

LAREDO MORNING TIMES

# TAMIU'S 50<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY

Laredo  
State  
University

Laredo  
Junior  
College



PART 1 OF 12: THE FIRST DECADE



## TAMIU 50th Anniversary

# TAMIU's 50th anniversary The First Decade

*Editor's note: This is Part 1 of 12 in Laredo Morning Times' special look at Texas A&M International as it celebrates its upcoming 50th anniversary in 2020. LMT will be counting down to that momentous occasion with a monthly look at the university's past, present and future.*

By Lisa Ehrer  
Laredo Morning Times

A band of professors and education advocates from all over came to Laredo in the late 60s to push for higher education, not just for the Gateway City but for the entire South Texas region.

Higher institutions such as Texas A&M and the flagship University of Texas at Austin educated mainly the white middle and upper classes in Central and North Texas. Yet in South Texas, and especially along the border, Hispanic lower class families yearned for better education.

Nearly 20% of the state's Hispanic population were in the south, which was home to the state's poorest cities such as Brownsville, Laredo and Hebbronville. Workers in these areas took up namely agricultural, construction and other blue collar work.

In Laredo, about 17% of the pop-

ulation obtained a bachelor's degree or higher, and so TAMIU's pioneers wanted to bring even the poorest out of poverty through higher education.

On Aug. 28, 1970, Texas A&I at Laredo opened its doors to students searching for more paths in life. After enduring name changes, historic events and political strife, the center educated more than a thousand students by 1980 and opened itself to new ways to expand and become the renowned university it is today.

### Humble Beginnings

Laredo's current State Sen. Judith Zaffirini, an influential democrat, was a part-time media aide for the newly-elected senator and rancher Wayne Connally in 1967. At the time, Zaffirini pursued her undergraduate degree at the University of Texas at Austin.

Her husband, Carlos Zaffirini Sr., was her boyfriend back then and worked for Connally as well as his chief of staff. Zaffirini said it was her mission to bring a higher education institution to Laredo, and so she and Carlos helped spread the word in the State Legislature for Conally.

"We were in Austin and had lots of friends in the Legislature," Zaffirini said. "We made many friends in the Legislature, so I lobbied for a university."

Then in the summer of 1968, brothers Joaquin and Leonides

Cigarroa, both prominent physicians in Laredo, urged the Texas Coordinating Board for Higher Education to add upper-level classes to Laredo Junior College.

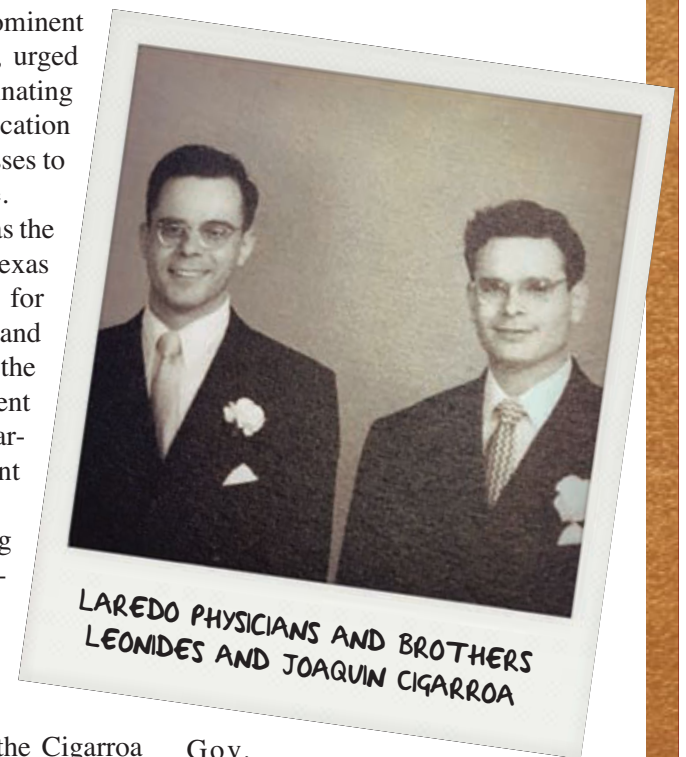
Joaquin Cigarroa was the first Hispanic on the Texas Coordinating Board for Higher Education, and Leo Cigarroa sat on the Laredo Independent School District and Laredo Junior College joint board.

The coordinating board denied their request and said Laredo could not enroll enough students. Determined to bet-

ter their community, the Cigarroa brothers returned to Austin and asked for an upper-level institution on their own.

"Joaquin had a lot of influence and people listened to him," said historian and TAMIU History Regents Professor Jerry Thompson. "So they got these really massive petitions of hundreds of people wanting this upper-level school in Laredo."

Along with influential Laredo Mayor Pepe Martin, the Cigarroa brothers, Conally and Sen. Honoré Ligarde urged the Texas Legislature to allow some sort of upper-level institution. The Legislature, under



LAREDO PHYSICIANS AND BROTHERS  
LEONIDES AND JOAQUIN CIGARROA

Gov.

John Connally —

the brother of Wayne — decided to help. Wayne Connally and Ligarde passed the bill, signed on John Connally's desk, establishing a center that was a branch of Texas A&I at Kingsville.

"The Coordinating Board made a special arrangement, and they named Laredo a satellite center," Zaffirini said.

### Kicking off the first 10 years

After that, the first decade for Texas A&I at Laredo was not an easy one.

The center opened in 1970 and only offered upper-level courses

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while serving a few hundred students. It also did not have its own campus since it used Laredo Junior College's Fort McIntosh campus — a location it would share until the 90s.

Thompson was recruited in 1969 right before the center opened, and he still remembers the campus's creaky, wooden buildings that were cramped featuring large annoying fans.

"We had classes in those old barracks buildings," Thompson said. "There was no air conditioning, and the classes would start in the summer at six in the morning. There were these giant fans that made all this noise and caused you to feel like you were being blasted into the atmosphere."

In the very beginning, recruitment of students and faculty was spurred by the immense help of Billy Cowart, the center's first president.

"Dr. Billy Cowart was hired, and we only had a desk at the library at Laredo Junior College," Zaffirini said.

Cowart arrived in Laredo amid the August heat of 1969. A graduate of several Texas colleges, such as UT Austin and Texas A&I, he was thoroughly committed to education.

"At heart, he was just an old cowboy who would invite you to his house on

Saturday, and people would sit around drinking beer and he would play the guitar," Thompson said.

Cowart and work-study student Mary Vela then took on the huge task of recruiting students and staff.

One recruited professor was history expert Stanley C. Green, who received his Ph.D. from Texas Christian University. He taught history at Appalachian State University and would be TAMIU's second history professor. Green retired in 2013 and said he remembers how quaint the center was.

"It was pretty small, kind of a mom-and-pop operation almost," Green said. "We would have faculty meetings, and the faculty meetings were in the office (waiting room) of the librarian, so the whole faculty fit. None of us had ever been in that situation, so we were kind of feeling our way through."

Mary Trevino worked for Cowart in 1969 before the center even opened. Now TAMIU's Director of Migrant Programs, she remembers when the baby-faced faculty showed up.

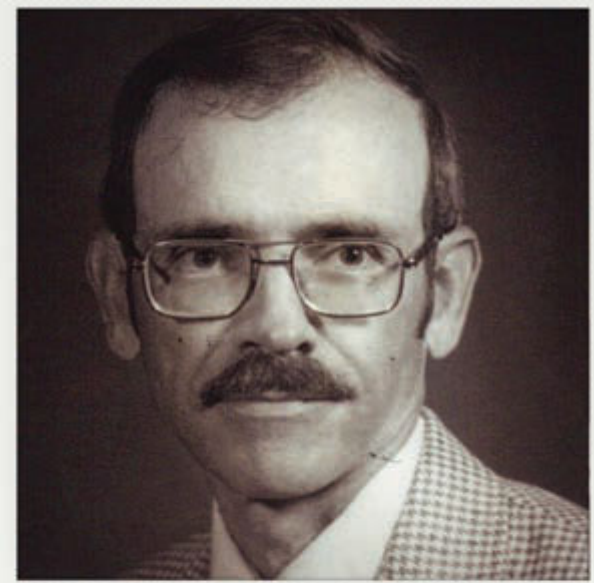
"My professors were very inspiring, although at the time they were very young," Trevino said. "I remember Dr. Ball coming into the interview and I was like, 'He's going to be our professor?'"

Although the unique set of faculty were young and sometimes unorthodox, Trevino said they were the brightest and most creative leaders for the new center.

"Dr. Cowart had the idea that although we were just a center, we weren't going to use that as an excuse," she said. "We were going to bring in top-notch faculty. He brought in the very best."

In 1971, enrollment nearly doubled to 459 students. The center graduated its first class in 1972, and by then it had about 637 students.

Instead of students receiving their degrees at



**PRESIDENT**  
**DR. BILLY F. COWART**



## Upcoming Schedule

Presidential Lecture Series presents Dr. Keith Pannell	Sept. 18
MPA 20th Anniversary Celebration	Sept. 18
Premiere Screening - Alfonso Gomez-Rejón	Sept. 25
Milestone Student Celebration	Sept. 25
Music on the Menu	Sept. 25
University Convocation	Sept. 26
Master Class	Oct. 1-2
FAB Collection Tribute	Oct. 2
Penny Wars	Oct. 7-11
It's On Us Chain Reveal	Oct. 10
TAMIU President's Dinner	Oct. 17
TAMIU Alumni Artist Lecture and Panel	Oct. 24
Make a Difference Day	Nov 2
Presidential Lecture Series presents Anya Kamenetz	Nov. 6
A&M System Pathway's Conference	Nov. 7-8
TAMIU Giving Day	Nov. 19



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Texas A&I Kingsville, they walked the stage at their alma mater in the Maravillo Physical Education Building on the LJC campus.

Degrees were awarded in three areas: elementary education, secondary education and business administration. The university went on to create more degrees that decade as it brought on bilingual education, criminal justice and international trade.

On the cusp of a new decade, the center started during a time of frenzied politics and activism. With the Vietnam War, the civil rights movement and other

conflicts, students protested the establishment in various ways.

Green said he remembers when community college students from Laredo Junior College, now called Laredo College, and the center held sit-ins for several issues.

"It was a hot, supercharged atmosphere politically," Green said. "I remember one time they called a strike and they walked out of the classes and were sitting around smoking and drinking sodas

around the campus. Now you just wouldn't have that now. It wasn't allowed then, but they did it."

Specific to Laredo, there was also the Chicano movement which started in the 1960s and sought to empower Mexican Americans. Renowned photographer and civil rights activist Manuel "Chaca" Ramirez had hung a poster of Argentine Marxist revolutionary Che Guevara in a student center of an LJC building.

"Leo Cigarroa came speeding down in his Cadillac, walked into the student center in front of the students, took the poster off the wall, ripped it up into pieces and took it over and threw it down on the vice president's desk," Thompson said.

During a time of fervor and anti-establishment sentiment, it was fitting to have several bold faculty members take on the center to provide education in South Texas when the state could not.

### First Bilingual Education Program

The first bilingual education program in the U.S. began in 1963 at Miami-Dade School District in Florida. There were still very few programs after that around the country, and in Texas there were initially no laws mandating bilingual instruction until 1973.

Yet a successful program in Laredo started in 1971 before this law to serve the large population of Spanish-speaking families.

Education professors Julio Madrigal and Ramon Alaniz saw how desperately Laredo needed to teach students English. With lots of grant writing and discussions, Alaniz and Madrigal helped secure funding for a program to travel the region to teach teachers bilingual education through the center's master's program.

Alaniz and a few faculty taught courses in Crystal City, a hotbed of political action where frustrated high school students spurred the Latino civil rights movement. In 1969, they walked out protesting racist school policies against Hispanics.

"Crystal City at the time was going through a commotion, so we worked with them very closely," Alaniz said.

In 1973, Texas passed the Bilingual Education and Training Act, mandating that all elementary schools provide bilingual instruction if they have 20 or more children of limited English ability in a grade level. With this, Alaniz and Madrigal tweaked the master's degree to create a bachelor's degree in bilingual education.

With lots of grant writing and discussions, the center secured funding to travel around the region starting in 1974 for this new certificate.

"We went about halfway in Crystal City, and we moved to Zapata and offered the same services," Alaniz said. "People needed coursework, and it was quite a distance and people couldn't travel, so Dr. Cowart allowed us to go there and teach courses on site."

Alaniz said several professors taught LISD, UISD and Zapata



SECOND WAVE OF STAFF  
RECRUITED IN 1972



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County teachers, as well as those in rural cities such as Cotulla and Crystal City.

“We developed the attitude of serving people wherever it’s needed,” Alaniz said. “We certified hundreds of teachers, and thousands, probably, over the years.”

### Budget Cuts

During its development, the center faced harsh budget cuts and political strife with the Texas Legislature. The center was successful during these years, but funding did not match its growth and increasing needs as more students enrolled.

In 1975, the Texas Legislature threatened to cut the center’s budget as a drop in oil revenues affected universities and colleges statewide. By then, Texas A&I at Laredo had about 852 students enrolled.

During the 64th state legislative session, the Legislative Budget Board proposed slashing Texas A&I at Laredo’s budget from \$1,008,859 to \$828,624.

The Legislature at the time was juggling two major bills: school finance and utility regulations. The school finance bill would have included property tax reform, according to a Texas Monthly article published June 30, 1975.

Yet the school finance bill did not pass, and Texas A&I System shelled out its own budget to save the school.

A pivotal political force in Laredo was the Independent Club, or Old Party (Partido Viejo). It consisted of elected officials, school board members and various other political bigwigs in the community.

“We had the good fortune, or ill fortune, depending on how you see



**DR. BILLY COWART NAMED “MAN OF THE YEAR” BY THE LAREDO TIMES IN 1980**



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it, of a really strong political organization here,” Green said. “Probably as a result of the Independent Club, it was probably instrumental in getting us in the first place and a factor of keeping it open.”

There was also chatter from the State Legislature of new Higher Education Commissioner Kenneth Ashworth wanting to revoke the center’s degree-granting privileges and turn them back over to Texas A&I in Kingsville. Yet activists and faculty went to Austin in protest, and the proposal died.

### Master’s in International Trade

The center created its Institute for International Trade in 1974, an interdisciplinary hub which facilitated various conferences on business. The institute was later incorporated into the A.R. Sanchez, Jr. School of Business.

Donald Barreson served as Academic Dean of the American Graduate School of International Management in Arizona but came to Laredo to lead the institute.

These conferences covered topics such as plant operations and labor, foreign trade zones, importation and processing. Oilman and philanthropist Radcliffe Killam donated in lieu of the State Legislature, which vetoed appropriating \$200,000 for 1976-77.

Texas A&I at Laredo also earned accreditation to award a Master of Business Administration in International Trade. Manuel Pacheco, who became the school’s president after Cowart in 1984, said the

master’s program benefited the area and all those interested in foreign trade.

“It was a small but extremely important beginning for something that didn’t exist since Laredo was one of the largest inland ports,” Pacheco said. “It made sense to have an opportunity to analyze what the port meant to Laredo and the United States.”

The new master’s degree attracted students worldwide, including from Canada, Ethiopia, Ghana, Iran, Malaysia, Mexico, Sierra Leone, Southeast Asia and Venezuela, and it helped build up the center’s diversity to where it is today.

Pacheco said he traveled all over, visiting places such as China, Hong Kong and Taipei to recruit students. These countries’ governments often created scholarships and programs so students could come to the center and study business.

“The original thought was that its  
was go-

ing to be a way to educate Americans and Mexicans to focus on trade between primarily Mexico and the U.S.,” Pacheco said. “Then the principles involved in border trade were transferable to other forms of trade, so we decided that we would start recruiting from not only Mexico and the U.S. but any part of the world.”

In 1979, new gov. Bill Clements slashed millions from the state’s budget, posing another threat to funding. Yet the institute received \$799,170 for 1980-81.

### First Building

The center’s enrollment grew to more than 800 students in 1976. This prompted University System

of South Texas Board at Kingsville to appropriate \$2,000 for a building site feasibility study.

Cowart said it needed 18,000 square feet to function, and so Laredo Junior College decided to help out. The two schools then negotiated, and on April 14, 1976, the junior college approved giving several acres of land if Cowart could secure \$2 million to make it happen.

Cowart and other employees frequented the Commissioner of Higher Education to ask for funds. After several rejections, they finally secured funding for their first building, University Hall.

On May 20, 1976, Ricardo Guti-



REP. BILL HALL, SEN. JOHN TRAEGER, DR. BILLY COWART AND RICARDO GUTIERREZ BREAK GROUND FOR UNIVERSITY HALL IN 1976



GOV. DOLPH BRISCOE APPROVES NAME CHANGE TO LAREDO STATE UNIVERSITY IN 1977



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erez, chairman of the University System of South Texas building committee, was joined by Sen. John Traeger, Rep. Bill Hall and Cowart as they broke ground.

University Hall was ready by the fall of 1979 and cost about \$1,398,357. Although on LJC's land, it marked the school's first physical building.

After the first building from LJC, the university functioned but needed

even more space. There were also discussions it would merge with Laredo Junior College, but that plan fell through.

In 1977, the 65th Legislature approved changing the center's name to Laredo State University and establishing the University System of South Texas under Gov. Dolph Briscoe.

By 1980, LSU graduated 1,897 graduates and offered bachelor's

degrees in criminal justice, elementary and secondary education, and bilingual education. There were also master's degrees in general business, international trade and other education fields.

Zaffirini would go on to become senator and head the charge in defending LSU from budget cuts and closure by the Texas Legislature. She would eventually write and pass a bill establishing itself as a four-

year university with its own campus. She said that in hindsight, working for Conally back in 1967 and many others over the following decades helped pave the way toward creating Texas A&M International University.

"Little did I know that as I worked as a part-time staff member I would have that bill 26 years later," Zaffirini said.



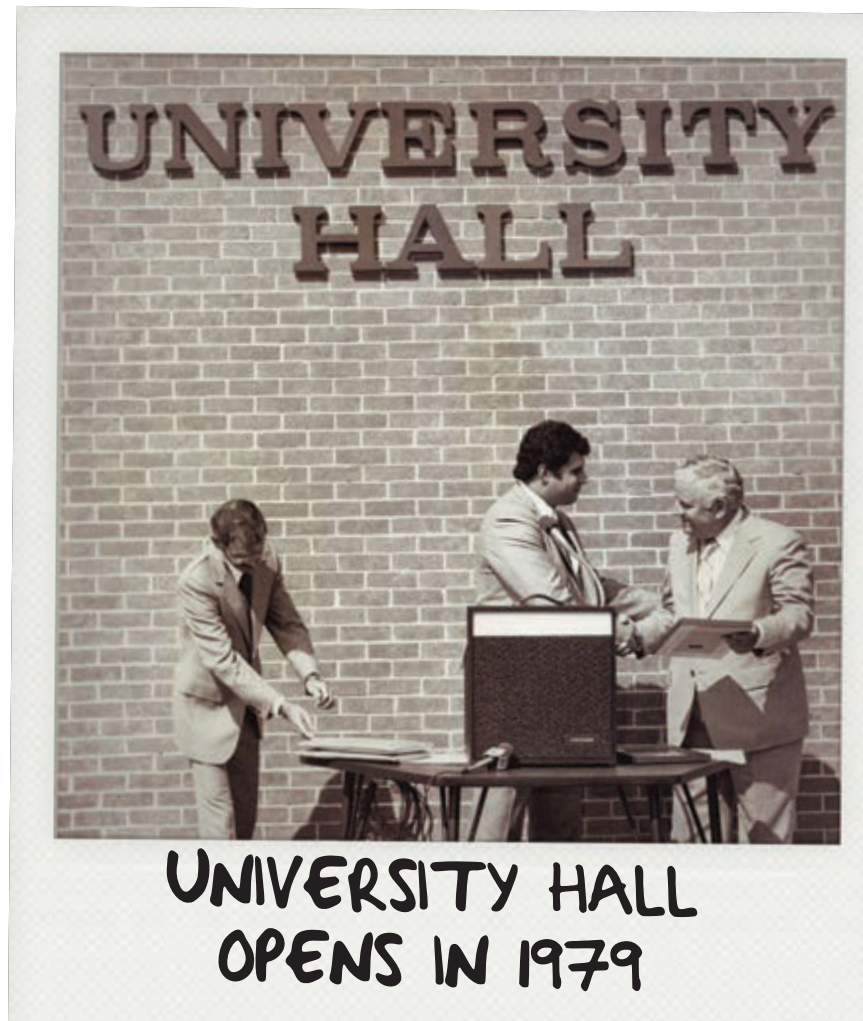
TEXAS A&M INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY  
*A World of Difference*



**SHARE YOUR STORY!**

Your story is our story – and now it's time to share that story! We're inviting individuals who have been impacted by the University to share a memory or moment that's forever changed their lives.

-  **VISIT** us at <http://50.tamiau.edu/yourstory>.
-  **UPLOAD** your story, photos, and videos.
-  **SUBMIT** your story.
-  **FOLLOW TXAMIU** on our official social media channels.



For more information on TAMIU's 50th anniversary, follow TXAMIU on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn and Spotify, use the hashtag #TAMIU50 and visit the school's website at [50.tamiau.edu](http://50.tamiau.edu).



**TAMIU.EDU/50**

**From a study carrel on a shared campus to three name changes and an inspiring home on 300-acres in northeast Laredo, TAMIU has quite a story.**

**And with over 23,000+ graduates worldwide, odds are you or a member of your family have shared in our story. Our 50th Anniversary theme, “A World of Difference,” affirms how we’ve impacted our community, region, and world... and will do so for generations to come.**

**Join our Celebration and share in our story.**

*It's a story 50 years in the making.  
It's the story of a lifetime.*

#### **UPCOMING EVENTS**

**Sept. 25 •** Premiere Benefit Screening of Alfonso Gómez-Rejón's “The Current War.”  
Tickets: \$100. Call 956.326.4483  
Online purchase at: <http://50.tamiau.edu/CurrentWarTickets>

**Oct. 17 •** President's Dinner & Awards.  
Tickets: \$150. Call 956.326.4483  
Online purchase at: <https://50.tamiau.edu/sponsorships>

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