

LAREDO MORNING TIMES

TAMIU'S 50TH ANNIVERSARY



PART 3 OF 12: THE THIRD DECADE

TAMIU 50th Anniversary

TAMIU's 50th anniversary The Third Decade

Editor's note: This is Part 3 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 Dreher
Laredo Morning Times

After 20 years sharing a campus with Laredo Junior College, TAMU acquired its own property to bring all its international and local students together in one physical space.

The university secured 200 acres of land — which eventually was expanded to 300 acres — in a peaceful area with frolicking deer at the edge of northeast Laredo. The campus could have been adorned in burnt orange, but the university picked the Texas A&M System over the University of Texas. This would not be the only time the UT System was considered, much to the behest of many Laredoans.

With its third decade rolling in, sweeping changes were made and new goals were set. It also underwent a name change, from Laredo State University to Texas A&M International University, signifying its international pull and well-rounded programs.

With the help of state politicians and local Laredoans, the university secured its long-awaited four-year status. TAMIU stands today as an affordable option for students in an area which severely lacked higher education as a ladder of upward mobility.

New name, new grounds

After dodging many budget cuts by the Texas Legislature in the 80s and a near closure, the college came out on the other side stronger and vastly supported, especially in South Texas.

In 1991, State Sen. Judith Zaffirini of Laredo wrote Senate Bills 732 and 1232 — the latter with the help of the young, State Rep. Henry Cuellar.

Senate Bill 732 allowed the Texas A&M Regents to change its institutions' names.

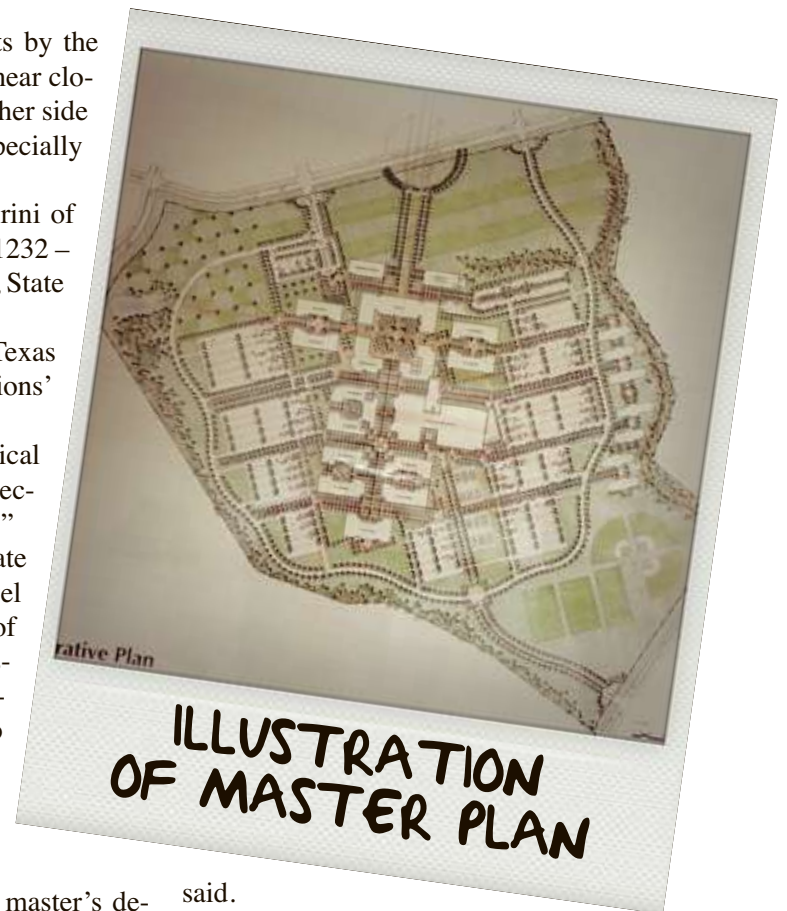
Senate Bill 1232 made a “technical correction” to a “defective and unnecessarily limiting and confusing law.”

“My bill specified that Laredo State University could teach upper-level and master-level courses, instead of merely accepting only students classified at one of those levels,” Zaffirini said in an emailed statement to LMT. “As a result, for example, a student classified as a sophomore at Laredo Junior College or someone with a postgraduate degree could register for junior, senior or master's degree courses at LSU.”

State Rep. Henry Cuellar's House version of appropriations allowed the university to receive its first revenue bonds of \$30 million, Cuellar told LMT.

Zaffirini also authored her own amendment authorizing providing \$30 million in tuition revenue bonds to the university for constructing buildings and renovations, but it did not pass.

“Though my Senate colleagues supported my proposal, the bill ultimately did not pass because of irreconcilable differences between the Senate and the House of Representatives,” Zaffirini



said.

In 1993, Senate Bill 6, authored by Zaffirini and Cuellar, renamed LSU to Texas A&M International University and made it a four-year university rather than just an “upper-level” institution. It would be effective September 1995, and it authorized TAMIU to award doctoral degrees with Mexico and Canada.

Zaffirini said that since she was elected in 1986, she needed support from the outside to help build up a four-year university in Laredo.

She and Cuellar passed multiple bills and resolutions for TAMIU, along with the strong

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support from then-Lt. Gov. Bob Bullock, who “without question” had “made a difference” by helping them authorize more than \$140 million in tuition revenue bonds for construction from 1993 to 2003.

“My Senate Bill 6 was the culmination of decades of dedication and persistence by all of the trailblazers who dreamed of a four-year university in Laredo,” Zaffirini said.

In 1993, Cuellar also secured money as the appropriations committee member for the university with \$36 million through tuition revenue bonds.

There were several ideas floated for the new name, including a humorous acronym. Zaffirini said during the Society of Martha Washington Colonial Pageant and Ball, there were some disagreements over the name.

“I said, ‘I don’t want it to be Texas A&M Laredo, so it would be like ‘TAMALE,’” said Zaffirini with a laugh. “The System Chair of the Board of Regents would not agree to using the name. Lt. Gov. Bob Bullock asked me what I wanted to do, since I’m the one who passed the bill giving the board the authority to name the institution.”

After some deliberation, Bullock announced the name as Texas A&M International University on the dance floor.

For all their accomplishments in getting the university off the ground, Cuellar, Zaffirini, Dr. Joaquin Cigarroa, Radcliffe Killam and Dr. Leo Sayavedra were named Laredoans of the Year by Laredo Morning Times.

Zaffirini’s bill stated the new university with its campus would open in 1995, yet some, including Sayavedra, TAMIU’s President, wanted it to open in 1997.

“He said, ‘It would be a new campus, new buildings. We’d have to work day and night,’” Zaffirini said. “And I said, ‘And the problem is?’ So we opened in 1995 with our first building and got appropriations for the building and a master plan.”

The master plan laid out goals including constructing at least 12 buildings, expanding the university from an “upper-level” to full-fledged four-year institution, investing in opportunities and resources, and capitalizing on its location to become a truly “international” university.

“Thankfully, these goals were accomplished because of the leadership of elected officials like Lt. Gov. Bob Bullock and our legislative colleagues, the trailblazing support of local leaders, the generosity of philanthropists like Radcliffe Killam and his family ... and the support of A&M system officials and local university educators,” Zaffirini said.

Cuellar also helped in

1995 to add appropriations to help fund the university’s transition into a four-year institution, which included funding the Killam Library. This also secured extra funding for phases three and four construction.

“We were adding huge amounts of money, this was the transitional monies,” Cuellar said. “That same year we added additional money for Laredo State University for over \$7 million to start creating programs we did not have.”

TAMIU underwent its first phase of construction, which finished in November 1995, marking its 25th anniversary. The Killam family also donated an additional 100 acres.

In the fall of 1995, there were 2,510 students enrolled, according to TAMIU records. The new campus helped accommodate Laredo’s booming growth as it was the second-fastest growing metropolitan area in the U.S., according to TAMIU records.

During Phase I from 1993 to 1995, the university was spending about \$6 million on campus infrastructure. It also spent about \$16 million on the Killam Library, said Joe Garcia, who was Vice President for Finance and Administration.

History professor Dr. Jerry Thompson, who has taught at TAMIU since the 70s, said it was a marvel to



SENATOR
JUDITH ZAFFIRINI



CONGRESSMAN
HENRY CUELLAR

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see a campus develop in the middle of practically nowhere.

“I drove out to see that and there was just a little dirt road that’s now University Boulevard, and they were just starting to build what is today the Killam Library,” Thompson said. “This really was scrub land, it was basically desert since we’re on the edge of the Chihuahuan Desert. I saw all these pillars go up and concrete poured, but I just couldn’t imagine what it would be today.”

Thompson said during the Phase I ribbon-cutting ceremony, many politicians flocked to the university

during a blazing hot day.

Sayavedra had a large tent near University Boulevard, with about 100 people packed under it.

“Leo seemed to have invited every politician south of San Antonio, and as it is the habit in Laredo, a lot of politicians take credit for more than what they do,” Thompson said. “These politicians were droning on and on for over an hour.”

Anne Richards, who was the Texas governor at the time, finally had enough.

“She was one character,” Thompson laughed. “She gets up to the mic and said, ‘I’m just all about clapped

out. Let’s cut the ribbon.’”

In 1995, a kind donor supported constructing Canseco Hall in memory of the Laredo physician. The university would also construct a nursing arts wing and create a nursing program.

Phase I also included what would be Bob Bullock Hall – dedicated to the powerful lieutenant governor – the lab classroom building and the central utility plant. In total, it cost about \$44 million for Phase I, Garcia said.

Dr. J. Charles Jennett, who became the fourth university president after Sayavedra and served from 1995 to 2001, said during this time he saw the university grow at an extraordinary rate.

For Phase II, the university began constructing the Dr. F.M. Canesco Nursing Hall, Anthony J. and Giorgio A. Pellegrino Hall, the Kinesiology-Convocation Building and the University’s Physical Plant Building.

In February 1997, TAMIU held formal dedication ceremonies for the four new buildings.

That year, Cuellar was the chairman of the appropriations committee and of the higher education subcommittee, and so he helped secure \$70 million for TAMIU for the rest of its buildings.

In May, the University Village apartment complex,

which cost \$5.1 million, sold out its one-bedroom units and featured free internet and a computer lab.

In November that year, TAMIU welcomed the addition of apartment-style student housing, which was developed through a privatized partnership with American Campus Lifestyles from Austin.

“It makes for the life of the University,” Jennett said. “The apartments were fine, the students seemed to enjoy it, and it allowed the international students places to live.”

In November 1999, the Phase III groundbreaking ceremonies were held, titled “Making Our Blueprints a Reality.” This phase entailed a \$49.5 million expansion where campus facilities more than doubled in size.

Phase III would include the Center for the Study of Western Hemispheric Trade, the Student Development Center and the Center for the Fine and Performing Arts.

TAMIU welcomes its fourth President

In 1995, Dr. Leo Sayavedra accepted a post as Deputy Chancellor with the TAMU System.

The TAMU System then began its search for a new leader. In June 1996, it appointed engineer Dr. J. Charles Jennett, who was the provost and vice president for academic affairs

at Clemson University in South Carolina.

In November, TAMIU held a two-day ceremony for his inauguration, which included groundbreaking for on-campus student housing, an alumni homecoming, a lecture and an inauguration dinner and dance.

Jennett, who currently resides in Wimberley, is no stranger to Laredo and said he was happy to come back and help out the ever-expanding university where “so much change was occurring so fast.”

“It’s my wife’s hometown, and we were really pleased to come back to Texas,” Jennett said. “And (we had) a university that was essentially starting from scratch and building things the right way, and they did.”

Jennett said he was impressed and proud of how the university attracted so many students from all over the world. In 1963, when Jennett married his wife, he said there were about 25,000 people in Laredo.

When he got to the university, the population was booming at a 44% growth rate compared to 28% statewide from 1995 to 2000, according to the TAMIU 2004 Master Plan’s regional context.

“And we had students from all over, like Europe and the Middle East, so it really was an international university,” Jennett said.



**PRESIDENT
DR. J. CHARLES JENNETT**

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“It was a really good fit for Laredo and the kind of businesses we had in Laredo.”

Thanks to the Killam family, the university gained various resources and support.

“Radcliffe and his family deserve a medal of honor,” Jennett said. “It would be hard to overstate all the things he did for the university that were public, and also a lot of time he would quietly do it.”

For example, Jennett said international students would sometimes lose their support from due to government changes or challenges in the international economy.

“The Killams gave land, they gave scholarships, they gave jobs to some of them, the list would go on and on and on,” Jennett said. “And it’s also his children who played a role in that. They supported more young people than you can possibly imagine.”

After five years of leadership, Jennett announced he would leave the university in 2001. Under him, TAMIU added 17 new degree programs and saw enrollment grow past 13%.

Advancing academics

Besides physically expanding, the university also expanded its programs and degrees to provide more options to the community and the world at large.

With its new four-year

status, TAMIU signed and welcomed its first freshman, José González, who was only 17 and graduated from United High School in 1994.

In 1996, TAMIU partook in a pilot program which provided over 700 students with a groundbreaking, fast way to communicate across time and space: email.

Several months later, the Texas Board of Nurse Examiners awarded TAMIU full accreditation status to the School of Nursing, a process that can take months or years to finish.

Given TAMIU’s advantageous location on the U.S.-Mexico border and its pull of international students, the business school gained more resources with each student and scholarship.

In September that year, Jennett announced the Radcliffe Killam Distinguished Professorship of International Trade Studies in the Western Hemisphere. The event occurred in the Great Room of the Sue and Radcliffe Killam Library, dedicated to the generous family.

“Radcliffe Killam and the Killam family name are synonymous with support of higher education in South Texas and beyond,” Jennett said during the event. “Mr. Killam and his wife, Sue Spivey Killam, helped fulfill our community’s long-cherished dream of a campus for Texas A&M International University with their gen-

erous gift of 300 acres of prime land in northeast Laredo for Texas’ newest four-year university.”

In March 1997, Dr. Susan Scobille Baker was named the nursing school director. The nursing school was also recommended to receive the maximum five-year Initial accreditation by the National League for Nursing Accreditation Commission.

The spring enrollment was up 6% from 2,677 to 2,840 compared to the previous fall. The increase is the highest among all Texas universities, according to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board.

In August, 30 TAMIU students piloted a new course which would help first-time students navigate academia and their career paths, as part of the “Total Freshman Year Experience Plan.”

One course included “Issues in Psychology: Univer-

sity Survival and Success.” TAMIU would also add music courses after creating a university band and chorale club. These were announced by Dr. Ray Keck, Chair of the Department of English, Spanish and Fine Arts of the College of Arts and Humanities. He would go on to serve as the university’s fifth president

In January 1998, the university band debuted with 45 members at the opening of the Laredo Philharmonic Orchestra symphonic concert.

Two well-needed degrees were added in April after the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board unanimously approved a Bachelor of Arts degree in communication and a master’s degree in Spanish.

Dr. Ramon Alaniz, who teaches education with a focus on bilingual education, said there were several degrees during this time that were considered. The arts

and sciences department proposed a master’s degree in English as a second language.

“At that time, there was a movement away from bilingual education, so Spanish as a local language wasn’t being promoted,” Alaniz said. “English as a second language was being promoted, even though it’s always part of a bilingual program.”

Alaniz said the degree did not work out given Laredo’s population that is mainly Spanish-speaking or bilingual.

“People tried to place more emphasis on English and it didn’t fly,” Alaniz said. “If you’re trying to do anything locally in regard to language, you need Spanish. For the most part we had about 50-50 in our programs.”

In May 1998, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board also approved a new biology degree. The



Upcoming Schedule

TAMIU Giving Day: 50 for 50	Nov. 19
Holiday Tree Lighting Celebration	Dec. 2
Ring Ceremony	Dec. 4
Pre-Commencement Ceremonies	Dec. 11
Commencement	Dec. 12
TAMIU Grand Tower Ribbon Cutting	January (TBD)
TAMIU 2020/Vision of our Past	Jan. 30

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ANTHONY J. AND GEORGIA A. PELLEGRINO

Texas Board of Nurse Examiners also approved a new bachelor of science in nursing. A bachelor's of science in sports fitness was also added, as well as a bachelor's in chemistry.

In September 1998, TAMIU initiated its first collaborative Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction. That same month, two faculty members became co-coordinators for a new women's and gender studies minor program.

On the cusp of advanced technology, students also learned about computers through a program which gave TAMIU employees access to the work order system.

In 1999, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board approved construction of TAMIU's Center for the Study of Western Hemispheric Trade and authorized adding a bachelor's degree in environmental science.

It also approved new undergraduate degrees in fine/studio arts and dance and music, as well as graduate degrees for planning in biology, nursing, public administration and psychology.

TAMIU gained its 23rd graduate degree when it got approved for a master's in public administration in the summer of 1999. It also gained a

bachelor's of social work.

Follow the money

Once TAMIU was established as a four-year university, the money trickled in to help out its new programs and projects.

In 1993, the Finance Committee of the Texas A&M University System Board of Regents approved \$19 million for capital campaign and \$9.7 million for new programs. In 1996, about \$5 million in pledges and gifts were sent.

The Killam family also pledged a \$2 million pledge for constructing the Center for the Study of Western Hemispheric Trade.

In 1997, the NBC Bank of Laredo announced a \$53,000 gift for student scholarships. Cuellar earned his doctorate of philosophy in government at the University of Texas, which was celebrated at TAMIU in 1998. The Dr. Henry Cuellar Endowed Scholarship in political science was created as well.

TAMIU received numerous scholarships and endowments, yet it continued to struggle to secure funding from the Texas Legislature.

"It was almost a constant struggle where numerous Laredoans of influence would have to make the annual pilgrimage to Austin to beg the legislature on their knees for funds," Thompson said.

Yet local leaders and politicians did what they could, including Cuellar and fellow State Representative Tracy King, Zaffirini, and Dr. Joaquin Cigarroa of the Texas Higher Education Board.

In 1996, they formed a Legisla-

tive Forum to tackle funding issues. The next year, word got out that the Texas Legislature targeted about \$35 million for TAMIU's campus completion.

"All universities had trouble getting money," Jennett said. "It would be hard to overstate, but all kinds of people from Laredo have done more things to help the people who grew up here."

Zaffirini said she was proud the Legislature recognized TAMIU's significance for the community and greater population.

"Such a significant investment was a sign that the Legislature supported our vision," she said. "This was the foundation from which we continue to secure additional appropriations for our university."

Campus life

In 1995, TAMIU held its first "Dusty Run" for alumni, faculty and students to run in a relay from the former campus near Laredo Community College to the new campus, totaling 10 miles.

The tradition will carry on, bringing together countless alumni and students and covering longer distances.

With students attending the university and congregating on campus, it was time to make changes to better give students a traditional college experience.

"I told President Sayavedra, 'We need a mascot,'" Dr. Jerry Thompson said. "We're never going to be a great university unless we have a mascot."

Initially, Thompson suggested the Roadrunners, since it was the most "logical" one. He also considered the Javelinas, but Texas A&M

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University-Kingsville adopted that mascot.

In 1996, Sayavedra set up a campus committee of students and a few faculty members to find a face for the university, with Thompson chairing it.

“(Sayavedra) didn’t want a mascot that any other college or even another high school had,” Thompson said. “He really wanted it to be unique, and it had to be gender neutral.”

Thompson said the committee received about 180 recommendations from students and faculty, including the Bucks and the Lipan Apache.

The Lipan Apache had traditional territory in Texas and northern Mexican states, including Tamaulipas.

“What I wanted and what I pushed for were the Chupacabras, and that didn’t make the cut,” Thompson said.

It came down to the Thunder, the Sun Blazers, the endangered species of Ocelots and the Dustdevils out of the six highly-considered mascots. Zaffirini suggested the Sun Blazers, and Thompson also floated the idea of the Texans, or the Tejanos. In November 1996, students and faculty chose the Dustdevils.

“There was a sociology professor who raised all kinds of holy hell and wrote numerous emails complaining of the use of the word ‘devil,’” Thompson said. “Oh, she didn’t like that, but Sayavedra said

it was fine.”

Near change of leadership

Things did not always go smoothly at TAMIU, especially in 1995 when Zaffirini suggested changing the university’s leadership over to the UT System as was suggested the previous decade.

Zaffirini drafted Senate Bill 11 with Bullock and Laredo leaders’ help.

“Senate Bill 11 was a message to legislators that it was a priority for the lieutenant governor who always reserves the lowest bill numbers,” Zaffirini said.

Thompson said the bill infuriated many Laredoans, since many liked being under the Texas A&M System.

“So there was blood in the streets of Laredo, I mean the community was deeply divided,” Thompson said. “I personally didn’t care, but I thought we’re the only A&M System on the border. There’s UT at Pan America, at UT El Paso, so I thought maybe it was better staying with A&M.”

Thompson said the Aggies came back with all they had to make sure the university stayed under A&M.

“I think the Senator really underestimated the Aggies, because those Aggies are like an army out there and they’re very influential,” he said.

The bill passed in the Senate, but Rep. Irma Rangel of Kingsville killed it in the House, Zaffirini said.

“As a result of our effort, however, A&M regents worked with us to resolve issues and were impressed

by the strong support local alumni expressed for our hometown university,” Zaffirini said. “We never had that problem again. Today, I am delighted that the university is part of the A&M System and that we unequivocally have demonstrated its value not only to Laredo and to the region but also to our great state and, indeed, to our nation.”

Thompson said he believed Zaffirini had more influence with UT – especially being an alumna – but in the end, the transfer did not work.

“They were really splitting hairs, but they couldn’t pull it off,” he said.

Ring in the new Millennium

As the 90s came to a close, approaching was the 2000s era of Y2K and the Bill Clinton presidency. TAMIU boomed in student population and saw its campus expand across what was once a dry patch of land.

When the university opened as an official four-year institution in 1995, it had a 28% increase from the previous fall.

In 1999, TAMIU broke its Fall enrollment mark with 3,200 students, an increase of 7.3% over the previous record enrollment of 3,001 students.

Jennett would retire in 2001, and to this day said working at TAMIU during the 90s was one of the best experiences ever.

“I couldn’t think of a place I enjoyed more, and I’ve worked at a lot of universities,” Jennett said. “The opportunities that university has given the people – old and young – in Laredo is extraordinary. And all you have to do is look at it.”

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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.



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.*



TAMIU.EDU/50

UPCOMING EVENTS

Nov. 18 - 20 • TAMIU Giving Day
50 Hours for 50 Years
go.tamiau.edu/50for50

Dec. 2 • Holiday Tree Lighting Celebration
Monday, December 2, 2019
6 - 8 P.M. • Sue and Radcliffe Killam Library Front Lawn
Free and open to the public
For more information, call 956.326.4483

