



Welcome Home



BY STEPHANIE JETER '06

A diploma from Texas A&M can be a ticket to a career anywhere in the world. But there's an emerging trend as more former students return to College Station to continue their careers, raise families or retire. Right now, there are about 17,400 former students who call Bryan-College Station home. These former students are returning to a city that has grown up, a University that has grown out and a community that they are quickly deciding they like ... a lot.



No, A&M hasn't changed the wording on the iconic campus water tower. We created this photo illustration using a digital editing program.



The mental picture Elmer Mooring '58 kept of College Station for 40 years suddenly bore no resemblance to what he was actually seeing.

A new introduction to his old alma mater came as a surprise. A few weeks earlier, he had received a telephone call from old friend whom Mooring, as a cadet, had taken to a football game in 1954. She was his date on one of the Corps of Cadets' game-day road trips. But this time she had an invitation for him, Mooring said. "She wondered if I wanted to come down for a ballgame," he said. "And I did."

A multicolored football ticket to the 2002 fall matchup between Texas A&M and Virginia Tech at Kyle Field was his to redeem.

By that time, Mooring had become a longtime Maryland resident. Soon after graduation, he left Texas to work at a Johns Hopkins University laboratory for advanced aerospace projects.

Being absent from College Station in no way dampened his Aggie Spirit, "but I never came back here," Mooring said. "For 40 years, I never came back."

So when he flew down for the football game, Mooring experienced something he called "culture shock."

His experience with postgraduate plans went like this: "You get your degree, get your trailer loaded and you leave."

By now, most Ags realize what Bryan-College Station has to offer in the form of community. It was listed as one of *Kiplinger's 50 Smart Places to Live* and appears in the national rankings for best-educated cities. The Texas Workforce Commission categorized the area as having among the lowest unemployment rates, below 4 percent in May.

For the majority of community shoppers looking to find the ideal place to raise a family, pursue a career or retire, just reading the phonebook is impressive. The community has multiple hospitals and state-recognized public schools. Bryan-College Station plays host to top-level artists and entertainers, and is in the geographic middle of the Austin and Houston cultural scenes. There are competitive University sports for entertainment almost year-round, more than 30 parks, five golf courses and easy access to a traveler-friendly



I would do if I didn't have to work." But for the past several months, the electrical engineer had been thinking about what he would need in a retirement area: good health care, a university setting, and easy access to the arts.

"College Station had all that," Mooring said. It had everything, plus the Aggie Spirit.

So as not to be swayed by the excitement of his first Aggie football game in



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Hello Again, College Station

"Here's this neat, bustling community," he said. Every bit of it was alive, and it stunned him. "You have to realize that when I graduated, nobody stayed here. There was no College Station. There was a train station. There was a gas station over on Texas, and the highway was a two-lane road."

airport. Plus, Mooring said, it has the intangible. It has Aggieland.

He was only packed to stay a week when he came for the game, but "I fell in love with the area," he said. Pretty soon he was packing boxes back in Maryland.

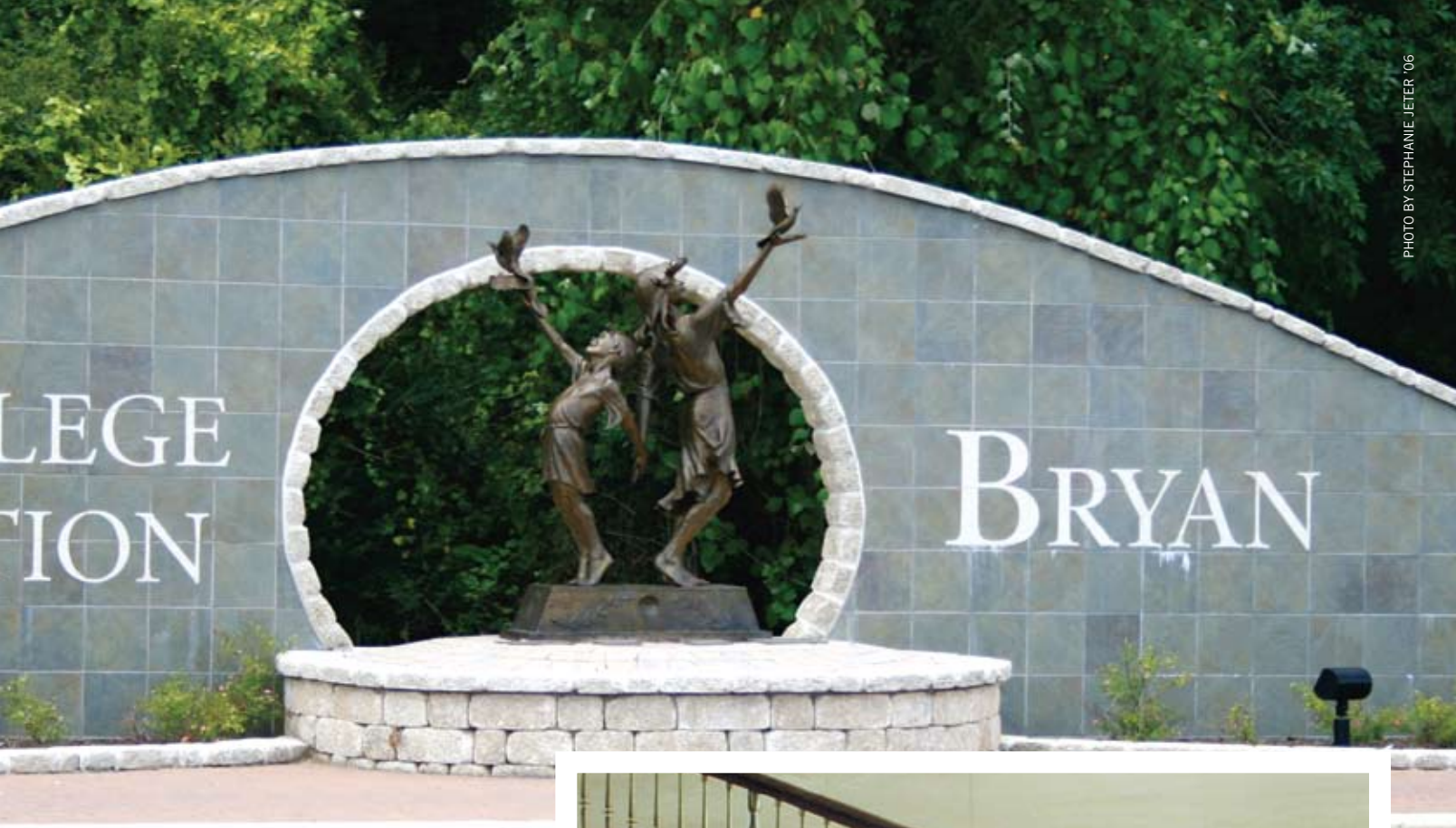
"I wasn't planning on retiring," Mooring said. He loved his job. "My work was a hobby; it was exactly what

40 years, Mooring decided to visit one more time while Texas A&M faced its rival in Austin.

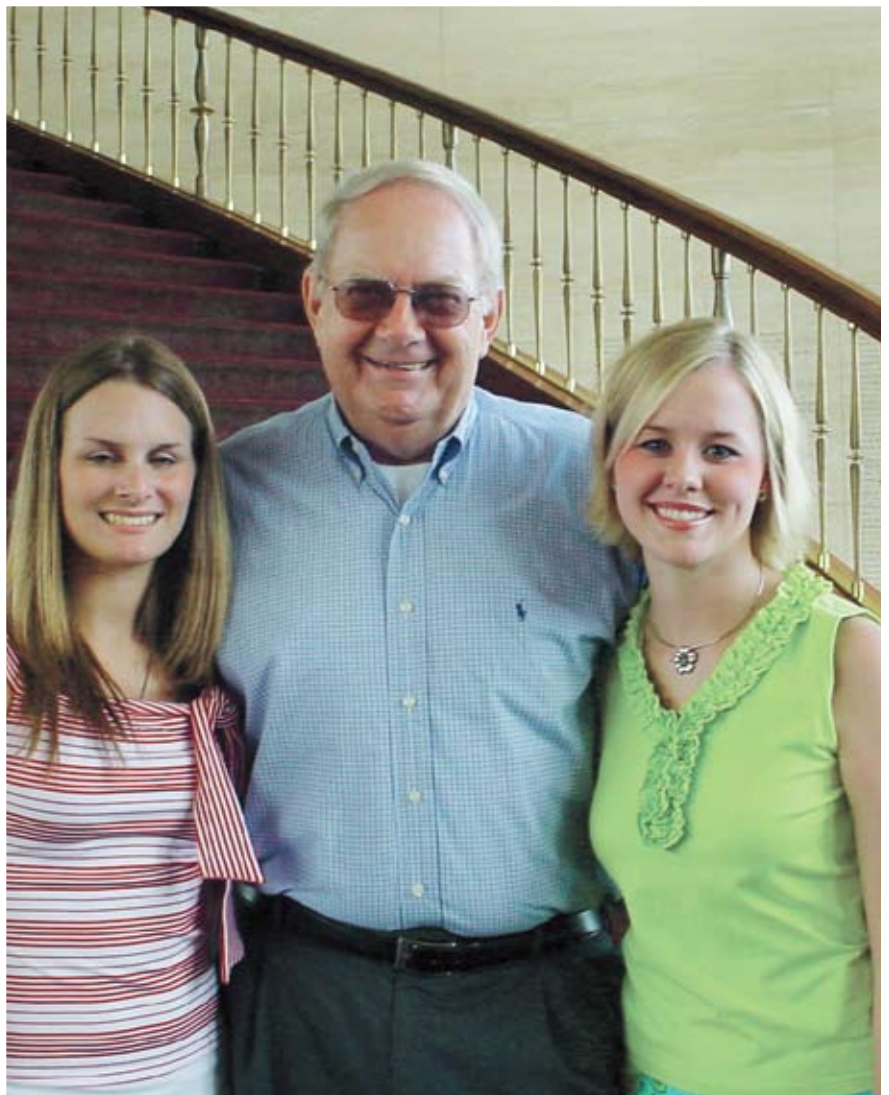
It was no fluke, Mooring said. He purchased a house on the spot.

"I like the way the town developed," he said. "It has everything a retiree could want."

That was in 2002.



ABOVE: Elmer Mooring '58 thought he was invited to the Williams Alumni Center to explain Aggie Hostel, so he was surprised when students announced him as a namesake for Fish Camp. Pictured, from left: Camp Mooring Co-chairs Tim McDonald '06 and Gina Montelone '06, Mooring, and Kristen West '07, who nominated him for the honor. RIGHT: Once back in BCS, Mooring got involved with Aggie Hostel. His student hostesses, Kristen West '07 (left) and Ashley Clark '04, nominated him as a Fish Camp namesake in 2005.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF ELMER MOORING '58



Ben Welch '90 is pictured in his Mays Business School office wearing his Aggie Ring, presented to him at Parents Weekend 2003 by the cadets of Squadron 17, for whom he was an academic advisor.

WELCOME BACK

Former students in the Bryan-College Station area: **17,400.**

- >Those younger than 50: **13,245.**
- >Those 50 and older: **4,155.**

Former students living in BCS who have a recent prior address other than BCS: **5,858.**

- >Those younger than 50: **5,067.**
- >Those 50 and older: **791.**

Source: Association of Former Students records

PHOTO BY STEPHANIE JETER '06

“I’m loving life here,” he said. After the move he found himself quickly invested in the community. For example, Mooring takes a University course every semester. His first was Texas history. His participation with students led to Mooring becoming a Fish Camp namesake. He holds a leadership position in the local Harley Davidson crew; the club sells raffle tickets outside Kyle Field at home games. At one game he noticed a young lady wearing painted Aggie overalls. After asking her where she got them, she offered to make him a pair. He wears them to every game with “Old Ag ’58” painted on the rear pocket.

From the Outside Looking In, You Can’t Explain It

That Aggie Spirit is what drew Ben Welch '90 to make his home in the Brazos Valley. The Georgia-born teacher came to Texas A&M to earn a doctorate in educational curriculum and instruction. With so many options spawning from his chosen career path, it’s his Aggie story that shot fast-growing roots down in College Station.

“From the moment that I walked on

this campus I felt a sense of connectivity,” he said. He likes to tell the story about how on his first day of class, a young man in the Corps of Cadets offered directions and walked him to the proper building.

It’s a simple story, but to Welch, it says something complex about Aggieland.

“From that day forward, I knew that there truly was ‘a Spirit that can ne’er be told,’” he said. “And after attending A&M, I knew that I could never go anywhere else where I would feel the same thing I feel being part of Texas A&M. Everything about A&M is home to me.”

Teaching has always been Welch’s passion. As a child, his imagination could turn the family garage into a classroom to hold make-believe lessons. “Teaching has always been a lifelong dream,” he said, and as the director of the Center for Executive Development at Mays Business School, he is great at it. Of the plaques and accolades that decorate his résumé, Welch holds two Distinguished Achievement Awards from The Association of Former Students for teaching. Other universities have contacted him, offering new positions on their team, “but

I’ve just said no,” Welch said. “This is where my loyalty lies. I tell people that I have three driving values in life: my faith, love for my family and love for Texas A&M University,” he said. “I get to live out those values everyday. I can’t imagine anything better.”

The feeling of home in College Station was progressive, Welch said. It started out as fondness as a student, and when he married his wife in 1991, they both agreed that College Station is where they would like to call home forever. Since then, they’ve formed a family of five.

“This is a community that I want my children to grow up in,” Welch said. “It has a great educational system and the community places importance on family.”

But what makes the community a forever home are the students. “You are just able here to build lifelong relationships,” Welch said. “Here, I’ll give you an example.” He pulled a 5-by-4-inch stationary card from his desk. “I got this in the mail yesterday.” It was a thank you from a student he had in class five years ago. The words “thank you” were underlined, “not for anything recent or in particular,” the student wrote, “but generally for all the times you listened, exhorted me and loved me. You will always be a source of wise council and love.”

Nowhere else, Welch said, shaking his

head. “Nowhere else will you find that.”

He has a thousand stories. The Aggie Ring he wears on his right hand was given to him by students. He was once the advisor for Corps of Cadets Squadron 17, and the cadets purchased the Ring with money raised by cleaning Kyle Field after games and hosting car washes, he said. “I tell every audience that I speak to that it is second in love to me only to my wedding band because it’s symbolic of the Aggie Spirit.

“But I’ll tell you one of the most defining moments for me,” he said. November 1999, when Bonfire fell, Welch had Miranda Adams in class.

Miranda Adams ’02 was one of the 12 students who died in the collapse. Welch spoke at her funeral service about Aggie Spirit. In a letter addressed to him a couple of months later, Adams’ parents wrote how

Visualization Sciences at Texas A&M.

“Two things primarily led to the move,” he said. “The effects and animation business takes a lot of hours.” In his opinion, too many hours that he could use to spend with his wife and two young children.

“But the bigger thing, the thing that made it the time to jump, is visualization moved to its own department,” he said. Since his passion for visualization was formed during his time at A&M, it was an opportunity he couldn’t let pass.

When he was in school, visualization as a discipline was only a program within the University. “To help begin the program and be its first department head, that opportunity would not come around again,” he said. “This is the chance to step in and really contribute to growing it again from its creation.”

His feel for visual effects developed

used, but there’s a truth to it.”

Those were his two reasons, and had they been the only benefits from moving back to College Station, McLaughlin still would have been happy. But as he found himself feeling at home again in Aggieland, other gains only seen by locals started popping up.

“There are activities around campus that I enjoy,” he said. “I have a 5-year-old son who is very interested in pirates.” During the summer, the nautical archaeology program did a presentation about sunken ships that McLaughlin’s son found fascinating.

Then there was an open house at the vet school, he said. Since his specific interests include how creatures move and how to synthetically represent them, “Just looking around and making connections with what I do is invigorating. Those things were not high on my mind

TEXAS

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excited their daughter was to be part of the A&M family.

The term “family” stuck out to Welch. “It personifies why I do what I do,” he said. “It’s a Spirit that lasts forever.”

Making The Move

Tim McLaughlin ’90 and ’94 also found his way back to the Brazos Valley. After graduating with an undergraduate degree in environmental design and earning his master’s in visual science, McLaughlin left to work in the entertainment industry.

Jumanji, Mars Attacks, Star Wars: Episode I, The Haunting, The Adventures of Rocky and Bullwinkle and Jurassic Park III all show his work. It’s in the way the character moves in its skin, how the hair or fur or flesh moves with its form and motion, and McLaughlin is one of the best.

He’s now head of the Department of

quite organically, he said, all starting out in a class.

“I had an instructor that came from the entertainment side of the business,” McLaughlin said, and pretty soon, his schoolwork started having that animated look to it. “By the time I started looking for a job, I had a demo reel for entertainment and animation, rather than a portfolio.”

As a professional, McLaughlin loved working within the industry, where the people around him were all extremely skilled at particular jobs. But here in College Station, “there are opportunities to explore lots and lots of different directions,” he said, and improve a program that holds a portion of his history.

“Being able to come back and be part of this program on this campus has made all the difference,” McLaughlin said. “The word ‘family’ is often over-

when I came here,” McLaughlin said.

“It was a wonderful discovery.”

As Welch says to everyone who asks, “We’re blessed. We live in a great place.”

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