



DALLAS STAR CLUB
ESTABLISHED 1902



Parents' Weekend:

'When Home Folks Come To See'

By Stephanie Jeter '06

Now in its 90th year, Parents' Weekend has changed names and formats many times. But the annual event has always been about family and the certainty that when the Aggie Spirit is shared, it unites us all.

For those seeking history, there's nothing like old newspapers and yellowed letterhead to offer the truth and its details. The picture files and paper trails housed at Texas A&M's Cushing Memorial Library and Archives take readers on a journey. Following the history of Parents' Weekend means starting at the beginning—when this Aggie tradition was just an Aggie possibility.

The seed of Parents' Weekend was planted in 1919, back when being a Fightin' Texas Aggie meant mandatory enrollment in the Corps of Cadets. As such, incoming students in 1919 received a uniform, a lesson in following orders, and the promise that the AMC of Texas was like no other school around. But early news that reached home from the school was not always good. "In the early 1900s, when membership in the Corps of Cadets was mandatory, the hazing of freshmen was strictly enforced," explains a 1991 Parents' Weekend pamphlet. Hazing has long since been banned from the traditions of the Keepers of the Spirit, but back then, the mothers of underclassmen were worried, the pamphlet notes.

And worried mothers often take action.



The photo files of the Cushing Memorial Library and Archives are filled with images like these from past Parents' Weekends.



The result was the formation of the first A&M Mothers' Club, an organization that now has chapters across the nation. But long before the spread of Mothers' Clubs, that original initiative spilled over on campus. "The Dallas Mothers' Club, in conjunction with Student Government, set up a program much like an open house on Mother's Day," the Parents' Weekend pamphlet continued. The program wasn't much else but a chance to check on their sons and maybe boost their spirits, but with that first influx of mothers to campus, Parents' Weekend was born.

For a few years, the event continued to serve as a celebration of Mother's Day. But a March 18, 1925, news story in *The Battalion* announced a change: Parents' Day, as it was called, would be an annual event and no longer just the celebration of Mother's Day.

That aged *Battalion* clipping said that Parents' Day had been a goal since the Dallas A&M Mothers' Club was launched in 1922. Mrs. H.L. Peebles, along with Texas A&M's Student



Government, got much of the credit.

Based on the reporting in *The Batt*, the movement to create an annual gathering of parents went without a hitch. Peebles, the first president of the Dallas club, and Mrs. Kirk Hall, honorary member, approached University President Dr. William Bizzell with their plans for such an event. The 1925 news story said Bizzell was "enthusiastic over the idea," and the article proclaimed that Parents' Day

"will hereafter be observed as one of the big days in the College year." It announced that "the occasion of this day should be one of the most enjoyable of the whole year."

And so it has been.

Today's Parents' Weekend

On a Tuesday afternoon before the holidays, the Flag Room in the Memorial Student Center was a murmur of approaching end-of-semester finals. In every chair, on every couch sat—or slept—a student preparing for that end of the semester.

Rebekah Thornton '10 sat upstairs with her books, her bag and her plan-

ner. As the 2009 Parents' Weekend communications chair, Thornton keeps a datebook that could rival most anyone's. It is filled with reminders of tests and homework assignments, but what's written the most in her loopy script is a commitment to Parents' Weekend, preparations for an event that she believes reaches far beyond campus.

Without visiting the university by the Brazos River, Thornton said, the moms and dads of current students recognize something intrinsically wonderful about Texas A&M University. Echoing along telephone lines in hometowns just down the road and thousands of miles away, Aggie parents hear about things like Midnight Yell and how at the Memorial Student Center you don't dare walk on the grass. And even if they have yet to travel University Drive with a newly minted "Aggie Mom" sticker on the family car, many parents can list College Station streets.

Parents notice that life in Aggieland changes their children. Conversations about classes and Aggie core values leave the parents intrigued. And while "some may boast," Thornton points out that claims of greatness remain unconfirmed until witnessed first-hand.

"When parents come here, they finally get it," Thornton said. They understand what makes Texas A&M special. And they learn that part of what makes Texas A&M great is due to their own child. "At Texas A&M, we believe so much in student leadership," Thornton said. The evidence is everywhere, and parents are proud to see their child making a difference, Thornton said.

Parents' Weekend sounds like a simple event, Thornton said. The parents show up, share a meal or two, hang out with their children,

and then head home at the end of the weekend. But it's so much more. "Part of our goal for Parents' Weekend is for parents to feel respected, honored, educated about Texas A&M and proud to be an Aggie parent," she said.

Parents' Weekend can unite families. Aggie traditions can be family traditions, she said, and she's seen it. Neither Thornton's mother nor her father attended A&M, but she says her mom "will bleed maroon forever." Thornton knows because of the introduction her folks got at Parents' Weekend, they can all share a love of Texas A&M as a family.

"I love being that one other outlet for people to find out about Aggie Spirit," she said.

The Event Grows Wider, Deeper

The Parents' Weekend Committee is made up of 36 students, Thornton said. Those 36 Aggies orchestrate participation University-wide to display the heart of Aggieland for parents to experience.

Entertainment has grown along with the tradition. A schedule of events published April 22, 1925, in *The Daily Bulletin* has the two-day affair starting with mothers pinning flowers on cadets during chapel formation. Parents' Day 1925 included convocation, an open house, a Sacred Concert, Sunday evening church services, a



PARENTS OF THE YEAR

The 49 previous recipients of the honor that is awarded at the close of Parents' Weekend activities (the award was called "Aggie Mother of the Year" until 1974):

- 1959: Mrs. Dorothy Cleland
- 1960: Mrs. Fred Curry
- 1961: Mrs. Helma Huitt
- 1962: Mrs. Lottie Neumann
- 1963: Mrs. Leana Patridge
- 1964: Mrs. Edna M. Urbanic
- 1965: Mrs. William T. Ward
- 1966: Mrs. Gene Overton
- 1967: Mrs. Joseph Rehmet
- 1968: Mrs. John C. Fisher
- 1969: Mrs. Peter N. Reed
- 1970: Mrs. Elizabeth F. Neal
- 1971: Mrs. Ruth Hewitt
- 1972: Mrs. Ruth Stone
- 1973: Mrs. Majorie E. Ramage
- 1974: Dr. & Mrs. Kenneth Hamilton
- 1975: Mrs. Betty Singleton
- 1976: Mr. & Mrs. John & Mary Jo H Walker
- 1977: Mr. & Mrs. Durwood N. Clader
- 1978: Mr. & Mrs. Ralph Menefee
- 1979: Mr. & Mrs. Oswald Kubecka
- 1980: Mr. & Mrs. William H. Stroman
- 1981: Mr. & Mrs. Ernest Jaska
- 1982: Mr. & Mrs. Charles Weinbaum, Jr. '47
- 1983: Mr. & Mrs. William '57 & Gardner Osborn
- 1984: Mr. & Mrs. James Uptmore
- 1985: Mr. & Mrs. Joe '56 & Patty Hlavinka
- 1986: Mr. & Mrs. Bill '60 & Joan Heye
- 1987: Mr. & Mrs. Frank and Joanie Abbot, Sr.
- 1988: Mr. John Erickson '63 and Peggy Erickson
- 1989: Dr. & Mrs. Pat Hubert '51
- 1990: Mr. & Mrs. Richard & Pat Brunner
- 1991: Mr. & Mrs. Ted '53 & Barbara Coughran
- 1992: Mr. & Mrs. William '92 & Thelma '93 Isenhardt
- 1993: Mr. & Mrs. Rodney & Sue Hill
- 1994: Mr. & Mrs. John & Donna VanDuy
- 1995: Mr. & Mrs. Jim Bilhartz '78
- 1996: Mr. & Mrs. Gerald & Caroline Macmanus
- 1997: Mr. & Mrs. Robert & Margaret Palm
- 1998: Mr. & Mrs. Ken '59 & Gayle Cox
- 1999: Mr. & Mrs. Jon '68 & Johnette '70 Jarvis
- 2000: Mr. & Mrs. Bill '69 & Marilyn Youngkin
- 2001: Mr. & Mrs. Bob '72 & Marjie Walters
- 2002: Mr. & Mrs. Keith & Tryn Wilson
- 2003: Mr. & Mrs. Tim & Janice Kerlee
- 2004: Mr. & Mrs. Eugene & Elaine Baumann
- 2005: Mr. & Mrs. David '69 & Kathy Howard
- 2006: Mr. & Mrs. Bruce & Patsy Nichols
- 2007: Mr. & Mrs. Roger and Teresa Lane
- 2008: Mr. & Mrs. Kenneth '77 and Gerilyn '75 Kleckley



reception, a military review and a pep meeting at Guion Hall.

In 1926, the schedule widened a little more. Parents' Day added a concert—Miss Evelyn Finty, a popular young concert singer—and demonstrations by the electrical engineering club and a pageant by the Southwestern Bell Telephone Co. of Dallas.

Out of those demonstrations in 1926—frying eggs on ice and starting cars by radio—grew today's Parents' Weekend, with A&M Mothers' Clubs Boutiques, movies, art exhibits, concerts, and enough receptions and award ceremonies to fill most every meeting room on campus.

There's an MSC Variety Show and programs hosted by student organizations. Speakers are invited and about

5,000 people are fed at the Bevo Burn barbecue cookoff. There are Fightin' Texas Aggie sporting events and a special Parents' Weekend Midnight Yell. "We want parents to experience as much as they can," Thornton said.

And then there's the presentation of Texas A&M's Parents of the Year.

Every Aggie's Parent

The application process is strenuous: a six- to 10-page essay written by a current student about the parent or parent-like mentor, along with multiple letters of recommendation and pictures. When the committee sits down to decide, what catches everyone's attention, Thornton said, is passion. The committee wants a parent who is involved, who cares about

DID YOU KNOW?

- Parents' Weekend was previously called Mother's Day, Mother and Dad's Day, Open House Day and Parents' Day.
- Parents' Weekend was originally held on Mother's Day. After an academic calendar change in 1969 that moved graduation to early May, the program was set for April.
- In 1927, an article in the *Bryan Eagle* noted that mothers and fathers were housed on campus during their stay.
- Aggie mothers still pin flowers on cadets' uniforms, a mainstay since Parents' Weekend's earliest days.

A&M and loves Aggies. “Not every student gets to go home; some don’t have parents. The Parent of the Year award gives every student a stand-in parent figure,” she said.

Parents of the Year speak at Fish Camp sendoffs, and at Fish Camps themselves. They attend leadership events, Midnight Yells and various campus events. “It’s an extended family,” Thornton said of the Parents of the Year’s participation in students’ lives.

Originally called Aggie Mother of the Year, the award was changed in 1974 to include fathers. The archive lists honorees back to 1959. Though only given once a year, it’s a distinction that lasts far beyond the 365-day reign, said Peggy Erickson, one-half of the 1988 Parents of the Year. She shared the honor with John Erickson ’63.

Thought of as a Parents’ Weekend finale, the Parents of the Year are announced at a University-wide awards ceremony. The winners don’t know until their names are called, and it can be tricky to get the parents to attend without raising any suspicions.

“Our daughter Traci (Erickson-Thomas ’89) said she was going to be getting an award,” Erickson said. “We were so excited. We were just sitting there, waiting for her to be announced.”

Stunned when their name was called instead, someone had to whisper, “It’s you; stand up,” before she could make her way to the podium. “The most amazing thing about the award, personally, was that we were nominated by our children and voted on by students,” she said. “We took our role very seriously as Mom and Dad, and continue to this day.” When students they knew were having a bad day, one of them would call. Notes were mailed, parties were hosted, dinner was served. “It is the 12 most magical months of your life,” she said.

The Ericksons are Mom and Dad to two other daughters—Kelle Erickson-Shanks ’85 and Ashlee Erickson-Blakley ’95—but she said she often hears from many other Aggies. She’s remained involved with the Parents’ Weekend Committee—“Once an Aggie mom, always an Aggie mom,” Erickson said. Family is family.

Parents’ Weekend 2009

You and yours are affectionately invited to this year’s Parents’ Weekend, Thornton said. The Aggie family will reunite April 17-19 for Parents’ Weekend. Check the website <http://parentsweekend.tamu.edu> for a complete schedule.

As AMC of Texas President F.C. Bolton wrote to Aggie parents in 1940, “To our guests ... we wish you an enjoyable visit, one that may be often repeated.” 🍷

Stephanie Jeter ’06 is a reporter, writer and photographer for *Texas Aggie* magazine and AggieNetwork.com. To contact her, e-mail SJeter06@AggieNetwork.com.



MOTHER-DAD DAY

An excerpt from *Mother-Dad Day* by Mrs. George A. Mather, Sr. of San Antonio. The full poem appeared in the A&M Mothers Day program on May 8, 1927.

*On Mother's Day and Dad's Day
The doors will open be
At dear "old A. and M." this year
When home-folks come to see.*

*Their own dear boys, each Mother proud
And Dad with shining eyes,
Will greet their sons with glad acclaim
And believe 'tis paradise.*

*On Dad's Day and Mother's Day
And each day of the year,
May God's rich grace and blessing, too
Be with each boy so dear.*

