

A Beacon of Aggieland

Generations Maintain 'Aggie Barn' On Highway 6

BY GRACE PARKER '20

Off Highway 6 between Waco and College Station, painted maroon and white, sits the Aggie Barn that many A&M students and former students have come to know and love. The Aggie Barn has a story of its own and represents the appreciation and pride a family has for Texas A&M.

The building began as the First State Bank of Reagan in the early 1900s before being purchased by Thagard Kirkpatrick, Class of 1924, in the 1940s, and moved from downtown Reagan to Kirkpatrick's land. Painted red and with "wings" added onto the building, one side held a livestock corral and the other stored equipment.

In 1980, after a storm damaged the barn, Kirkpatrick repainted with a fresh coat of maroon to honor his alma mater and share his Aggie Spirit with the community. He also emblazoned it with "Gig 'em Aggies."

A few years after Kirkpatrick died in 1999, his young friend and previous paper boy, Joe Swinnea '85, bought the barn. Swinnea had helped Kirkpatrick hang the first "Ol' Sarge" on the barn in the early 1980s (Aggie cadets in the 1990s helped add Class years and "Whoop").

Swinnea said of Kirkpatrick, "He helped everybody and was a pillar of the community. He was an Aggie through and through."

When highway realignment threatened the barn's location in 2006, Swinnea bought the structure and moved it three-tenths of a mile south to his family's land in order to save it.

"The barn is how I describe where I'm from — 'Reagan, the little town with the Aggie Barn.' It was my identity. My wife, Tressa, recognized what it meant to me and pushed me to buy it."

Now, Joe, Tressa and their children, Jake Swinnea '11, Samantha Swinnea '13 and Taylor Hood '15, maintain the barn and repaint the Class years on the side to welcome the incoming freshman Class in the fall and congratulate the graduating seniors in the spring.

"We put the barn back together. But every time we have come down here, we have a good time. It has become a meeting place for all of us," Joe said. His son Jake echoed him, saying, "We grew up coming here. To me, the barn has meant a lot of work, but also time



PHOTO COURTESY OF JOE SWINNEA '85



In 2006, the Swinneas moved the barn's core — an early 1900s bank building that once stood in downtown Reagan — to their own land to save it from highway realignment.

with family and friends.”

Along the way, the Corps of Cadets, the Dallas A&M Club and others have offered a helping hand in painting. However, all pale in comparison to the hours the Swinnea family has devoted to taking care of the Aggie Barn, making it a symbol of the camaraderie

and commitment within the Aggie Network.

For the Swinneas, it has never been about money. In fact, the family has never financially profited off the barn. For decades, both current and former students have gone to hold up a gig 'em and capture a photo (though the Swinneas ask that visitors stay on the highway right-of-way and not enter private property without prior permission; see aggiebarn.com for details).

Thus, the Aggie Barn has become an emblem of the Aggie Spirit, reminding Aggies and non-Aggies alike of the unbreakable Aggie bond.

“It is amazing what this place means to people. For our family, it is our pride and way to give back to Aggies everywhere,” Joe said.

Joe attended Texas A&M because of encouragement from Kirkpatrick and Gen. Travis Hetherington '32, who offered him a scholarship. “His generosity is one thing that meant a lot,” Swinnea said. “He was giving back. Mr. Thagard was giving back. This is how we give back.”

It began with one Aggie's gratitude and commitment to Texas A&M, then was carried on to another's. The Aggie Barn stands proud because of the Swinnea family's dedication to making it a place of community and pride for Aggies.

“I am proud to be an Aggie, mostly for the opportunities it has given me in my life and for the people,” Joe said.

The Aggie Barn has become a part of the Swinnea family, and even more so, the Aggie family.



Joe Swinnea '85, center, is engaging his family's next generation in keeping the Aggie Barn alive. At left are daughter Samantha Swinnea '13 and her fiancé, Mac Evans; at right are Jake Swinnea '11 and his fiancée, Mikeala Van Horn.



In an Aug. 24, 1984, clipping that Joe Swinnea '85 saved from the *Bryan-College Station Eagle*, original owner Thagard “T.K.” Kirkpatrick, Class of 1924, stands in front of his Aggie landmark.