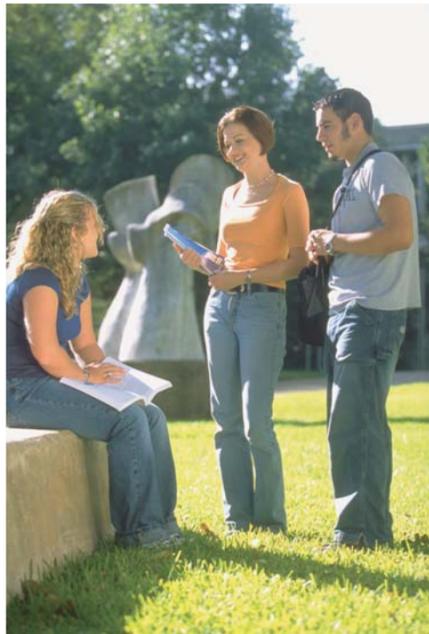
Just outside the door of that room in 1964, in what is now the president's conference room, was a small office shared by two young assistant professors—Bob Marks, the eleventh president of Sam Houston State University, and for whom the building is now named; and James Gilmore, who spent many years as Dean of Business Administration before ending his distinguished career as Vice President for Academic Affairs. Both men have been mentors to me since that time.

Sam Houston has changed in many ways since the 1960s, but in other respects it has remained the same. The physical campus has obviously changed, primarily with the expansion to the east. In my judgment the campus is more beautiful today than it was when Nancy and I were undergraduates. University program offerings have increased, most notably the addition of a wide range of graduate degrees, including five doctorates. Faculty credentials have also improved dramatically, with the norm now easily being a doctorate from a well-respected research university. Faculty are now expected to make significant scholarly contributions to their respective academic disciplines—in other words to “publish” as well as to teach their classes.

However, some things have not changed. Sam Houston State University is still a very special and nurturing community. Our heritage is to teach and mentor students. We recently established an innovative Student Advising and Mentoring (SAM) center that is strictly devoted to helping students succeed. We still do an exceptional job in making this a university with a special aura of thoughtful concern for everyone associated with it. It is truly still a “Bearkat family.”

With regard to the duties and responsibilities of the president (in the early days the “principal”), they have changed in some ways, too, but the primary responsibilities have remained constant. Fundamentally each president has served as the chief executive officer with the overall goal of running the university and leaving it in better condition when he departed than when he entered.

I am reminded of one of my favorite tales. It concerns the lives of the nineteenth-century fur trappers of the Rocky Mountains. Ostensibly there were several huts placed strategically in remote parts of the mountains that were for the purpose of providing shelter during snowstorms. Inside each cabin was a stack

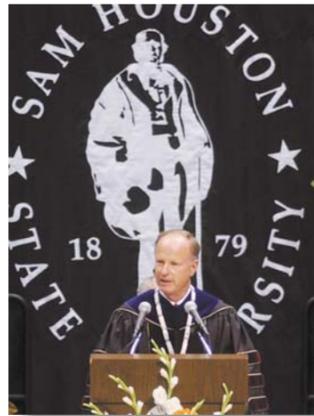


Afterword by President James F. Gaertner, Class of 1964

It was the summer of 1964, and both Nancy and I were undergraduate students living in the Gintz married housing on the south end of campus. As with so many Sam Houston State students, both then and now, we were working our way through school. Nancy was a part-time secretary, and I was a clerk at the Lowman Student Center bookstore operated by Mr. Wayne Rainwater. I had just completed a Business Statistics course that was perennially taught by the head of the Business Administration department, Dr. Jean Neal.

Mr. Rainwater managed to keep the student workers pretty busy, and as I remember, we were shelving books in preparation for the fall 1964 semester when I spotted Dr. Neal strolling through the store. I had approached his statistics course with some trepidation—after all, he was the head of the entire department and had the reputation of being unyielding in his expectations of students. Thanks in large measure to the fact that I was somewhat intimidated by the course *and* Dr. Neal, and therefore studied very hard, things worked out well, and I made an “A” in the class.

I had heard a rumor that Dr. Neal’s assistant, who taught a “lab” portion of his statistics classes, had graduated and the job was open for the fall. In an early effort at upward mobility, and hoping that he would remember me, I decided to ask Dr. Neal if the position were indeed available, and if I might apply. By the time I had gathered up the courage to approach him, he had exited the bookstore and was walking back to his office. I literally ran after him, and when I caught up, I asked about the job. Beneath his exacting veneer, Dr. Neal was a kind-hearted man. He remembered me from his class and essentially hired me “on the spot.” A few days later I found myself teaching a business statistics lab in a classroom that was on the third floor, southeast corner, of the administration building, which has since been remodeled. That space is now the office of the president of the university. My academic career has come full circle, so to speak. I am



Investiture of James F. Gaertner, 12th President of Sam Houston State University