



**RECREATION, PARK
& TOURISM SCIENCES**
TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY

HOWDY!

We are happy to present our Fall 2011 electronic newsletter. It is important to us to keep in touch with our former students, and we want you to keep in touch with us! Let us know what you are up to, where you are living, and how we can best keep you in the loop. We welcome all your comments and criticisms, and we want to know what you would like to see in our future newsletters. Please direct all correspondence to:

Justin Harmon (jtharmon77@tamu.edu)

Marketing Director and PhD Student

Fightin' Texas Aggies Class of '15

Gig 'em, Aggies!



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Gary's Gab

Howdy! Welcome to this first edition of our twice-per year Department of Recreation, Park and Tourism Sciences newsletter! The Christmas season is upon us, and as we await the arrival of the jolly man in the red suit and cool boots (speaking of impressive boots, I recently heard a rumor is that Santa is an Aggie, and was a member of the Corps of Cadets...), we can reflect on many wonderful events that occurred in the Department of Recreation, Park and Tourism Sciences during the Fall Semester of 2011. I would like to share a glimpse of some of these with you.



First, gifts by generous donors afforded us new opportunities to better serve our students and stakeholders. The Sequor Foundation committed to 10 years of funding to support our Youth Development Initiative (YDI). The YDI is an innovative program that yields unique educational and professional development experiences for our youth development students while allowing us to meet needs of youth-serving organizations throughout Texas and beyond.

The Texas A&M University Department of Athletics provided a generous gift that allowed us to hire a talented lecturer who specializes in services to non-traditional students. Mrs. Kelly Kyle, who serves in that position, teaches classes on-line, develops and implements custom programs of study that meet needs of nontraditional students, provides consultation, and serves as a mentor for nontraditional students. This program is an innovative partnership with the Department of Athletics that has great potential to serve as a model for other institutions.

Generous donors also allowed us to honor and support students through thoughtful and significant gifts to our scholarship programs. One donor endowed a scholarship in honor of Mrs. Elizabeth B. Crompton, wife of Dr. John Crompton. Significant new gifts were made by generous donors to our Leslie M. Reid Endowed Scholarship, our John L. Crompton Endowed Scholarship, our Peter A. Witt and Joyce Nies Youth Development Fellowship, our Robert B. Ditton Endowed Scholarship, and our College of Agriculture Development Council Heidemann-Wuest Scholarship. The Texas Travel Industry Association also generated significant funding that allowed that organization to award scholarships to outstanding tourism management students again this year, in honor of Texas Travel Industry legend Mr. Gene Phillips.

Our AgriLife Extension Service programs thrived. We welcomed Mr. Stephen Brueggerhoff as an Extension Program Specialist. Mr. Brueggerhoff has impressive background in interpretation, event management, and horticulture. He is providing leadership to our Texas Friendly Hospitality Program and our Texas Event Leadership Program. Our Coastal Watershed Program continued to provide innovative projects that improve the quality of life of coastal residents. Our nature tourism program and our urban parks programs also provided quality and innovative services to their constituents throughout Texas.

Gary's Gab continued...

We are celebrating successes of many of our students. We are particularly proud of the 39 undergraduate students and 5 graduate students who will be graduating at the end of the Fall Semester. Another special undergraduate program success is the second-place finish of our RPTS Quiz Bowl team in national competition. Our team was coached by Dr. Mike Edwards and was supported financially by a generous gift from Mr. Robert Starnes '72 and his wife Robin Starnes '76. We also celebrated placement of a number of graduates in exciting professional positions this semester, and RPTS students have been recognized by prominent national awards. One notable example is the Best Masters Thesis of the Year, awarded by the American Academy for Park and Recreation Administration. Mr. Steven Cooksey received that award. Mr. Cooksey is a student of Dr. John Crompton.

Faculty successes during the Fall semester are also notable. Dr. David Scott received the prestigious Franklin and Theodore Roosevelt Research Award, the highest park and recreation research award in the nation. Dr. Corliss Outley was promoted to associate professor with tenure. We are thrilled to welcome Ms. Kim Free as a full-time lecturer. Ms. Free has significant experience in event planning and management with a number of major professional sport organizations. Ms. Free will provide leadership to our new Professional Event Manager Certificate Program. We were pleased that she successfully defended her doctoral dissertation this fall and will graduate with a PhD from the University of Utah.

This survey of select RPTS successes during the Fall Semester would not be complete without mention of an extraordinary lecture by Mr. Mickey Fearn, Deputy Director of the National Park Service. Mr. Fearn was a College of Agriculture and Life Sciences "Centennial Lecturer." Mr. Fearn delivered a very memorable message. His insights about youth, nature, parenting, and youth leadership will be valuable to all who attended.

So, while Santa may be on his way to Aggieland, the many causes we have for celebration hint that he has already delivered gifts to faculty, staff, and students of the Department of Recreation, Park and Tourism Sciences. We look forward to an equally exciting Spring semester, and we wish you the very best for the holiday season and the new year!

Gary Ellis, Department Head



Megan Flowers is a senior in RPTS with a focus area in tourism. She hails from Weslaco, Texas, a town of roughly 35,000 near the U.S.-Mexico border. Weslaco may be best known for being the hometown of Harlan Block, one of the Marines who planted the flag at Iwo Jima, but Megan is sure to give her hometown another person to be proud of! Megan and fellow former-RPTS student Meredith Reigle are known around campus for starting the Texas A&M chapter of the Student Event Planners Association (SEPA). SEPA is a professional student organization that caters to students interested in pursuing a career in the event management industry by providing opportunities to gain valuable experience, knowledge of the industry, networking and internship prospects.

RPTS: What made you pick RPTS as your major?

MF: You know this is kind of funny because I got into A&M as a Gateway student in General Studies. I was walking by Francis Hall one day and saw the “Recreation, Park and Tourism Sciences” department sign and was intrigued, so I stopped in and talked to Ann and took 202 my first fall semester (2008). I loved it and became an RPTS major my second semester.

RPTS: What do you want to do with your degree?

MF: I would like to start my career in the event coordination or hospitality fields but I feel as though I could be happy doing any number of things with my RPTS degree.

RPTS: What is the best tradition at A&M and why?

MF: The tradition of the Aggie Ring, because it is symbolic of Texas A&M and recognizable anywhere. It’s nice to see one on a stranger far away from College Station; it’s an instant connection that we have with thousands of other Aggies no matter where we are.

RPTS: What is the best advice someone has ever given you?

MF: It’s a little cliché, but “be yourself.”

RPTS: What was your favorite class at A&M?

MF: My favorite would have to have been the study abroad program I went on to Fiji and Australia. It doesn’t get much better than class on the beach or in the rainforest.

RPTS: Where is your favorite place to eat in BCS?

MF: Naked Fish and Shiraz Shish Kabob are my two favorite places to eat in BCS.

RPTS: What will you miss most about BCS when you leave? What will you miss least?

MF: I will miss the unique smaller town feel of BCS, and I will definitely not miss game day traffic.

As we are getting ever closer to Christmas, it is quite appropriate that Megan’s favorite movie is *Elf*, with Will Ferrell. So in the holiday spirit, we wish her a happy and memorable last semester as she prepares to graduate in May. Megan has been an exceptional student during her time here on campus, and quite worthy of being “in the spotlight.”



David Vela is currently the Southeast Regional Director of the National Park Service (NPS). The region encompasses sixty-six parks in nine states, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands, and employs more than 3,000 people. Before becoming the Southeast Regional Director in 2008, Mr. Vela served as superintendent for several park units throughout the country. During the years between 1998 and 2008 he headed up the Palo Alto Battlefield National Historic Site, the Lyndon B. Johnson National Historic Park and the George Washington Memorial Parkway. He began his career with the NPS in 1981 at the San Antonio Missions National Historical Park. He was born and raised in Wharton, Texas, a rural community in the southeastern part of the state.

RPTS: What made you choose RPTS as your major in college?

DV: Upon taking a trip to Yellowstone National Park with my family at an early age, I found my calling to be a United States Park Ranger. I decided to transfer to Texas A&M upon obtaining my Associate of Arts Degree in Theater and Communications from Wharton County Junior College. I then married my high school sweetheart (Melissa, class of 1982) who was attending Texas A&M University. I was impressed by the RPTS focus on park management as well as the opportunity to engage the National Park Service representative that was housed in the Department.

RPTS: What class do you most remember from RPTS?

DV: Dr. Jim Fletcher and Dr. Ron Kaiser taught classes on park law and law enforcement that I enjoyed. The senior park, planning, and design class was also very beneficial to my career.

RPTS: What is your favorite Aggie tradition?

DV: Silver Taps – recognizing Aggies who are no longer with us.

RPTS: What aspect from your experience as an RPTS student has been most beneficial to your career?

DV: Participating in research field trips, and the on-going relationships that I have enjoyed with my former classmates and RPTS staff. Also, getting to know Lon Garrison who was writing his memoirs, *“The Making of a Ranger – Forty Years with the National Parks”* while he served as a Distinguished Lecturer in RPTS.

RPTS: I imagine your career has taken you all over. Where is the most interesting place you’ve lived?

DV: Working in New York City as a Federal Agent with an Inspector General’s Office in downtown Manhattan was quite an experience. We lived in Princeton, New Jersey, and I would take the Amtrak train into Newark then take the Path train into the World Trade Center every day. I would then walk a couple of blocks to 26 Federal Plaza. In the law enforcement world, there were few challenges greater than working in New York City.

RPTS: Based on your career experience, what advice would you give to current RPTS students interested in your field?

DV: Do not expect to obtain a permanent position in the National Park Service upon graduation without any previous park work experiences. While an RPTS student, take advantage of federal college hiring authorities, participate in research projects within national parks, and pursue volunteer and seasonal job opportunities.

RPTS: Do you have a mentor or anyone you look up to for guidance?

DV: My parents, as they always encouraged me to pursue my dream of becoming a United States Park Ranger. Also, Lon Garrison, as he would encourage me as well as share personal stories of what it was like to work in the early years of the National Park Service. Most importantly, I am also grateful for the loving support provided by my wife, Melissa. I would not be a Regional Director today if she had not been supportive and willing to move around the country (eight times), endure long work hours, and numerous training assignments.

We are grateful to have such a prestigious Former Student as David Vela. He is a testament to what can be accomplished through hard work and dedication, and not to mention an RPTS degree!



Dr. Corliss Outley recently was granted tenure (Congratulations!) in the RPTS department. She came on as a faculty member in 2006, but her ties to the university go back to her graduate school days. She earned her PhD in Recreation and Resources Development from A&M, and after spending some time as a Professor at the University of Minnesota, she was eager to have the chance to come back to Aggieland. Originally from Lynwood, California, she also studied in Louisiana (Grambling State University) and Illinois (Southern Illinois University) before doing her doctorate work in BCS.

RPTS: You've lived in several different states. Which state did you like living in the most?

CO: My favorite state to live in was Minnesota. Even though I cried every winter, it was exciting to be able to experience the seasonal changes.

RPTS: What made you decide to come back to Texas A&M?

CO: My mentors Drs. Peter Witt, John Crompton and Joe O'Leary, as well as the development of the Vision 2020 Goals by former TAMU President Gates. The department had also begun to make many changes and I wanted to be a part of the exciting growth of the youth development program.

RPTS: What do you miss most about Francis Hall? What do you miss the least?

CO: I miss the feeling of being at "home." I don't miss the extreme heat and cold fluctuations in my office.

RPTS: Has the accomplishment of becoming a tenured professor changed your perspective at all?

CO: Yes and No! My commitment to students, teaching, and research hasn't changed. There are moments when everything feels the same since I am still teaching and heavily involved in several research projects. But more recently I have begun to feel a little off. Some of my colleagues call this post-tenure blues and say it is very common. As I began to reflect on why this was occurring, I realized that since arriving at A&M I focused on excelling at teaching, scholarship and service. Instead of feeling excited about this accomplishment, I am exhausted! I also keep asking myself, "Now what?" Before tenure a road map was provided for success and now I have to begin to plan for my post-tenure academic existence without a map. "I have to keep asking myself, what legacy do I want to leave behind? What do I want to accomplish? I guess the true struggle is just beginning!"

RPTS: What advice do you have for aspiring academics?

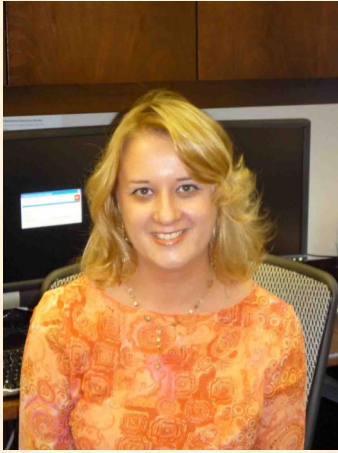
CO: 5 keys to success:

- Take advantage of opportunities
- Distinguish yourself as a leader
- Find a mentor
- Maximize your career options
- Go to graduate school

RPTS: Any additional parting wisdom?

CO: "Do not go where the path may lead; go instead where there is no path and leave a trail." - Ralph Waldo Emerson

Dr. Outley is a very fascinating person. She used to work for the U.S. Forest Service as a smokejumper and fought forest fires, and as a hobby she designs jewelry. She is currently conducting research on combating youth tobacco use, designing surveys for school staff perceptions of bullying, and working on county level obesity intervention program for children. We are honored to have such an accomplished scholar in our department, and we look forward to her future endeavors!



Irina Shatruk is known to everyone throughout the RPTS department as that friendly face that always has a smile and time to hear what's going on in your life. She is originally from Moscow, Russia, but moved to BCS with her family to start school at A&M in 2006. Upon graduation while looking for a job, she was presented with the opportunity to stay on in the department, and she is currently the graduate advisor. There are approximately 70 graduate students in the program presently, and she knows them all. She makes sure that the grads have an ally every step of the way.

RPTS: What made you choose RPTS as a major?

IS: When I first moved here, I had an idea of opening a travel agency. While searching for a major I got attracted by 'Tourism' in the name of our department!

RPTS: What were some of your favorite experiences as a student in the RPTS department?

IS: I have several favorite experiences from the department. Studying in an American university and using a different language was attractive and challenging. It is one of my favorite life experiences! I learned so much about people lives, as well as parks, recreation and tourism science! I was the president of the RPTS Club and Miss RPTS, and I enjoyed being a part of the Aggie family and participating in various A&M and departmental activities.

RPTS: You recently made your acting debut. How did it go?

IS: To play in The Theatre Company was on my wish list. I made it happen! I loved the experience and the people I was able to work with.

RPTS: What do you like most about BCS?

IS: I love the weather and the sense of a "big" city in a small college town (university, libraries, shopping centers, cute local coffee shops, assorted ethnic restaurants and various festivals). BCS has good people; it is family oriented, small, cozy, safe, friendly and diverse. It is also close enough to larger cities like Houston, Dallas, Austin and San Antonio if you need something "extra" in your life.

RPTS: You have mentioned that you would like to go to graduate school. Where would you like to go and what would you like to study?

IS: I am thinking about a master's degree in counseling psychology. Unfortunately, Texas A&M does not offer the program that I am interested in, so I would have to go elsewhere.

RPTS: What advice do you have for current RPTS students?

IS: Think of what YOU want and go for it. There are no limits. Make friends and enjoy your college years as much as you can. These are the best years of your life!

Irina will be traveling back to her native Russia for the holiday break. She is very passionate about traveling, and when I asked her to name the place she most wanted to go, she was unable. The list had far too many locations to list, so we here at RPTS hope she gets to cross some of these locations off her list in the near future. Thanks for all your hard work Irina!

Congratulations, Fall 2011 Graduating Seniors!!

**Debra Aitchison
Michael Atwell
Colin Barnes
Christina Bayer
Crystal Brown
Thomas Brown
Robyn Caldwell
Krista Carter
Kristi Castillo
Alexa Cockrum
Katie Coeckelenbergh
Trey Cooper
Jaclyn Driskell
Robert Dusing
Michael Edgar
Jesus Franco
Lucas Frank
Jaci Hammonds
Matthew Haynes
Daniel Josey
Stephan Kieval
Megan Lichenstein
Lauren Marinos
John Mayers
Cameron Michalski
Austin Nelson
Hannah Pabor
Amanda Parker
Rachael Patton
Adam Peeler
Wesley Peters
Luis Ruiz
Anthony Russo
Brian Salin
Rebecca Schroeder
Lindsey Shelburne
Annemarie Stanush
Ashley Tayebi
Thomas Woodings**

Congratulations, Fall 2011 Graduating Graduate Students!!

Smriti Dahal

Smriti successfully defended her PhD dissertation titled, “Understanding the Participation of Marginal Groups in Annapurna Conservation Area, Nepal.” The objectives of her research were: to examine the perceived benefits of ACAP and how marginal groups fare in the distribution of benefit; analyze the level of participation of marginal groups in local management institutions; and identify the barriers to participation as perceived by marginal groups.

Hyun Joo Kim

Hyun Joo successfully defended her Master’s thesis, “Airline Passengers’ Satisfaction with Airports.” A total of 262 airline passengers in Incheon International Airport and Los Angeles International Airport participated in the study. Six hypotheses were tested with data collected from a survey of the airline passengers using descriptive statistics and structural equation modeling. The results of the study implied that the desires of the congruency model can be applied to the satisfaction formation of airline passengers. Practical recommendations were presented for the airport managers to enhance airport services.

Linda Lelo

Linda successfully defended her PhD dissertation titled, “Understanding the Production and Consumption of Slavery Heritage: The Case of the African Burial Ground National Monument.”

Angelica Lopez

Angelica successfully defended her PhD dissertation, “Latinos and the Natural Environment along the United States–Mexico Border.” The purpose of her study was threefold: (1) to determine public perceptions toward natural resources, the environment, and conservation; (2) to assess general environmental behaviors; and (3) to determine general recreational behaviors among three student population groups along the U.S.–Mexico border region.

Lauren Reichstein

Lauren successfully defended her Master’s thesis titled, “Recreational Sex Amongst Teenagers as Recounted by Current College-aged Students.” Questions were focused on attitudes and feelings about experiences, and were formulated based on reminiscence methods as outlined by Wong (1995). Rather than investigating more traditional aspects of teen sexual behavior (i.e. contraception, alcohol and drug use), this study approaches sexual activity in terms of pleasure.

Reid's Rumble Seat

"Requiem For An Aggie"

Another school year began this week and the students have come flooding back to Texas A&M -- noisy, enthusiastic and thankfully so intense and vital about everything they do.

This Tuesday night was a dramatic change in mood, as I attended the first Silver Taps ceremony of the year. Silver Taps at Texas A&M is a memorial observance that is scheduled upon the death of a currently enrolled student.

Silver Taps this time had special significance for me. This special ceremony was conducted in memory of students who had died during the summer. William J. Stell was one of these students -- the first person to die while enrolled as a student in Recreation and Parks since the creation of the department six years ago.

Silver Taps takes place on the central lawn before the Academic Building, at 10:30 P.M. As I walked quietly to this area along with hundreds of others, I couldn't help but notice the somber reverent mood created by the banning of traffic from campus streets and the extinguishing of all building and street lights. A bright moon illuminated the area, and a soft breeze that breathed wisps of high clouds across the moon's face heightened the mood.

No one speaks at Silver Taps. Several thousand students stood in the ghostly half-light, flanking sidewalks in rows and clusters awaiting the start of the ceremony. Organ music drifted on the breeze from the Memorial Student Center tower.

Exactly at 10:30, the muffled, measured beat of faraway boots announced the imminent arrival of the honor guard of Ross Volunteers. This elite group from the Corps of Cadets, comprising a rifle squad of 22 students, marching silently in funeral cadence, entered the area, formed, and on command fired three volleys into the sky.

As the echoes faded and died, the first tremulous notes of "Taps" came slowly in harmony with infinite poignancy

from three silver bugles played by Corps buglers from atop the dome of the Academic Building. Three times the bugles completed the haunting melody -- and the ceremony ended with a final phrase that seemed to say "Rest in Peace".

As I walked from the silent, emptying area, that final phrase kept repeating itself in my mind. I thought of the students, taking time from studies and other activities to assemble with heads bowed in memory of fellow students whose careers and potentialities had been interrupted by untimely deaths.

My thoughts turned to Bill Stell. A 1967 graduate in Horticulture, Bill immediately enrolled in Recreation and Resources Development. Bill proved to be enthusiastic and highly motivated -- in Texas parlance, "A goin' Jessie". He completed the required course work in record time and with his thesis research in draft form, Bill left Texas A&M to take over a job as Director of Parks for Clark County, Arkansas. In a short time, Bill's talents were seen by Roy Wood, Regional Director of the U.S. Bureau of Outdoor Recreation in Atlanta, Georgia, and Bill moved to that city to join Roy's staff. Bill was there, involved in numerous programs and activities, when a sudden heart attack cut short his brief career this past July.

Bill, in his modest and unassuming way, would have been the first to say, "I'm not that special". But the Silver Bugles playing taps sweetly in the moonlight tonight, demonstrated that he was special. Though not every one of the Aggies at Silver Taps had known Bill personally, they were there to pay tribute to him, and by their presence to say, "I honor you, brother Aggie, because you are someone special". And Bill was special because he was a relevant person -- relevant because he made a difference in things just because he was there. That kind of relevance, the day to day involvement of committing one's energies, talents, and potentialities, is the real mark of a dedicated professional. Bill did his level best with everything at his disposal. He did himself and all of us credit. The bugles can well sing, "Rest in Peace".