The e-mails came first, followed by phone calls and in-person visits. Days after Sue Redman ‘80 launched a survey hinting at a new former students’ network for women, the returns were good. Her casual notice created some real enthusiasm. A woman from Madrid asked to be on the steering committee, Redman said. A Houston business woman spoke of finally having an outlet to give back. Messages were marked by timestamp and location from women former students across the globe.

“I think the idea has been out there for a really long time,” Redman said—for sure, remembered the blonde-headed visionary, since her own graduation from Texas A&M University in 1980.

Her story is like many others, Redman said. She had been an active student who found fulfillment in making Texas A&M better. Her name made student rosters and leadership lists. But after the diploma was framed and she was offered her first job, she figured “that part of my life was over.”

In defense, Redman said she wasn’t happy about the dead end. And while she didn’t feel she had shunned Aggie involvement, eventually, she felt disconnected from the family.

“I had moved on,” she said. It wasn’t until she came back to campus 20 years later as Texas A&M University’s senior vice president and chief financial officer that she realized her hiatus was portion of a deeper problem: “Women former students as a whole don’t seem to be connecting back to the University as much as their male counterparts,” she said. Men return to give back, she said. They give and sit on boards. They encourage current students in the classroom and are named distinguished alumni. But after gathering the names of all women distinguished alumni, she lamented the female list could have >>
to see the possibilities. That needs to change, said Dr. Carol Jordan ’80, a
director at the University of Kentucky, but
also needs to be explained. The women’s
former student network isn’t a way to
highlight differences and separate the
Aggie family, she said. It’s about further-
ing the Aggie family using the strengths
of an untapped resource.

“We had something missing,” she said.
“We want to engage women by bring-
ing them back to talk to organizations,
involve them in mentoring current
students and other kinds of opportuni-
ties,” she said.

Yes, being involved in the new network
is a way to support the university, Jordan
said. But it is more tangible than that.

“When women connect to
current students, they con-
ect to the future, she said.

Women former students are not being
couraged to stay involved, or to give of
themselves to advance the university, Red-
man said.

“I hadn’t realized there was a glass ceil-
ing,” she said.

Sallie Sheppard ’65 was one of the first
women to graduate from Texas A&M Uni-
versity. When the university announced
in 1963 it had seats for women in the
classroom, she quickly checked out of her
previous school—The University of Texas—
and enrolled in the college of engineering,
computer science.

She graduated and returned to teach.

In a way, the timeline starts with her. It
has been 45 years since women were
admitted as degree-seeking students, yet
she said that after a student’s graduation,
“There has never been much organized
for women.”

“I think we sometimes fail to think of all
the possibilities there are for us, unless we
see women doing similar things,” she said.

And a women’s former student network
fills that hole, Redman said.

She said it laps back to her diagnosis.
Women former students aren’t coming
back, so current students aren’t able

When women connect to
current students, they con-
ect to the future, she said.

“Women want to be
involved not for social gain
or enjoyment, but because
they’re driven and motivat-
ed to give back,” she said.

As the network gained its
legs, Redman said, the tra-
ditional burdens that follow
big decisions never showed
up. Twenty-eight women
signed the organization’s
charter. Those present elected an interim
board and continue to grow in enthusi-
asm. “Enthusiasm not just for an idea,
but enthusiasm for doing something,”

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