

A monument to the 'Aggie Spirit'



Eagle photo by Laura McKenzie

Texas A&M Regent Bill Mahomes of the class of 1969 speaks during the dedication of Spirit Plaza on campus Tuesday. The area commemorates Muster and Silver Taps and highlights the Aggie Code of Honor and Texas A&M's Core Values. Spirit Plaza was a gift from the class of 1969, which is celebrating its 50th anniversary.

Ceremony at A&M dedicates plaza and sculptures explaining traditions

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Scores of members of the Texas A&M class of 1969 gathered just south of Texas A&M's Academic Building on Tuesday morning to dedicate the new Spirit Plaza, the class' gift to the university campus and the student body.

They were joined by hundreds of current and former students for a ceremony that included the Ross Volunteers and other members of the A&M Corps of Cadets. The Fightin' Texas Aggie Band

performed a rendition of *The Spirit of Aggieland*, led by a multigenerational cast of current and former yell leaders.

The plaza, designed by longtime architecture professor Rodney Hill and a host of others, features art, sculptures and plaques symbolizing or explaining the Texas A&M traditions of Muster and Silver Taps, which honor students and former students who have died. It also includes a large compass sans the letter 'E,' representing

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the reality that those who died will not see another sunrise.

Bill Howell, part of the Texas A&M class of 1969 planning team, served as the event's emcee.

"Our class committee began designing a plaza that brought together the existing sculptures of Silver Taps, Muster and adding a descriptive marker incorporating this poignant letter which captured the essence of Silver Taps and the Aggie Spirit," Howell said, and he also credited the plethora of other leaders who assisted in bringing the plaza to fruition.

Class of '69 member Bill Maddox read a letter that Donald Coward wrote as a freshman in October 1968 to his parents about being moved by Silver Taps.

"I'm not crying because of all the hell I'm going through — but rather because I've experienced tonight what A&M is all about," Coward wrote in 1968.

Less than a month after sending the letter, Coward and classmates George Reynolds and John Groves died in an auto accident near Denton.

In his remarks, Howell noted the class of 1969's place in A&M history, as its members arrived on campus two years after the school's first three black male students enrolled. By the time they graduated, women were admitted in unrestricted numbers, according to previous reporting from *The Eagle*.

"Change was coming to Aggieland," Howell said, "but there was something here that continues to be deeply embedded in all Aggies — even as Texas A&M grew in size, diversity and stature. That 'something' is the Aggie Spirit."

Texas A&M System Regent Bill Mahomes, who was the first black man to graduate from the Corps of Cadets in 1969, acknowledged his "significant role" in both A&M's past and present.

"It's a day that means a lot for me — from where I started to be in the class to playing a significant role in this class," Mahomes said. "It didn't start that way. It was difficult, any time you're the first. But we truly bonded, and to see it play out the way it did is really important to me."

He expressed pride in the way Texas A&M's population has grown, diversified and changed, and he said he hoped for more progress going forward. He also reflected on the significance of Muster and Silver Taps.

"I've always thought Silver Taps and Muster were the most important things we do at A&M, because I don't know of any other school that recognizes students' contributions in this

way," he said.

According to a university release, the project cost \$560,000, with members of the A&M classes of 1972, 1991, 1995 and 2019 also engaged in the planning.

Among the '19 attendees was outgoing student body president Amy Sharp. "It's so exciting for the class of 2019 to be stewards of this plaza and take care of it until the class of 2069 takes over," she said in her remarks.

Following the event, local artist Benjamin Knox

said that he, Hill and others on the planning team sought to incorporate what was already on site, and that an architecture class at A&M also contributed heavily.

"This is my 50th year at A&M. I started teaching at Texas A&M in 1969," Hill said after the ceremony. "This is my contribution. This gives people an opportunity to gather around and read about A&M traditions and history."

As plans for the plaza unfolded in recent years, a

group of current and former students met at artist Benjamin Knox's gallery for planning sessions.

"The goal and hope is that this becomes a place that is a learning tool for incoming students to learn about traditions at A&M," Knox said.

OBITUARIES

Robert Louis Risinger

April 16, 1932 - April 19, 2019



Robert Louis Risinger, 87, of College Station, a devoted husband, cherished father, beloved uncle, passed peacefully into the afterlife.

Services

BORNE-ASHLEY, Norma
- 11AM at St. Joseph's Catholic Church.

Deaths

Doris Henderson

Doris Henderson, 93, of Llano, passed away Monday, April 22, 2019. Services are in the care of Callaway-Jones Funeral and Cremation Centers of Bryan College Station.