

LAREDO MORNING TIMES

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



PART 4 OF 12: THE FOURTH DECADE

## TAMIU 50th Anniversary

# TAMIU's 50th anniversary The Fourth Decade

*Editor's note: This is Part 4 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

It's a new millennium, and Texas A&M International University now has a robust campus, student housing and a mascot. It has fortified its status as a successful four-year university after the Texas Legislature granted expanding its classes to lower levels.

The following decade to the present marked many more accomplishments for the university, accompanied with some goodbyes and fresh faces.

In a major break in public relations, TAMIU launched its "Prism" University magazine in May 2000 to provide information on the university's achievements, upcoming projects and impact on the area. For its first edition, it released an "Annual Report" rounding up its accomplishments in 1999.

In 2006, TAMIU joins the digital age and launches its own website to aggregate all its information and resources with the help of the Office of Public Relations, Marketing and Information Services and the Office of Information Technology.

### TAMIU gains its fifth president

After serving five years as TAMIU's fourth university president, Dr. J. Charles Jennett announced in August 2001 his farewell to retire and

become an engineer.

"I hope it gets better and even more international," Jennett said in 2019 about the university. "I think TAMIU is in an exciting position to grow and make a place in the international (scope)."

Under his leadership, TAMIU became a four-year university, added 17 new degree programs and saw enrollment increase around 13%.

Dr. Ray Keck III, the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, became the university's fifth president on Sept. 1, 2001.

Before working at TAMIU, Keck earned a doctorate in romance languages and literature from Princeton University. He also taught and held administrative positions with a few secondary schools.

Keck worked at TAMIU when it was just Laredo State University in 1979 and until 1983 as an assistant professor of Spanish and assistant to the president. He returned in 1994 as associate professor of Spanish and later served as chair of the Department of Language, Literature and Art. He became a Spanish professor before being appointed as provost and vice president.

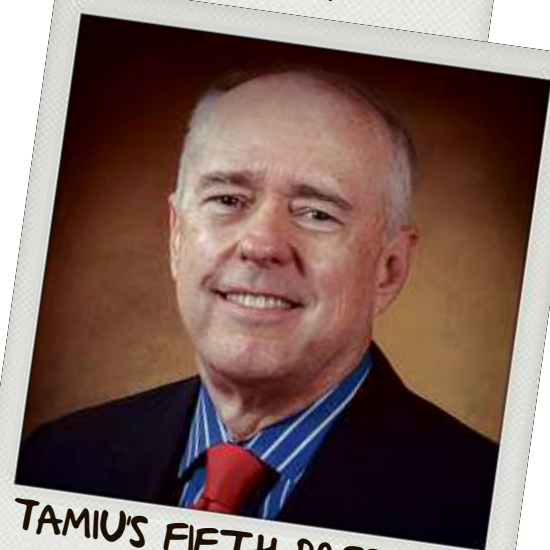
"Dr. Keck was highly recommended by the presidential search committee," Texas A&M System Chancellor Howard Graves had said on his appointment. "He is well qualified to lead this institution, and I believe he will make an excellent president."

### Building up

In 1999, TAMIU held its groundbreaking ceremony for Phase III called "Making Our



TAMIU'S FOURTH PRESIDENT  
DR. J. CHARLES JENNETT DEPARTS THE  
SCHOOL IN AUG. 2001.



TAMIU'S FIFTH PRESIDENT  
DR. RAY KECK

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Blueprints a Reality.” This phase consisted of a \$49.5 million expansion with facilities growing an additional 60%.

Its expansion included the Student Development Center, the Center for the Study of Western Hemispheric Trade and the Center for the Fine and Performing Arts.

By 2000, students, faculty and the community could watch the phase’s development online through a fixed camera which documented construction every 60 seconds.

In August 2003, TAMIU opened its Center for the Fine and Performing Arts to the tune of \$22 million. It included the Sharkey Corrigan Pipe Organ, which was donated by Laredo businessman E.H. Corrigan.

Corrigan showed Keck classical music when he was a teenager, which sparked his lifelong passion for music and studying it.

The center also featured a recital hall, a gallery, art and music studios, rehearsal rooms, a small theatre and a full-sized theatre.

In 2006, the Laredo Philharmonic Chorale turned over its independent status and became part of TAMIU, using the university as its new and permanent home.

Three years after Phase III, Phase IV began with groundbreaking in June 2003. Lt. Gov. David De-

whurst watched the groundbreaking for the phase included a science building and a transparent glass pyramid for the Planetarium.

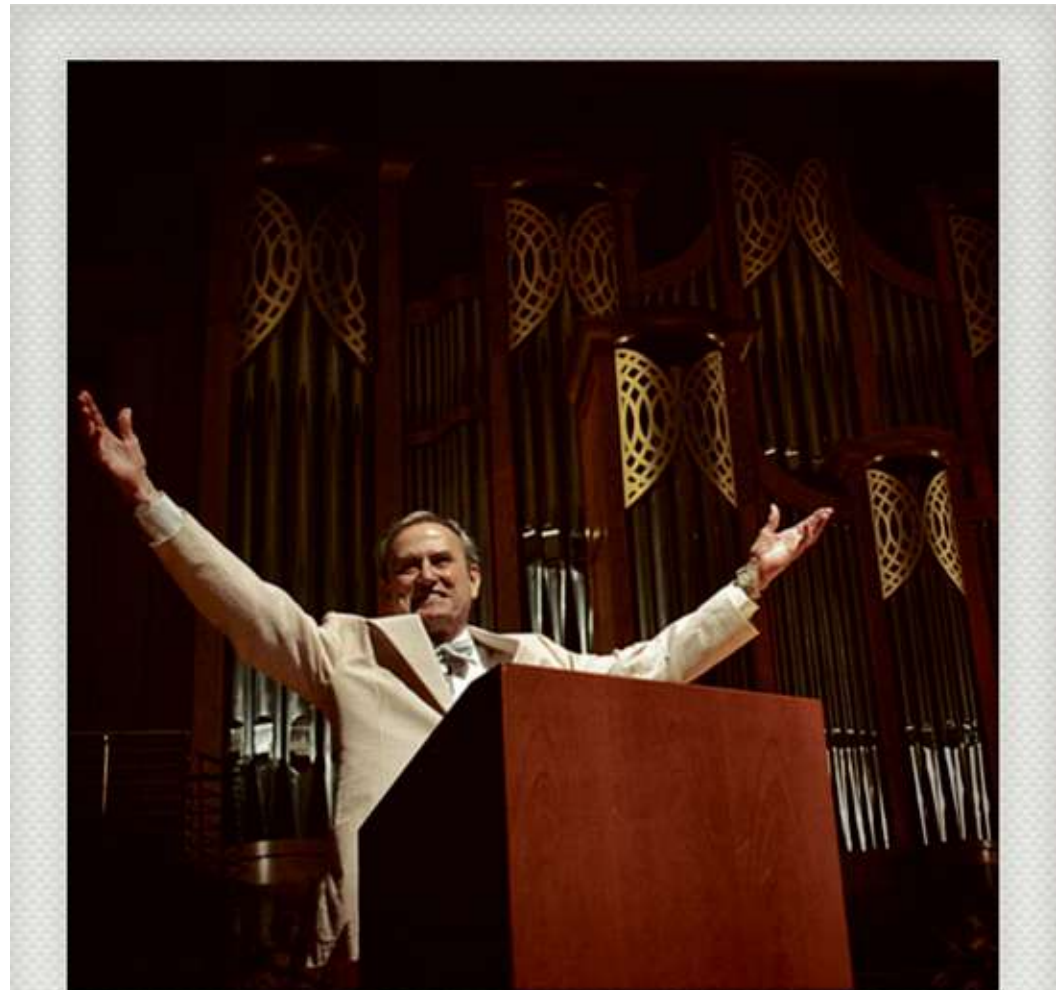
The science building housed a lecture hall, offices and 30 labs. It was called the Lamar Bruni Vergara Science Center, honoring the late local philanthropist Lamar Bruni Vergara. Trustees of the Lamar Bruni Vergara Trust helped fund construction, programs and student scholarships for TAMIU.

The TAMIU community received information via Prism Magazine that Phases IV and V are underway, even though the State Legislature is wary of the budgeting.

“To have delayed our campus’ completion, this session would have had dire ramifications for our university, and we are glad that the Legislature shares in our vision for a first-class regional university of choice here,” TAMIU President Ray Keck said at the time.

For the 78th Legislative Session, TAMIU was appropriated funding for Phases IV and V, with the latter phase including a support services facility, completing utility service, infrastructure loop improvements and athletics facilities’ improvements.

In 2005, the Lamar Bruni Vergara Science Center Planetarium was opened as one of the few Digistar new generation digital projec-



**DONAR E. H. CORRIGAN POSES BEFORE THE INAUGURAL RECITAL OF THE SHARKEY CORRIGAN PIPE ORGAN IN JULY 2006.**

tors in the U.S. at the time. The dome was 40-feet and showed students and the community shows and clo-seups of the universe.

It would later be upgraded in 2014 with crisp resolution and brighter projection.

The University Success Center opened in 2010 with

a price tag of \$25 million. Dr. Minita Ramirez at the time was the Enrollment Services Executive Director, and currently she is TAMIU’s Vice President of the Division of Student Success and an LISD Trustee.

Ramirez said students traveled all around campus

to get errands done and get information since all the offices were spread out.

“We had the Financial Aid Office in Pellegrino Hall, the testing was in Cow-art Hall and Admissions was in Killam Library,” Ramirez said. “Everyone was scattered around the four or

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five buildings we had at the time, so students were going building to building to try to get all of their work done, so it was impossible and the tech wasn't what it is today. That was a dream of ours to have a one-stop shop center."

It contained units in one area for students to access resources and information, including the offices for Registrar, Admissions, Financial Aid Campus Card Services, Recruitment and School Relations and the

Bursar's Office.

It also housed the offices for Recruitment and School Relations, the bookstore, Student Success, Testing Center, Advising and Mentoring Center, and Student Counseling Services.

TAMIU students could get closer to Wall Street and global finances through the renovation of the Value-Investing Trading Room and Technology Center. The renovation funding was donated by the "Tony" and Maria J. Sanchez Family

Foundation.

## New Programs

With the opening of the Office for International Programs, it coordinated study abroad trips for students and faculty. It coordinated with more than 20 higher education institutions around the globe and assisted international students coming to TAMIU.

In August 2000, TAMIU enrolled its first student to its new four-year Honors Program through the D.D. Hachar Honors Program.

In a victory for sports, TAMIU announced in 2002 it was beginning an athletics program which featured men's and women's soccer along with volleyball.

TAMIU joined the National Association for Intercollegiate Athletics and participated in the Red River Athletics Conference under the guidance of Athletics Director Steve Garippa.

In 2007, TAMIU's baseball program launched its inaugural season and played four games over four days. It began with a three-game series at Tarleton State University and played its first home game in school history against Schreiner University.

TAMIU became a full member of the NCAA's Division II in 2006 playing in the Heartland Conference, and all 11 TAMIU teams were then eligible for Conference and NCAA post-season championship play beginning in 2008 after the NCAA's mandatory two-year probationary period.

Native Puerto Rican Jose Alicea, a student-athlete, earned his Master of Business Administration at TAMIU on a basketball scholarship. He also was the first intercollegiate basketball athlete to finish four years in TAMIU's basketball program in 2010. It was a triumph for Puerto Rican students who wished to attend school in the U.S. but were restricted by finances and language barriers.

After it dissolved in the 1970s under Joe Garcia, the ROTC program was re-established in 2003. ROTC saw a great increase in the enrollment of women, which tripled since Spring 2009 to October 2009.

"When I left here, they closed the program because we weren't commissioning

enough people," Garcia said. "But later on, we became part of the new ROTC program, and they restructured the ROTC program completely."

After successfully obtaining its four-year status, TAMIU announced that its first Ph.D. in International Business was being considered during a Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board meeting in 2003.

From 2002 to 2003, TAMIU received grants totaling over \$5.4 million for programs, research and/or services.

Its International Business Ph.D. was approved and offered courses for Fall 2004. TAMIU also announced it would collaborate with Ph.D. degrees in Hispanic Studies and Curriculum with A&M System sister campuses, the first Hispanic Studies doctorate program in Texas.

Lola Orellano-Pérez joined Lisa Flores, the director of the Office of Student Activities, and Conchita Hickey, Office of Programs for Academic Support and Enrichment executive director, to become the first cohort in the collaborate Ph.D. in Hispanic Studies.

In 2003, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board approved TAMIU for three music degrees, making it the 55th degree offered at the university.

TAMIU not only helped current students, but it also



**TAMIU'S ROTC PROGRAM SAW FEMALE CADET TOTALS TRIPLE OVER THE COURSE OF 2009.**

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expanded to assist local high schoolers.

In 2005, TAMIU announced its Regents II initiative to produce more teachers in collaboration with 16 schools from LISD, UISD, Mirando City and Zapata ISD. The Texas Education Agency funded the \$2.3 million project.

Dr. Ramon Alaniz, who teaches education with a focus on bilingual education, said in the early 2000s that TAMIU offered a program to help students earn their teaching certificate.

“People would come in with a bachelor in maybe education and other areas, but they didn’t have a teaching certificate,” Alaniz said. “What happened is the alternative certification allowed people to come in if they had a minor in math or science and others. Then you would take a prescribed curriculum of 12 hours all related to education and spend two years working as a permit teacher.”

Alaniz said this program continued for about six years. He said TAMIU had ways of finding which programs it needed to add or build upon.

“We had to do surveys in the community to figure out what the needs were in the community, and once we figured out those needs, we would design a program according to those surveys,” he said. “Normally the sur-

vey indicated we needed a degree in kinesiology or something like that.”

TAMIU also welcomed its new Sames Scholars which pairs high school students with TAMIU faculty mentors during their high school careers. Students that finished the program received a four-year scholarship to TAMIU, which included tuition, books and fees.

In 2008, TAMIU launched its freshman reading program to encourage students to read and give students a visit to the campus.

To help under-represented minority students obtain biomedical degrees, TAMIU and Laredo Community College partnered up in 2006. They created the Promoting Undergraduate Education Now Through Experimental Science program. It received \$413,774 by the National Institutes for Health for a three-year program.

Near the end of that same year, TAMIU’s Master of Public Administration added a health administration track to help those wanting to join the public health sector.

As part of the 2007 Ford Salute to Education program, Sames Scholars awarded scholarships to 75 high school seniors.

Likewise, the Dr. F. M. Canesco School of Nursing held a summer camp for Laredo high school students

to show them the nursing profession and get them acclimated with the university.

In Fall 2005, the nursing school launched its master of science in nursing, or MSN, and admitted 19 students. Its first graduates in 2006 were Manuel Flores, Norma Garcia, Graciela Gonzalez, Rita Haber, Marissa Jimenez, Julio Lujano, Alejandro Madrigal, Barbara Matelski, Claudio Ruiz, Griselda Salas, Martha Salinas, Sandra Santos, Yolanda Seibert and Alfredo Vela.

In collaboration with Texas A&M University-Kingsville, they worked on communication sciences and disorders programs to focus on education and research.

For its campus life, TAMIU holds a special overnight orientation for students transitioning from high school to university life. Freshmen go to the universi-

ty’s Student Center, partake in activities and are provided all meals and housing.

For faculty members, Texas A&M Chancellor Michael D. McKinney launched voluntary, student-selected honors program in 2008. It would recognize faculty members for their great contributions to the university and great guidance for their students.

The next year, the university’s new Honors Program opened advanced courses and opportunities for students to obtain honors certificates or diplomas.

## More Money, More Opportunities

Throughout 2000-10, TAMIU saw donated money pouring in to bolster its many programs and begin new opportunities, especially for socio-economically disadvantaged high school

students and TAMIU students.

There was a heavy focus on STEM fields and business, which the university prides itself on, especially given its location on the U.S.-Mexico border in the intersection of international and local trade.

By 2001 when Jennett announced his leave, private philanthropy had raised \$12.5 million. Sponsored research increased 600% to over \$7.6 million.

By 2004, TAMIU announced it had exceeded its target enrollment every year since its “Closing the Gaps” program began in 2000.

Ramirez said enrollment numbers soared, especially after TAMIU switched to a four-year traditional status.

“There was the growth of the campus itself, but also because we made some significant changes in the way



## Upcoming Schedule

TAMIU Grand Tower Ribbon Cutting	Jan. 2020*
TAMIU 2020/Vision of our Past	Jan. 30
Spirit Week	Feb. 3-8
Presidential Lecture Series presents Dr. Jerry Thompson	Feb. 6
Discover TAMIU	Feb. 29
<b>Homecoming &amp; Tailgate</b>	<b>Feb. 2020*</b>
TAMIU athletics BBQ Party & Car Show	March 21
residential Lecutre Series	March 25
The Big Event	March 28
TAMIU Alumni Golden Celebration	March 28

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we recruited and how we made ourselves accessible to the public increased our enrollment,” Ramirez said. “The majority of the student population at the time was all non-traditional, and most of our classes were held in the evenings. We expanded our programs tremendously and were still a young campus compared to the others.”

Ramirez added that TAMIU continued to see growth, unlike many other universities.

“Most institutions across the country are seeing flat enrollment, or if there’s any growth, it’s by 0.1 or 0.2%,” she said. “Because of our mission, the intent of TAMIU always has been to serve an area that has been traditionally underserved from a higher education standpoint to help prepare students for lead roles and help students grow from the standpoint of not just a local level but state and international level.”

State Sen. Judith Zaffirini, a helpful catalyst in TAMIU’s changes ever since it opened, announced she secured \$14 million, an 18.4% increase, for TAMIU’s funding from the Texas

Legislature in 2007. Yet then-Tex. Gov. Rick Perry also vetoed \$5 million for Student Success Programs.

That same year, the now U.S. Congressman Henry Cuellar announced awarding a \$3.5 million Title V federal grant to Laredo Community College and TAMIU to improve academic recruitment and retention of Hispanic students and low-income individuals.

Student scholarships for TAMIU soared, including \$150,000 raised through the Second Ford AutMus Fest at TAMIU, where artists performing included a Flock of Seagulls, Losa Palinos and Girl in a Coma.

A few years later, TAMIU’s high enrollment of 5,980 drained the scholarship pool. In response, it held its first Scholarship Phona-

thon which generated \$310,000 for student scholarships.

Cuellar stepped in again to help in 2008 with \$500,000 earmarked by the federal government to go toward TAMIU’s Energy-Efficient Green Campus Research Initiative.

He also helped secure a \$299,997 U.S. Department of Education grant to increase recruiting under-represented minorities, especially minority women, for science and engineering careers. It was doled out in \$99,000 increments each year for three years.

In 2008, he also announced \$1.2 million to expand the proposed Southern Border Operations Training Center in Laredo at TAMIU’s Western Hemispheric Trade Center, further solidifying TAMIU’s presence in

international business studies given its advantageous location on the U.S.-Mexico border.

The next year, Cuellar announced a U.S. Department of Health and Human Service grant of \$152,031 for the nursing program. It helped 30 economically-disadvantaged students from under-represented minority groups.

Likewise, TAMIU received help for its first-generation students, especially for the many of those that come from the Laredo area and beyond. It received a \$500,000 grant by the Walmart Foundation to increase the retention rate of first-generation, first-year Hispanic students through the Leadership and Involvement for Diversity, Engagement and Retention program.

At the very beginning of 2010, TAMIU was given a \$58,511

grant from the National Science Foundation to train first-generation Hispanic students in education and scientific research. Cuellar also announced \$424,913 to go toward a five-year award of \$2,124,565 for a TAMIU College Assistance Migrant Pro-



THE RENAMED A. R. SANCHEZ, JR. SCHOOL OF BUSINESS RECEIVED A \$10 MILLION GIFT FROM THE A. R. „TONY“ AND MARIA J. SANCHEZ FAMILY FOUNDATION AND A \$10 MILLION MATCHING CHALLENGE GRANT IN DEC. 2007.



CONGRESSMAN HENRY CUELLAR ANNOUNCED TAMIU RECEIVED A \$424,913 GRANT FROM THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION FOR TAMIU’S COLLEGE ASSISTANCE MIGRANT PROGRAM.

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gram, which began in 2004.

TAMIU's budget took great strides beyond 1980, with an increase from \$2.8 million to \$64 million in 2007.

The "Tony" and Maria J. Sanchez Family also donated \$10 million in a matching challenge grant to establish an endowment fund for the Sanchez School of Business, named after Tony Sanchez.

The Fernando A. Salinas Charitable Trust pledged \$1 million in

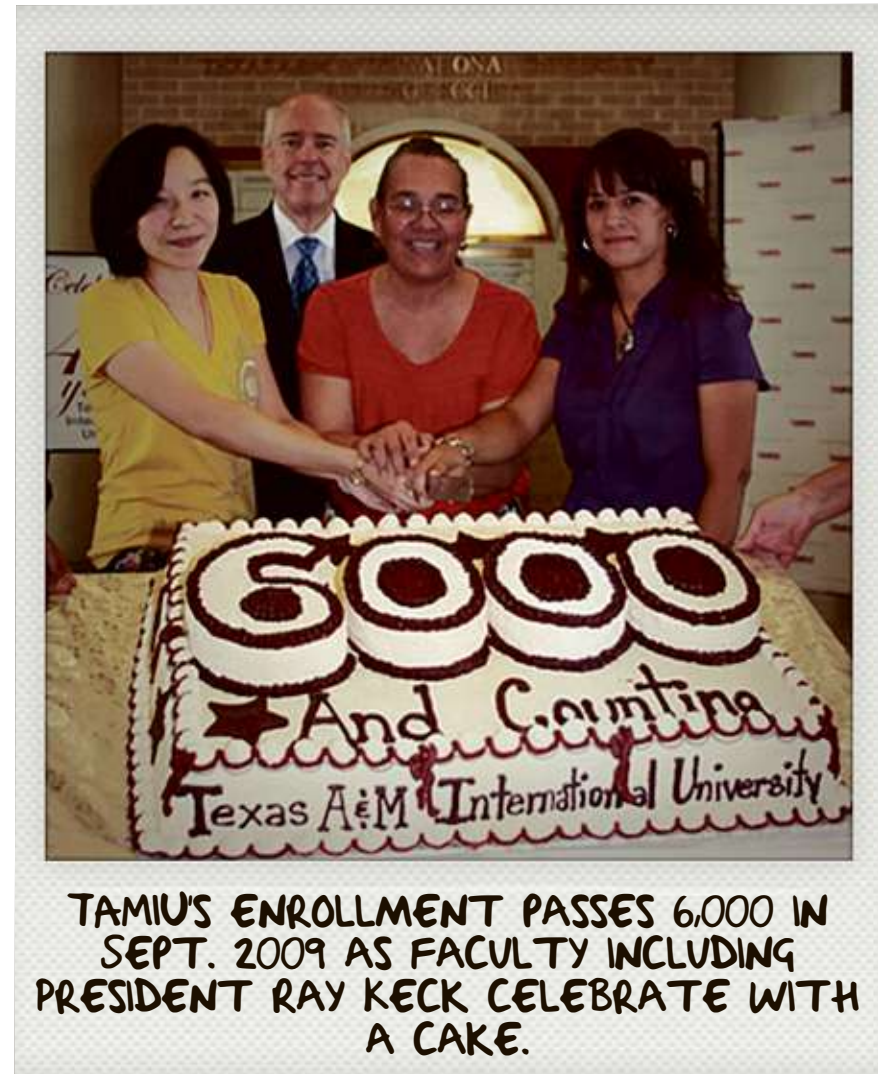
response to the challenge grant, and in 2008, it doubled to \$2 million. It supported the business school, and classrooms were named in honor of Roberto M. and Beatriz S. Benavides.

The next year, TAMIU formally dedicated two rooms in the Western Hemispheric Trade Center to family members of the Fernando A. Salinas Charitable Trust.

The business school continued to receive donations, including \$500,000 by the Matias De Llano Charitable Trust. It was to fund continuing the Ph.D. in International Business Administration.

The Lamar Bruni Vergara Trust gave a \$3 million gift for graduate study scholarships. In 2009, the Union Pacific Foundation presented a \$10,000 gift for Lamar Bruni Vergara Science Center and Planetarium's fourth anniversary.

TAMIU also was granted \$87,000 for Phase 2 funding for a community energy con-



**TAMIU'S ENROLLMENT PASSES 6,000 IN SEPT. 2009 AS FACULTY INCLUDING PRESIDENT RAY KECK CELEBRATE WITH A CAKE.**

servation education program. It was in collaboration with Texas A&M College of Architecture's Center for Housing and Urban Development Colonias Program and local energy providers.

In 2009, that trust also donated a \$1 million gift to provide emergency financial assistance to qualified TAMIU students.

Bolstering its STEM program, the Texas Higher Education Coor-

dinating Board awarded a \$635,900 grant for a program to provide training for local 6th-12th grade teachers training in math, science and technology.

In a big step in studying mental conditions, Cuellar announced a \$287,314 grant from the U.S. Department of Education for a graduate education degree program in autism. It was set to launch in 2010.

*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.*

**50**  
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.



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 29,000+ 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.*

*Season's Greetings!*

