In 1984, Clayton W. Williams, Jr. ’54—oilman, real estate developer and Distinguished Alumnus of Texas A&M University—agreed to fund half the cost of a new building to be the home of The Association of Former Students. “A&M has done more for me than I have done for A&M,” he said at the time. “It’s a gift of love and I had tears when I was approached on the project.”

More than a quarter of a century later, he says he still gets a little emotional about what he calls the “high honor” of having his name on the Clayton W. Williams, Jr. Alumni Center.

“The Bible says it is more blessed to give than receive. And this particular building is for the former students. That’s everybody, all of them, every single former student. I can think of no building I’d rather have my name on.”

Honoring his commitment to help fund the construction of the building was not without its challenges.

“Let me tell you a story,” he says. “Clajon Gas Co. was one of my greatest accomplishments. And when the market was up, I had made a commitment to give The Association money for a former students building. But by 1987, when the time came to write the last check, the market had collapsed. I didn’t have the money and no one would loan it to me. Nobody. So I sold Clajon. I sold it for money to uphold my commitment for a former students building at A&M. I wish I still had that company. I was proud of it. Still am. But I had to make a choice, and my commitment, my integrity, was more important than owning that gas company. It gave me great personal pride but also great professional pain to finish paying for my part of the building.”

Maintaining his integrity throughout his 53 years in business is a point of pride for Williams. He puts great importance on integrity and honesty, both in himself and in the people he does business with. “Once you lose your integrity, you cannot get it back,” he says. “If you want to make the most money in business, be honest. People of integrity are the ones you are going to deal with. Who wants to deal with crooks? I’ll only deal with them once, I tell you that.”

Williams credits A&M for reinforcing the traditional values he learned at home, and he says the school also taught him practical skills that have served him well over the years: “Discipline and studying, first of all. I was a wild cowboy and I needed reining in. I got that from the Corps. I didn’t like the Corps at first, but it has stood me well in life. I learned how to organize and to study, and I use that to this day—the ability to organize, to think, to put things in perspective. The total environment in the Corps and at A&M fit my life, fit who I was at that time, and it helped me grow and take the next steps.”

The values and skills he learned at A&M led directly to another of his proudest professional accomplishments: longevity.
“Fifty-three years in the business,” he points out. “A lot of oil companies have come and gone in that time. A lot of people went broke during that period. And it was close for us sometimes. But I’m a producer. Alfalfa, cattle, whatever it is, I’m always producing something.”

He would like to see more incoming A&M freshmen join the Corps of Cadets, to get the same benefits he did. “The Corps of Cadets is clearly the heartbeat of this campus,” he says. “I’m proud we have them. Without the Corps, we’d be just like every other school.”

He also thinks some incoming students would benefit from a piece of advice they aren’t likely to hear from a traditional guidance counselor: “Many young people go to college just because that’s what you do after high school, but some of them would benefit from working a year first. Tom Darling [one of Williams’ Class of 1954 Classmates] told me, ‘We thought you were really dumb, asking all those questions.’ But I was hungry, ready for information. I had already worked through high school, so I wanted to know, ‘How can I apply this?’ Having some practical experience before college gives you a foundation on which to build, and it would help a lot of them apply themselves and work more. Like the returning World War II veterans who were at A&M when I was. They had some fun, but they were here to work and learn, so they got more out of it than most.”

Williams also has a little advice for graduating seniors. “Try to do what you like, and try to live where you want to live,” he says. He’s speaking from experience: “At one point I was loaded up and prepared to move to Mineral Wells to go sell insurance there. But I didn’t really want to. I really wanted to stay in Fort Stockton, so that’s what I did.

“You should try to do what you enjoy doing, and try to live where you are going to be happiest. Wanting to stay at home was good for me in the long run. So investigate, evaluate and look for a place you want to live and a job where you will feel fulfilled with what you are doing. A lot of people don’t do that.”

Williams’ connections to Texas A&M run deep. His father was World War I veteran Clayton Wheat Williams ’15. Clayton’s wife, Modesta, attended TCU but “she’s an Aggie by osmosis,” Clayton says. “She bleeds maroon.” His oldest daughter graduated from UT because girls could not yet be admitted to A&M, but all four of his other children attended A&M. He also has two sons-in-law and a granddaughter who are A&M graduates, plus two grandsons who currently attend A&M. “There is a pride in going to A&M that passes on to our offspring,” he says. “We’re contagious.”

Williams is never shy about showing his love for his alma mater. He flies A&M flags from his buildings and is a huge fan of Aggie athletics and the traditions associated with them: “I love yelling practice, football games, the band, the cavalry.”

But he’s also a big fan of what he calls the simple traditions, “Like saying ‘howdy’ on campus, and not walking on grass. And Muster, which is probably the best tradition of all.”

And he’s especially proud that Texas A&M continues to emphasize its core values. “A&M’s values are not nationwide,” he notes. “Texas A&M is a conservative school, and it’s the most patriotic university in this country. All that comes from the Corps of Cadets and from the alumni, and I’m proud of that.

“I’m proud to be an Aggie. I enjoy being an Aggie. The Spirit of A&M is part of who I am. I’ve been lucky, been blessed, to live in a fine country and attend this fine school.”

Clayton W. Williams, Jr. Alumni Center
The Association of Former Students

Clayton Williams, Jr. on a tour of the Williams Alumni Center during renovation work in September 2008.

Clayton Williams, Jr. with Reta Haynes, widow of the late Harold J. “Bill” Haynes ’46, at the rededication of the Williams Alumni Center on Oct. 30. Williams was the lead donor when the Alumni Center was constructed; the Hayneses were lead donors to the enhancement project.

PHOTO BY SCOT WALKER ’90

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