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Talarico, Hinojosa win Texas



Photo courtesy of Baylor Proud

How Baylor's oldest tradition built family from tragedy

ELLIOTT NACE
Assistant News Editor

One hundred seventeen years after its inception, Baylor Homecoming remains one of the university's best-known traditions. Thousands of Bears flock back to campus each year for a lighthearted, nostalgic, generations-spanning reunion.

This has not always been the case, however. From its spotty fledgling years to its ties to tragedy and the two world wars, the classic tradition Baylor shared with the nation began as a chance for students and alumni to combat the hardships of their day.

"I tell people all the time that the birth of the Baylor family was at that first homecoming in 1909," said Dr. Alan Lefever, director of the Texas Baptist Historical Collection and an adjunct professor of church history.

By 1909, former Baylor President Samuel Palmer Brooks had noticed the university now had two cohorts of alumni: one from the old Independence campus, which operated from its chartering in 1846 until 1886, and the other from the present-day Waco campus. Brooks' idea of a "home-coming" intended "to call the Baylor family together," Lefever said.

The inaugural homecoming, held Nov. 24-25, 1909, saw Baylor transport alumni from the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex via train and amass a cavalcade of over 100 vehicles for the parade. George Washington Truett, a Baylor alum and the contemporary pastor of the First Baptist Church in Dallas, traveled southwest to speak on campus that weekend.

Despite the scale of the festivities, Lefever explained how Baylor funded the entire event out of pocket, and how the cost contributed to homecoming's hiatus between 1910 and 1914.

"It was so expensive that we couldn't do it like we did the first time again," Lefever said.

The latter half of the 1910s, in large part due to the beginning of U.S. involvement in World War I in April 1917, saw Baylor students taken far away from home in service to their country.

Yet Baylor pride continued through campus traditions that remain in place today. After being deployed, a soldier entrusted the university with a bear he owned, named Ted, in fall 1917. Ted, also known as "Bruin," became Baylor's first live mascot.

Hardship struck Baylor again Jan. 22, 1927, as the Immortal Ten, a group of 10 basketball players on the road to a game against the University of Texas at Austin, were killed in an automobile collision.

Baylor had only 1,300 students in 1927, which further underscores the scale of the tragedy. The annual Mass Meeting, first held in 1928, commemorates the Ten and their memory by lighting the Eternal Flame torch each homecoming.

"That was the first major athletic tragedy on any campus in America," Lefever said. "No one had dealt with anything of that magnitude before. Because Baylor was small, chances are you knew one of the Ten if you went to Baylor."

The loss of the Ten and alumni during World War I motivated the university community to strengthen its spirit further. Homecoming, which was held sporadically and called "Good Will Week," adopted its modern name and status as an annual event in 1934.

Baylor held annual homecomings until 1943, when World War II deployments increased to the point that the university canceled the event until 1946.

"Celebrating something at a time when our country was at war seemed a little odd to some people," Lefever said. "You read those lampposts around campus, you look at those names — we lost people that people knew."

Although hostilities in the Pacific ended in September 1945, Baylor faculty and former President Pat Neff unanimously voted to postpone the event one more year because of the continued displacement of Baylor students come October.

"Neither President Neff nor the faculty members felt that it would be appropriate to name any day this year or any game this year 'home-coming' due to the fact that so many Baylor men are still overseas," according to a brief notice from the Oct. 5, 1945 edition of The Lariat.

Seattle freshman Alma Martinez said she couldn't picture Baylor culture without its many traditions such as homecoming.

"I had heard about [homecoming] before I even came here, so I feel like without it … Baylor would have some other stuff that we would be able to get involved in that's just as big," Martinez said.

Homecoming resumed in 1946 after its second major hiatus, with the 1946 event being the largest in Baylor's history at the time. While exact attendance numbers for the whole weekend are unknown, the front-page story of The Lariat's Oct. 29, 1946 edition reported that 19,000 people attended the football bout between the Bears and the Texas A&M Aggies.

"The homecoming of '46 is cathartic because the great tragedy [was] over," Lefever said. "[That] we'll remember those that were lost, but celebrate a bright future, is why we were so exuberant to have that homecoming in '46 as the biggest ever."

Lefever said that Baylor's pervasive identity comes from its handing down of history and tradition from past generations to the present.

"That's [why] homecoming is almost a living, breathing organization," Lefever said. "Because without it, in fact, I would dare say, if Baylor didn't have a homecoming, if we hadn't done it, the very identity and DNA of this school would not be the same."

Homecoming and Baylor football have also become integral to Waco commerce. When the University of Oklahoma and the University of Texas at Austin announced their departure from the Big 12 Athletic Conference in 2021, Lefever said concerns about the conference's possible dissolution led local businesses to lobby for Baylor to stay.

"I would say [leaving the Big 12] probably would affect how many people come in on every weekend — except one," Lefever said. "That would be homecoming because it doesn't matter. We could be playing six-man football, and it wouldn't matter to Baylor people on that one weekend. Everybody would be here."

Martinez, who has cousins who have attended Baylor, said the value of Baylor Homecoming comes not only from the football, but also from being able to "celebrate our school as a whole."

The type of student who goes to Baylor, she continued, influenced her final decision to enroll.

"I wanted to surround myself with people who were similar to me," Martinez said. "I feel like Baylor's culture is pretty significant in the sense of having big social events, and it's just a happy campus in general."

When Truett came to campus for the 1909 Baylor Homecoming, Lefever said he tweaked a familiar adage for his speech, saying that "where there is one Baylor person, there is Baylor."

"For a large majority of the people that come to our university, their lives are changed, and they go on to change the world in whatever they do," Lefever said. "Homecoming is a reminder of that for me, because I see so many of those people coming back and sharing their stories of how Baylor prepared them for what they're doing now."



Lariat file photo

BEAR COUNTRY Baylor Bears help light the annual homecoming bonfire.

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opinion

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Go on a short-term mission trip

MIM ROBBINS
Photographer

Mission trips challenge Christians to step out of their comfort zones, put their faith into action and lift their eyes beyond their home culture to see how God is at work in his bigger story among every tribe, tongue and nation.

I have been on five mission trips, and every one of them uniquely influenced me. Going on short term mission trips helped me grow in my faith, and I strongly encourage everyone to consider going on a mission trip as well.



I witnessed God's sovereignty in February 2026 on a trip to Bani, Dominican Republic with the partnered ministries FamilyLife and Filter of Hope. Filter of Hope partners with the local church in the Dominican Republic to connect mission teams with families in need of clean water.

Our group installed filters in the homes of the Bani people and shared the gospel with them. We used the filters to illustrate how, just as a filter removes harmful bacteria from water, God offers us salvation from sin through his son, Jesus Christ.

The families were astonished to learn that salvation is a free gift from God to anyone who believes in him.

On this trip, I grew in my faith by learning to be vulnerable and depend on the Lord, rather than my own performance. On the first day of filter distribution, I was nervous because I was serving as a group leader for the first time.

When my group entered our first home, things started to fall apart. I bumped into a wobbly table and knocked a small decoration to the dirt floor. It shattered to pieces. The kind woman remained welcoming and excited to receive her water filter, but then, matters got worse.

As we installed the water filter into the bucket, it began leaking because one of the screws was jammed. At that moment, I felt I had failed as a group leader because everything seemed to be going wrong.

However, the Lord used my weakness and mistakes to demonstrate his sovereignty. Because we were struggling with the filter, the woman's 20-year-old son came out of his room to help us fix the filter. When we transitioned into sharing the gospel, the son was curious and stayed to listen.

We were filled with joy and gratitude when both the mother and son accepted Christ that day. Even though it seemed like everything was going wrong, our mistakes created an opportunity for more people to hear the gospel.

This trip reminded me that I can try to do everything perfectly, but ultimately, God is the one who draws people to himself, according to his perfect plan.

Short-term mission trips also equip believers to share their faith both overseas and at home. Mission trips give Christians opportunities to practice sharing the gospel and telling their own story of knowing Jesus.

As we had conversations with people from backgrounds vastly different than our own, we became more confident in sharing our faith and talking about our own journey with the Lord. When we got home, we could continue to share the love of Jesus with people in their own communities who need to hear the gospel just as much as the unreached people overseas.

I still vividly remember my first mission trip to Cuba where I experienced a community without reliable access to clean water in their homes. At least one person in each household I visited had gotten seriously ill from the bacteria in the water. And yet, I was astonished by the joy these families displayed, regardless of the hardships they faced.

It was amazing to witness the delight on their faces when they heard the gospel. It is evident that God had been working in their hearts long before we arrived, and many put their faith in him.

My experience reflects what Spencer Hoyt writes in the article "The Benefits of Intentional Short-Term Service Trips" that, "Many participants will describe a heightened awareness of God's guidance, a humility that grows in the face of poverty, and a renewed gratitude for His provision."

Through witnessing the hardships these families faced and the joy they found in Christ, I developed a deeper appreciation for God's provision and learned to trust him more fully.

I encourage all to prayerfully consider going on a short-term mission trip. You will be amazed by the ways the Lord is able to work through you, even if you do not feel capable of sharing your faith or meeting new people of a different culture.

God works through imperfect, broken people for his glory and good. I encourage you to come as you are and witness how God is at work all over the world: in every tribe, tongue and nation.

Treasure those who make Baylor home

THE EDITORIAL BOARD

For most of Baylor's student body, this is the first chapter of life spent away from our hometowns and families.

With 35% of students from out of state in 2025, and Texas being so big, in-state students may feel like they are in a different part of the world. Adjusting to the realities of adult life can be difficult.

This homecoming season, we are reminded of our ties to our Baylor community. Whether professors and advisers, or roommates and friends, the Baylor Bears seem to be especially tight-knit this time of year.

Many of our relationships with peers likely started over something trivial. Perhaps a mundane assignment or lecture that felt a bit too long sparked the first conversation with a table mate. But before long, text conversations became coffee dates and short conversations after class turned into weekend trips visiting home together.

Ever so silently, we grew closer and closer. Strangers became coworkers and coworkers became friends, until those friends became our newfound family.

All the wins, big and small, will be celebrated with those people as well, like excitedly sharing when you did better than expected on an exam or when you finally receive a text back from that special someone.

In those seemingly sky-high dorm beds, if you roll out of the top bunk and fracture an ankle, your roommate will be the one to chauffeur you to the emergency room in the middle of the night. The inevitable drive to Dallas-Fort Worth might not be possible without a ride from one of your closest and most charitable friends.

Failing grades, breakups, loss of a loved one or some deeply emotional event will likely hit each of us at some point during our time at Baylor. Our community is often the one that picks up our broken pieces. Whether it's picking up dinner, check-in text messages or coffee catch-ups, it would be difficult to get through much without the support of those near.



Sarah Jane Matteck | Cartoonist

CAPTURE IT Whether you prefer to take your family photos in a field, on the beach or in a JC Penny studio, capturing the moment is always a good practice.

And of course, these relationships are a two-way street. Continually looking for ways to serve one another is a practical but charitable way to make friends. Raising the bar for your friendships, one act of generosity and kindness at a time, benefits us all as we navigate this new stage of life.

If you haven't quite found your group yet, don't fret. Developing true companionship takes time and often doesn't come as quickly as we'd like. Joining on-campus organizations is often a good place to start meeting like-minded people with similar interests and perspectives.

And while yes, we all are hoping to graduate with a diploma and a career plan, something more important might follow us instead. That something is, without a doubt, the people who will stand with us in all of life's most special moments. You might see them beside you blowing out their birthday candles, or next to you on your wedding day.

So for homecoming week, keep the theme of a home away from home in mind. While it's difficult to truly replace where your roots are planted, a newfound home of green, gold and chosen family feels good too.

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We've missed why people use AI therapy

MADY MIJARES
Photographer

I remember during my sophomore year of high school seeing YouTube shorts of people using character.ai to talk with their favorite fictional characters.

At first it was funny, then it progressively got weirder.



Some content creators went from using these fan-made bots for laughs and clicks, to companionship and sexual gratification. In the beginning of 2026, the number of users on character.ai indulging in pseudo relationships and living out fantasies with fictional characters skyrocketed to almost 200 million users.

Aside from fulfilling social needs, many internet users have also looked to AI for mental health support. However, this has not always shown to be entirely helpful.

Recently, character.ai filed bankruptcy following lawsuits with alleged ties to teen suicide. Google Gemini faced a wrongful-death lawsuit from a user forming a delusional attachment with the chatbot prior to committing suicide.

OpenAI faced a lawsuit where users were encouraged by ChatGPT to commit suicide. 1.2 million weekly users express suicidal thoughts and 80,000 users report experiencing mania and psychosis.

I noticed after Googling "Using AI as a therapist," that the AI overview made majority positive claims around using artificial intelligence as therapy. Specifically, it noted the immediate access, lower cost, removed stigma and ability to be terminated after use.

Traditional therapy without insurance ranges from $100-250/hr, while insurance included costs range from $20-50/hr. These costly sessions are timed, mental health has a history of stigma and sometimes, the therapists cannot always help you.

This is a major setback which leads many to confide in AI chatbots.

With artificial intelligence lacking the ability to formally diagnose and hold the user appropriately accountable, using it for therapy becomes increasingly more dangerous. Furthermore, without having an in-person conversation, the software cannot detect if the user is in active crisis, self harming or in a suicidal state.

From this, the Therabots can sometimes give harmful, toxic or incorrect advice during a time of need.

The Baylor Counseling Center has even added a section to the initial therapy consultation form including a questionnaire regarding if the patient had been using AI for counseling.

With users pleading for a connection, tapping into the AI world and conversing with a python script has shown to lead them down a much more self-deprecating route. Ultimately, the user builds a dependency on the AI Therabot and worsens the loneliness epidemic in highly vulnerable users.

A user on Reddit posted, "It feels crazy to say, but [I use] ChatGPT to console me. I'm honestly scared of losing touch with real relationships because I'm forming an attachment to an incorporeal AI."

But can you blame those who seek AI for companionship?

Using AI for intimacy is nothing new.

Candy.ai launched the AI Girlfriend app in 2023, appealing to an adult audience. Candy.ai markets to the public as, "Create Your Perfect AI Girlfriend or Boyfriend." With Candy.ai, you can share photos, videos and voice recordings together. The app launched right at the apex of the mental health and loneliness epidemic.

Our society is drowning in a mental health crisis resulting in Generation Z being coined as the loneliest and least resilient generation. 20-25% of young adults have reported to using chatbots for mental health advice or emotional support.

We shouldn't shame people for going lengths to use AI for company. This won't solve the root issue — it will make it worse.

We've all noticed ChatGPT's distinct locution: "You're not broken, you're just [ ]" or, "[...] and that takes courage; that doesn't make you weak, it makes you human."

For someone in such a vulnerable state, reading this can feel warm, validating and an escape from stricture and criticism.

35% of psychologists have patients who use AI to help with consoling, companionship, and self-affirmations.

We are missing the entire point of why people resort to AI for love and empathy. We are too critical, we call them cringe and immediately resort to judgment when considering those who resort to Therabots for emotional support.

We need to look deeper and have a desire to understand the root issue: this is a real dilemma and people are suffering. The last thing they need is another reason to stop talking and resort to AI bots.

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79 HOMECOMINGS & COUNTING

Baylor alumna says returning to campus every year is a 'no-brainer'

JOSH SIATKOWSKI
Lead Writer



Photo courtesy of Alice Curtis

BAYLOR IS HOME Alice Curtis, Class of 1952, sits at a bench outside the new Baptist Student Ministry with her name on it. She is returning for her 79th homecoming this November.

For most alumni, returning to campus for homecoming every few years is a commendable record of engagement. But Alice Curtis, Class of 1952, has an attendance streak that leaves most other alumni in the dust: Since 1948, she's been to 78 straight.

Curtis, 96, has experienced a lifetime of Baylor Homecomings. She was there in 1949 for the last season in the wooden grandstands of the Waco Municipal Stadium. She was there in 1974, when Grant Teaff led the turnaround that became the Miracle on the Brazos. She was there in 2010, the season in which Robert Griffin III took home Baylor's first and only Heisman Trophy.

And she'll be there Saturday with her season tickets to see interim Head Coach Joe Klanderman's first game in charge at McLane Stadium — for her 79th Baylor Homecoming.

"I really didn't make a certain decision," Curtis said of her streak. "I really didn't. I just like to be there with friends, and I'm close enough."

Today, Curtis lives in Fort Worth, in the same house she bought with her late husband Paul Curtis in the 1950s. After a decade teaching with her speech and education degree, she spent most of her career as a realtor. She retired from her 52 years in real estate only two years ago at age 94.

While the decision to keep coming back was more of an unconscious "no-brainer," she said, her arrival at Baylor was intentional. Born and raised in the South Texas town of Gonzales, Curtis knew only one other girl who went to Baylor. But as a devout Baptist, Curtis said that her interest in the university was likely guided by her own strong faith.

"I always, from the time I was little, wanted to go to Baylor," she said. "Don't ask me why. Any friends? No. I think I had enough preachers that came to our church, though. Maybe that planted that in my heart. Anyway, I never wanted to go anywhere else. My parents worked hard and made it possible."



Roundup file photo

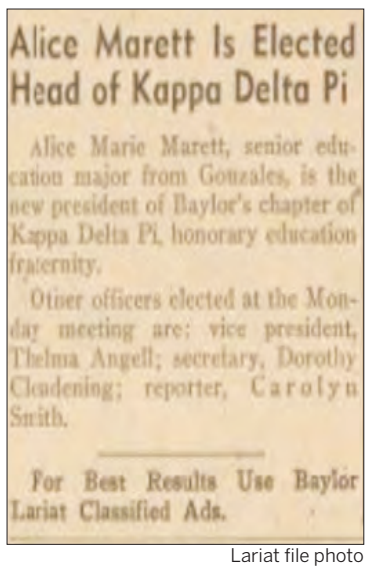
YEARBOOK Alice Marett's 1951 Roundup Yearbook photo. She graduated in 1952.

With her supportive parents, Curtis also made the journey to Waco of her own accord, graduating high school as valedictorian and earning a $75 scholarship.

In her nearly eight decades as a Baylor student or alumna, Curtis has made several friends and contributions in addition to her homecoming visits. Suzie Anderson Person ('90) grew up a close friend of Curtis, as her parents, Justice and Mary Ann Anderson, were friends from their college days.

In her lifetime, Curtis sold Person's parents their home after returning from mission work in Argentina, frequently attended Baylor football games with them and recently attended Person's son's wedding this past summer.

"I could go on and on," said Person, an international missionary along with her husband, Kirk Person ('87). "She is so grace-filled, loving, very encouraging with words, just such an encouragement. She's so positive, just such a positive attitude and thankful for blessings, thankful to God, but thankful to others."



Alice Marett Is Elected Head of Kappa Delta Pi

Alice Marie Marett, senior education major from Gonzales, is the new president of Baylor's chapter of Kappa Delta Pi, honorary education fraternity.

Other officers elected at the Monday meeting are: vice president, Thelma Angell; secretary, Dorothy Cleadening; reporter, Carolyn Smith.

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Lariat file photo

ANNOUNCE A notice run in the Sept. 28, 1951 edition of The Baylor Lariat announcing Alice Marett's leadership of Kappa Delta Pi.

One way Curtis shares her positive attitude, Person said, is by giving friends countless free tickets to Baylor games over the years.

"So many people have gotten to go to games with her in these more recent years, driving her down and just having that time together on the road, and … getting to share the joy of all the Baylor traditions with them too," she said.

Curtis has also remained actively involved in Baylor Baptist Student Ministries, which she joined as a student.

"She's been so instrumental in networking and giving to Baylor through the years ... I know most recently she was super excited about her involvement with the new Baptist Student Ministry building," Curtis said.

Curtis returned to campus in August to celebrate the dedication of the new building, and today, a bench outside campus honors her.

Over time, homecoming has changed for Curtis and for Baylor. From new stadiums to new traditions and new generations, today's homecoming celebrations vary greatly from those of 1948. But even as friends have passed and campus has changed, Curtis said that Baylor still "really does" feel like home.

"I've never had an unhappy time there," Curtis said. "I can really say that."

This Saturday, Curtis will continue a streak that only a pandemic could interrupt. And even in fall of 2020, when most of the world was on pause, Curtis put in enough effort to make a case that the streak still holds up.

"[COVID-19] was the only time [I wasn't on campus for homecoming]," she said. "Two friends of mine met in Hillsboro, took some decorations. We decorated a corner of a restaurant to celebrate."

With her dedication, positivity and generosity, Curtis has made a lasting impact on those who know her best.

"She's one of my heroes," Person said.



News

Texas chooses Talarico for US Senate seat over Paxton

TRIPP HENDERSON
Staff Writer

Democrat James Talarico defeated Republican Ken Paxton in the U.S. Senate race in Texas, becoming the first Democratic Senator from the state in 30 years.

Talarico's victory flipped a Senate seat for Democrats, adding to a host of blue victories across the country Tuesday, including Democrat Gina Hinojosa's upset win over Republican Greg Abbott in the gubernatorial race. Democrats now hold the majority in the House and Senate, giving them full control of Congress.



Caleb Garcia | Photo Editor

SENATOR U.S Senator elect James Talarico speaks about policy and campaign promises at the Hurd Welcome Center Sept. 17. He defeated Republican candidate Ken Paxton in the 2026 election.

On Tuesday night following the calling of the race, Talarico gave a speech at his Austin watch party to celebrate his Senate victory.

"We just took back Texas," Talarico said. "We just proved that all the money in the world is no match for the people of Texas; we just proved that a politics of division is no match for a politics of love."

Talarico looked to the future and called Texans to action.

"As this movement heads to the seat of power, as we head to the United States Senate, we know that this moment requires of us," Talarico said. "Texas, it's time to start flipping tables."

Houston senior Hanna Al-Hayek, president of Baylor College Democrats, said Talarico brings a new kind of energy to politics and does a good job bridging the gap between parties.

"I'm very excited about the changes that he'll be able to work towards, but I will say, the work doesn't end here," Al-Hayek said. "We still need to make sure that we are also energized and engaged because it doesn't end with voting."

Talarico, a 37-year-old Texas state legislator, based his campaign on making everyday life more affordable, expanding healthcare, getting big money out of politics and fighting corruption.

In September, Talarico stopped at Baylor to address a crowd of more than 1,000 Baylor students, faculty and staff.

"I think all the issues that young Texans face are the issues that are being ignored by our U.S. Senate, whether it's housing, whether it's jobs, whether it's higher education or debt," Talarico told The Lariat. "These are all the things that really impact young people in particular."

Talarico also discussed the role young voters play in the election.

"We are winning young voters across the state of Texas by an overwhelming margin, so I'm confident we're going to win here at Baylor, at colleges and universities across the state on Nov. 3rd," Talarico said.

Similarly, Al-Hayek said that young voters are "fed up" and they were motivated to show up to vote in the midterms.

The Texas Senate race was the most expensive in history, with total spending on campaign advertisements exceeding $570 million. Talarico outpaced Paxton in direct campaign fundraising, bringing in roughly $155 million to Paxton's $40 million.

In a post-election speech broadcast by FOX26, Paxton acknowledged his defeat.

"We have had a difficult night across the country, but it's not over," Paxton said.



Mesha Mittanasala | Photographer

GOVERNOR Gov. elect Gina Hinojosa speaks at the The Backyard Bar and Grill over her plans for Texas on Oct. 27. She won against incumbent Gov. Greg Abbott.

Hinojosa pulls off upset over Abbott in gubernatorial race

TRIPP HENDERSON
Staff Writer

Democrat Gina Hinojosa defeated incumbent Republican Greg Abbott on Tuesday to become Texas's first Democratic governor since 1995. Hinojosa's upset victory cut short Abbott's chances of becoming the longest-serving Texas governor.

Hinojosa's upset follows a string of blue victories across the country, including a historic win by Democrat James Talarico in the U.S. Senate race in Texas. Despite most polls favoring Democrats ahead of the midterm election, Democratic candidates nationwide outperformed expectations and secured control of both the House and Senate.

In a WFAA broadcast, Hinojosa spoke to supporters in Austin after her victory.

"Everything is bigger in Texas – and so is this win," Hinojosa said. "Texas, we have shocked the world tonight. With a Texas chip on our shoulder, we showed that anything is possible."

Hinojosa acknowledged the odds stacked against her in the election but said being the underdog did not discourage her.

"It never bothered me that they doubted me; it bothered me that they doubted us," Hinojosa said. "... Texas, my faith in you never wavered."

Hinojosa said Abbott called her to congratulate her on the victory and offer his help as she steps into her new role. In a speech at his watch party in Texas, Abbott also mentioned the phone call.

"There are still votes to be counted, but mathematically we're not going to be able to win this election," Abbott said. "I let Gina know that I would assist her and her team in a period of transition."

Hinojosa has run a campaign focused on supporting Texas schools and putting money back into Texans' pockets. In late October, Hinojosa visited Waco to highlight her priorities and encourage voters.

"Come Nov. 3rd, we will end Greg Abbott's 30-year-old career," Hinojosa told supporters in Waco. "When I am governor … my agenda will be to secure the American dream."

Hinojosa also said that as governor, she would suspend the gas and diesel tax, freeze electricity rates, fire Commissioner of Education Mike Morath and give every Texas household $1,500 as a "corruption tax refund."

Hinojosa will officially take office and replace Abbott's 12-year tenure as governor in January 2027.



On-campus polling location gives Baylor students easier access to midterm voting

JOANA KAROSHI
Staff Writer

BECKETT RAKES
Staff Writer

Baylor students could cast ballots at the Hurd Welcome Center Tuesday, where an on-campus polling location offered a convenient way to participate in a midterm election with major implications for Texas and the nation.

The election features a closely watched U.S. Senate race between Republican Ken Paxton and Democrat James Talarico. The contest, which could help determine control of the Senate, has become the most expensive nonpresidential race in U.S. history, with approximately $573 million in advertising spending.

The Hurd became a voting location on Nov. 7, 2023. For students balancing classes, midterms and other responsibilities, an on-campus polling location offered a chance to vote without traveling elsewhere.

Fort Worth sophomore Luc Nguyen said having a polling location in the Hurd made it easier to fit voting into his midterm schedule.

"Everyone's busy, so the fact that we had a polling location right here in the Hurd is a very big reason why I'm here today," Nguyen said.

Nguyen said he also wanted to participate in an election beyond presidential races, noting that many people tend to vote only when a major election is taking place.

He said on-campus polling locations are particularly important for students who do not have reliable access to transportation.

"Not everyone has the same access to transportation," Nguyen said. "Having a location on campus where a student can say in between classes ... to go out to vote and then come back is very important."

San Antonio senior Shay Wiseman said she has become more interested in politics as graduation approaches and she begins thinking about life after college.

"Since I'm graduating soon, I'm like, 'OK, I'm going to be on my own in a little bit, and I gotta start thinking about my future,'" Wiseman said.

Wiseman said she wanted to have a say in what the future would look like and felt voting was a way to make her voice heard.

Wiseman, who was voting for the second time, said she believes universities have an important role in making voting accessible to students.

"I think it's so important because it's very accessible," Wiseman said.

Katy senior Mari Allen said the current political climate and its effects influenced her decision to vote.

"I feel like it is kind of our duty as citizens to help others," Allen said.

Allen specifically identified abortion rights and immigration as issues that influenced her decision. She also said having a polling location on campus made voting easier, particularly for students unfamiliar with the surrounding area or without transportation.

"It's just a simpler way, and it's more accessible," Allen said.

Olivia Thompson, a program manager for Baylor's academic resources, also highlighted the importance of providing students with access to an on-campus polling location.

Thompson said having a polling place on campus removes a potential transportation barrier for students who might otherwise have to travel elsewhere to vote.

"It removes a barrier for their students who maybe don't have transportation to go off-campus," Thompson said.

For Wiseman, voting is also an opportunity to have a say in the future she will soon enter after graduating.

"It's important to have my voice be heard," Wiseman said.



Caleb Garcia | Photo Editor
POLITICAL ACCESS A collection of election ads stands outside the Mark and Paula Hurd Welcome Center for Election Day Tuesday.



Layla Bazan | Photographer
ANTICIPATION Members of the McLennan County Democrats gather together to watch the midterm elections Tuesday night.



Vanessa Adams | Photographer
POLITICAL PARTY Relected Texas Representative, Pat Curry, held an election watch party at Waco's Urban Air Tuesday.



Lily LeMaire | Photo Intern
RE-ELECTED Congressman Pete Sessions speaks with his supporters at the Salty Dog bar and grill Tuesday evening.

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Caleb Garcia | Photo Editor

BACK ON THE FIELD Three Baylor Sigma Chi members ring the Bear Bell and drive it across the field in Baylor's 36-19 win over Louisiana Tech Sept. 19 at McLane Stadium.

LET VICTORY RING

How the Bear Bell went from storage to gameday tradition

JEFFREY COHEN
Sports Editor

It had been about two decades since the Bear Bell roamed the field of Floyd Casey Stadium.

A tradition that originated in the early 1970s had drifted into obscurity and was eventually forgotten. Baylor Sigma Chi, the owner of the bell, had taken a hit just like its lost custom, getting removed from campus in 2010.

At the end of the five-year hiatus, Sigma Chi was looking back to its roots. The members stumbled across the Bear Bell, sitting in a storage closet and collecting dust. The sight of the bell brought decades of memories flooding back.

That rediscovery led the Bear Bell from a forgotten glimpse of the past to a game day tradition in the last 10 years, working with Athletic Director Doug McNamee to bring it back to the field.

"With Doug McNamee coming in, having an understanding, talking with mutual friends of his that were Sigma Chi's and others, I'm sure he was really the catalyst for it coming back full time," Sigma Chi Advisor Mike Lively said.

The bell was used sparingly outside of Sigma Chi's events since 2015. It made a comeback in the 2017 Homecoming parade as a part of the fraternity's float. It had gone between storage and being used, appearing in the 2023 parade and in the Bears' win over TCU in 2024.

"We moved it over to a storage unit so that we could still bring it out," Lively said. "When I saw it in 2022, I was like, 'What are we doing with this thing? Why are we still not utilizing it?' And so, I just started asking questions and I was like, 'OK, 2023, let's try and see if we can get the Bear Bell back into the homecoming parade."

Baylor announced in late August that the Bear Bell would return to being on the sidelines of every home game for the first time in 25 years. The news created a spark to Sigma Chi, and that energy grew until some of the members got to finally see the bell before Baylor's home opener against Prairie View A&M.

"The week before the game, we got to go out to McLane, walk the field with it and see it," Sigma Chi President James Kennedy said. "We probably had 10 guys there, and every single dude was excited, high-fiving each other. ... This is something that this is a huge step not only first for the fraternity, but for Baylor as a whole."



Photo courtesy of Baylor Sigma Chi

IN ITS HEYDAY Four Baylor Sigma Chi alumni, known as the "Keepers of the Bell," pose with the Bear Bell nearly 50 years ago.

The tradition began in 1972 — the first year of legendary head coach Grant Teaff's tenure — and since its resurgence, the bell has been a driving factor in bringing support and excitement from past Baylor classes.

"The alumni were excited to see it, to hear it ring again," Lively said. "It was a connecting piece from alumni of the past and hopefully connects that to the present and then to the future. Bears that come along, that they have a remembrance as a kid. And now that they're a student, they remember, and now they're excited when they see it."

Former Bears are not afraid to show their support and appreciation for the Bear Bell's return. The bell has become a celebrity outside of McLane Stadium.

"You get there three hours before you're ready for the Bear Walk," Weiler said. "We're talking to alumni tailgates that are around there. They're all coming up talking to us, asking about the bell, and they're taking us to their tailgates, introducing us to anybody."

Bringing the custom back has also become a renewed honor for Sigma Chi, being one of the few student organizations that play a notable role on game days, just like it did decades ago.

It has become more of a selling point for the fraternity since it returned to the gridiron. While it was mainly being used during its rush events and bid day, the members now want to be one of the few who are with the bell each home game.

Houston senior Miles Weiler is with the Bear Bell each game, but the other members have to be chosen in a raffle to get the honor of keeping the bell.

"We all have so much pride in it," Houston senior Miles Weiler said. "All the guys in the chapter are fighting to get the three positions that are always on the field with me."

That sense of pride does not come from just one group of members generating this change. It comes from years of members trying to revive the tradition as it faded in the 2000s and vied to bring it back in the past decade, incldluing Sigma Chi's faculty advisor Dr. Herb Cox.

"There's thousands of alumni that have come through here and fought for this," Kennedy said. "We're so excited for the years to come. We've got so many ideas of how we can incorporate the Bear Bell. ... Whether it's rush or whether it's philanthropy events, having it out on Fountain Mall, I think the Bear Bell represents just more than a fraternity. It's definitely a Baylor tradition."

While the bell has remained in Waco for the past couple of decades, it traveled the country in its heyday. Sigma Chi members hitched it to the back of their cars and hit the road, letting it ring at some of college football's most iconic venues.

"Guys were telling stories about the back of their Cutlass," Lively said. "They had the Bear Bell going to Arkansas and the Peach Bowl in Georgia and, and in '85, it was at the Independence Bowl. And so, it's traveled; it used to go to all the games, used to even go to A&M and Houston and all over the place."

The Bear Bell's goal is to allow alumni to reminisce on some of the memorable moments from Baylor football's history. It serves as a way to connect those past memories to the ones that the Bears can create today.

"I want the alumni that come back that they hear that Bear Bell ring again or they hear that horn again," Lively said. "[I hope] it takes them back to the BYU victory in 1985 or '83 or it takes them back to 1986 when we're 8-0 and they can remember the days of Grant Teaff."



Photo courtesy of Baylor Sigma Chi

DUSTED UP The Bear Bell was found in a storage unit, covered in dust after years of not being used before Sigma Chi returned to Baylor's campus in 2015.

BASKETBALL DOWN THE BRAZOS

Chatman reminisces on journey from McLennan CC to Baylor

CARSON VERCOE
Sports Writer

Senior forward Evan Chatman's path to Baylor men's basketball was a winding road with multiple stops along the way. Before getting his shot on the biggest stage and repping the green and gold, Chatman's college career started 6.8 miles down the road.

Coming out of Harker Heights High School, Chatman was a "late bloomer" and was an unrated recruit according to 247 Sports. McLennan Community College was the only spot that gave Chatman an opportunity to continue his basketball career.

"They were the only school who kind of gave me a chance, honestly," Chatman said.

Chatman soon found more than just a basketball program at McLennan.

"It was like a family," Chatman said. "I still keep up with them. That just made my whole journey easier, especially being a freshman. I didn't know what to expect, but McLennan just made it easy and made it feel like a home."



Photo courtesy of MCC Athletics

Chatman arrived at McLennan with talent but needed to grow into that talent and find his love and passion for the game.

"He was a very skilled player," McLennan basketball head coach Kevin Gill said. "He liked basketball, but I don't know if he loved it."

Gill added that Chatman preferred being on the perimeter, relying on 3-pointers rather than being a physical player. As his collegiate career progressed, he became a dominant inside the paint.

Chatman gained experience throughout his freshman season and earned more playing time with each game.

On Dec. 28, 2023, Chatman suited up with the Highlanders for the biggest game of the season against No. 2 Salt Lake Community College.

Chatman started the game, but after five minutes of play he left the game with a broken foot, ending his season after 12 games.

While the injury could have been seen as a major obstacle, Gill felt it gave Chatman the push he needed to fall in love with the game.

"Sitting on the sideline watching those guys, he developed a real passion for the game, and I think he fell in love with it," Gill said.

For Chatman the injury put something into perspective that he hadn't thought much about before.

"When I broke my foot, I realized that this isn't forever and I wouldn't be able to play forever," Chatman said. "I needed to take it serious and from there on it made me a better person overall."

In his sophomore season Chatman became the player coach Gill knew he could be. Chatman averaged 15.5 points per game along 7.5 rebounds, improving on his physicality down low.

"He was a winner," Gill said. "He wanted to win no matter what he was playing, inside, playing outside, guarding guards, guarding bigger guys."

Gill is not the only coach to have noticed Chatman's want to win. Head coach Scott Drew noted that Chatman and his team love to win coming off exhibition wins over No. 1 Florida and No. 3 Illinois.

"'Is it about me and my numbers or is it about our team and winning?' And we got a lot of guys that it's about the team and winning," Scott Drew said.

Aside from being physical, Chatman possessed a high basketball IQ that helped him all season long.

"He had a good IQ for the game where he was really coachable," Gill said. "Then he became a pretty good scorer as well, so he became a complete basketball player."

Those things stuck with Chatman when he transferred to UAB following the 2024-25 season.

Chatman averaged 8.8 points and 8.8 rebounds a game with the Blazers, continuing to flash his ability to crash the boards. He finished with 281 total rebounds, ranking fourth in the American Conference.

The journey through McLennan and UAB taught Chatman to be confident in his abilities even when the odds are stacked against him.

"Playing at different schools, you always have to recruit yourself, and that's never easy for anybody," Chatman said. "Just realizing it's a part of the process."

This mindset brought Chatman back to Waco, this time representing a different team.

When Chatman got the opportunity to play at Baylor, it was one he couldn't believe was real. The fact Chatman started at a junior college and made his way to a Power Four conference team was one he had to sit back and admire.

"Honestly, it didn't feel real at first," Chatman said. "I was surprised. The first week after I saw it, I couldn't believe it. I was like, man, I'm really about to play at home at the highest level."

The transfer has allowed Chatman the opportunity to compete at the highest level, something he had been working for since he first stepped on the court as a Highlander.

"When I was coming here, as long as I have an opportunity, that's all I need," Chatman said. "It seems like I do, so I just get a chance to compete."



Layla Bazan | Photographer

BALLIN' Senior forward Evan Chatman boxes out Jayden Nesbitt during Baylor's 87-65 win over Northwestern State Monday night at Foster Pavilion.

Chatman feels the difference between him at McLennan to the player he is now is his something you could only get from playing at many different levels of college.

"I understand basketball a little bit more," Chatman said. " I could make it easier on myself by playing smarter instead of hard sometimes in certain situations. I know what can work in a situation, what I need to do and when to do it."

For Gill seeing Chatman is a good reminder for the things that can happen when a player believes he can do great things.

"He put in a lot of work, and he believed in himself," Gill said. "He took coaching, and he let us coach him. He wanted to reach the highest level he could, and he has."

Now, Chatman gets to shine on the biggest level. For Chatman the feeling of wearing Baylor across the chest is one of the best feelings.

"I just love the fact that I can play with Baylor at home," Chatman said. "I'm just happy that I get to wear that name on my chest."

Chatman was just a player who was overlooked at McLennan, but now at Baylor, Chatman is proving that all some people need is one shot.



Courtesy of Baylor Athletics

WELCOME HOME Baylor volleyball alumni return to the Ferrell Center Sept. 27, 2025 during the Bears 3-2 victory over TCU.



Courtesy of Baylor Athletics

HAVE FAITH Baylor volleyball alumna Faith Lynch has returned to the volleyball world as a broadcaster for ESPN+.

VB welcomes revered alumni home for 'family reunion'

BENNETT PARKER
Sports Writer

Baylor is known as one of the premier volleyball destinations across the country. The Bears have been a mainstay in the national rankings for the past decade, but perhaps the program's greatest asset comes after a player's career.

Baylor volleyball expectantly waits to welcome its alumni back to the Ferrell Center with homecoming on the horizon. Head coach Ryan McGuyre has poured the foundation for his family of alumni, and reconnecting is one of the highlights of the season.

"So excited to see alumni," McGuyre said. "The Baylor volleyball family is something special. They're coming back for it, too. So many friendships, memories. And they're all a part of each other. It's not like we are plucking them out of here and there."

McGuyre's program brags about its alumni when attracting new players. Teammates build strong fellowship with each other and Baylor volleyball intends to extend that far beyond their playing days.

"It is a family reunion," McGuyre said. "Personally, it brings back joyful tears, cherished memories, different experiences ... We get to battle together, joke together. I'm looking forward to seeing them."

McGuyre has helped establish the One Way Club, which serves to invest in the volleyball program, its players and its coaches. The name stems from McGuyre's emphasis on building a single identity and play style within the team.

Baylor volleyball alum Faith Lynch recognizes it as one of the primary ways McGuyre continues to build culture with the alumni.

"Our One Way Club is called One Way because [McGuyre] asks us to play one way," Lynch said. "We follow the Lord one way. We play volleyball one way. We do everything one way. I think that just bleeds into post-volleyball life. I've spent so much time and dedicated so much time with these girls and this team and this staff that I want to continue to be a part of it."

Lynch is a sixth-generation Baylor Bear who played all four years of her volleyball career at Baylor from 2021 to 2024. She currently works as a freelance broadcaster for ESPN+, calling games for the Bears has helped her keep Baylor volleyball and its people close.

"Getting to walk through life with my teammates is something that I think is really cool," Lynch said. "Getting to do post-volleyball life with them. I knew I'd still be close with them, but we have truly still been a family, getting to different stages of life together."

Many of Lynch's teammates have gotten married and are starting families, but the community they built in college hasn't left them; homecoming weekend offers them the opportunity to reunite. McGuyre only has a few years with each of his players but, he has a clear goal for them that goes beyond their athletic careers.

"I want these women to be powerful women of influence that can graduate as Christ-like warriors that glorify the Lord," McGuyre said. "And it's been fun because the other ones that graduated are all getting married, and there are more and more babies coming around from our alumni. That also excites me, just to see the joy."

NCAA athletics have been shaken by the introduction of NIL; one of the fallouts of the changes is the decrease in alumni that spent multiple years of their collegiate career at one school. Fortunately for Baylor, the foundation had already been built.

"In the day and age of NIL and just college athletics in general, alumni are so far and few between now," Lynch said. "When you do have a true four-year letter winner or someone that has a degree from Baylor, you want to keep them involved. Coach [McGuyre] and his staff really see the value of that and how much we can pour back into the program. I know for me, I want Baylor volleyball to be great forever."

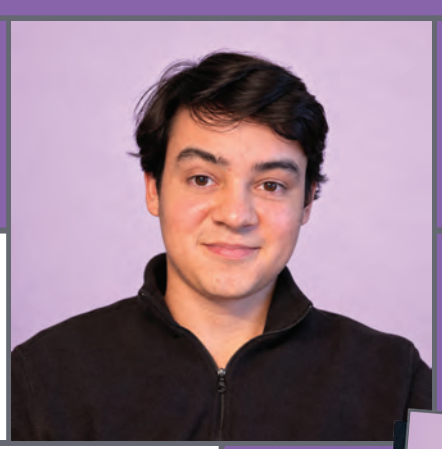
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A TRADITION



Photo courtesy of Baylor University Archives - Athletics

BEAT THE FROGS Running back Alfred Anderson evades pressure from TCU's defensive line in Baylor's 56-21 win over the Horned Frogs on Oct. 22, 1983 at Floyd Casey Stadium.



Lariat file photo

PAINT IT GREEN Baylor fans root on the Bears by painting "Sic 'em Bears" across their chests in Baylor's 71-7 win over Iowa State on Oct. 19, 2013 at Floyd Casey Stadium.



Lariat file photo

THERE HE GOES Senior running back Dawson Pendergrass breaks free for a touchdown run in Baylor's 38-28 win over Oklahoma State on Oct. 26, 2024 at McLane Stadium.



Lariat file photo

GET FIRED UP Baylor players run onto the field past the Baylor Line before the Bears' 30-3 win over UCF on Nov.1, 2025 at McLane Stadium.



Roundup file photo

ON A PEDESTAL Members of the Baylor Line hold up Bruiser on a platform during Baylor's 28-0 loss to Texas Tech on Oct. 29, 2005 at Floyd Casey Stadium.



Photo courtesy of Baylor University Archives - Athletics

CREATING THE PATH Offensive lineman Frank Ditta leads the way for running back Alfred Anderson in Baylor's 42-15 win over Arkansas on Nov. 8, 1980 at Floyd Casey Stadium.



Associated Press

WELCOME TO MCLANE Quarterback Bryce Petty hands the ball off to running back Shock Linwood in Baylor's 60-14 win over Kansas on Nov. 1, 2014 at McLane Stadium. The blowout marked the first homecoming football game at McLane Stadium.



Lariat file photo

PURE DOMINATION Quarterback Bryce Petty slings the ball against Iowa State in Baylor's 71-7 win over the Cyclones on Oct. 19, 2013. The 64-point win marked the largest in Baylor Homecoming history and bid farewell as the final homecoming game at Floyd Casey Stadium.

LIKE NO OTHER

Revisiting Baylor's 71-7 win over Iowa State

CARSON VERCOE
Sports Writer

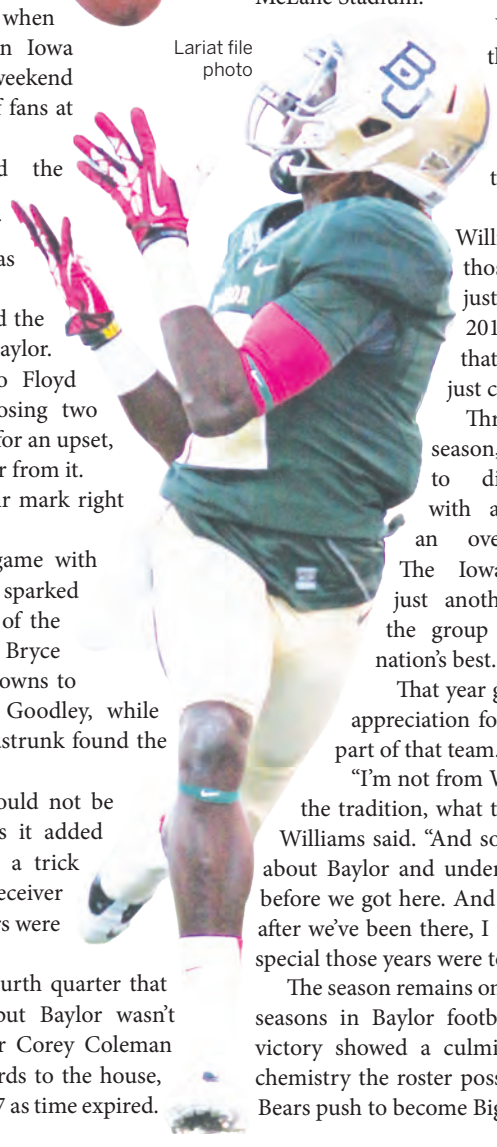
Big 12 football in 2013 could be described in only one way: high-scoring.

The offensive firepower in the conference was routinely put on display every week, with teams scoring 40 points on the regular. No team displayed this offensive firepower quite like the 2013 Baylor Bears.

The Bears surpassed 70 points on four occasions that season, averaging 52.4 points per game and 618.8 yards per game, of which both led the nation.

Having one of the nation's best offenses was a catalyst for the Bears to win their first Big 12 title.

That offense was on full display Oct. 19, 2013, when No. 12 Baylor took on Iowa State on homecoming weekend in front of thousands of fans at Floyd Casey Stadium.



Lariat file photo

The Bears entered the matchup undefeated on the season, coming off a 35-25 win over Kansas State the week before.

The Cyclones entered the matchup opposite to Baylor. Iowa State walked into Floyd Casey Stadium after losing two straight games, looking for an upset, but what they got was far from it.

The Bears made their mark right from kickoff.

Baylor started the game with a touchdown drive that sparked the offense for the rest of the game. Quarterback Bryce Petty threw two touchdowns to wide receiver Antwan Goodley, while running back Lache Seastrunk found the end zone twice.

The Bears offense could not be stopped all first half as it added another touchdown on a trick play from Petty to wide receiver Levi Norwood. The Bears were up 37-0 at halftime.

It wasn't until the fourth quarter that the Cyclones scored, but Baylor wasn't done yet. Wide receiver Corey Coleman returned the kick 97 yards to the house, putting the Bears up 71-7 as time expired.

"I think the biggest moment, the biggest real moment in the game was watching Corey take their kick back," cornerback Joe Williams told the Lariat.

The Bears finished with 714 yards of total offense with 10 total touchdowns, but it wasn't all about the offense.

Baylor held Iowa State to a total of 174 yards while also forcing three turnovers, including an interception by Williams.

"He ran a simple comeback route," Williams said. "Once I turned and played the route ... the quarterback was releasing the ball."

The win helped the Bears get to 6-0 for the first time since 1980 and fueled the push towards becoming Big 12 champions. It bid an appropriate farewell to Floyd Casey Stadium as the final homecoming game before moving to McLane Stadium.

When reflecting on the special group from 2013, Williams felt the years prior were what allowed that team to be special.

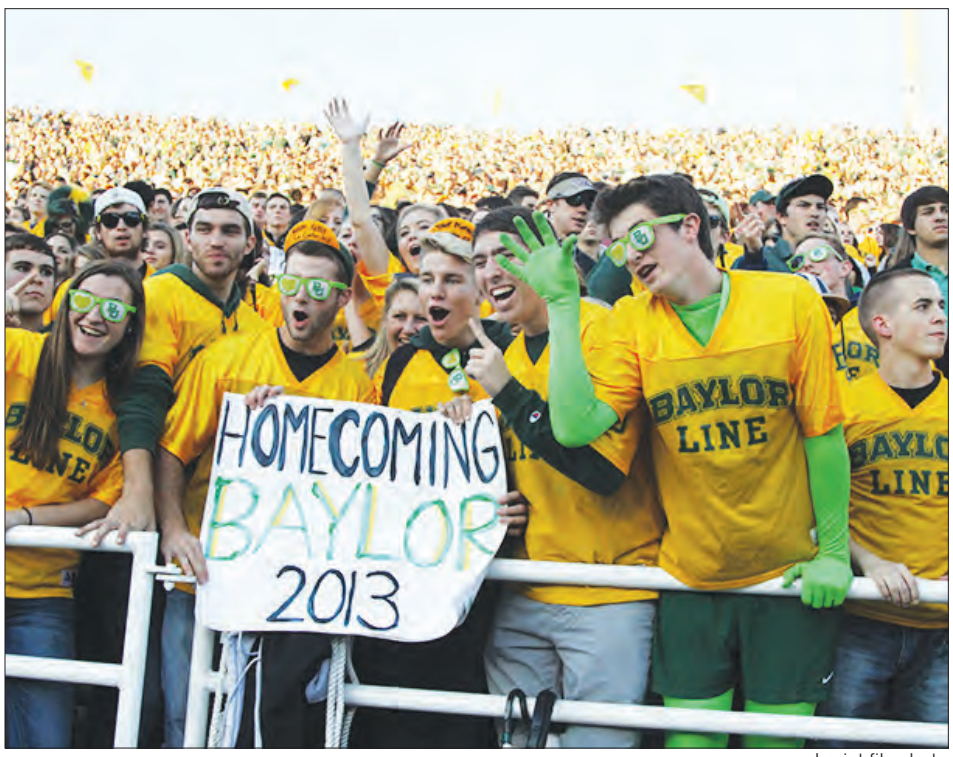
"It started in 2011," Williams said. "From what those seniors left to us, we just carried that through 2012. Midway through that season, everything just came together."

Throughout the 2013 season, the Bears continued to dismantle opponents with a solid defense and an overwhelming offense. The Iowa State game was just another example of how the group became one of the nation's best.

That year gave the players a new appreciation for Baylor after being a part of that team.

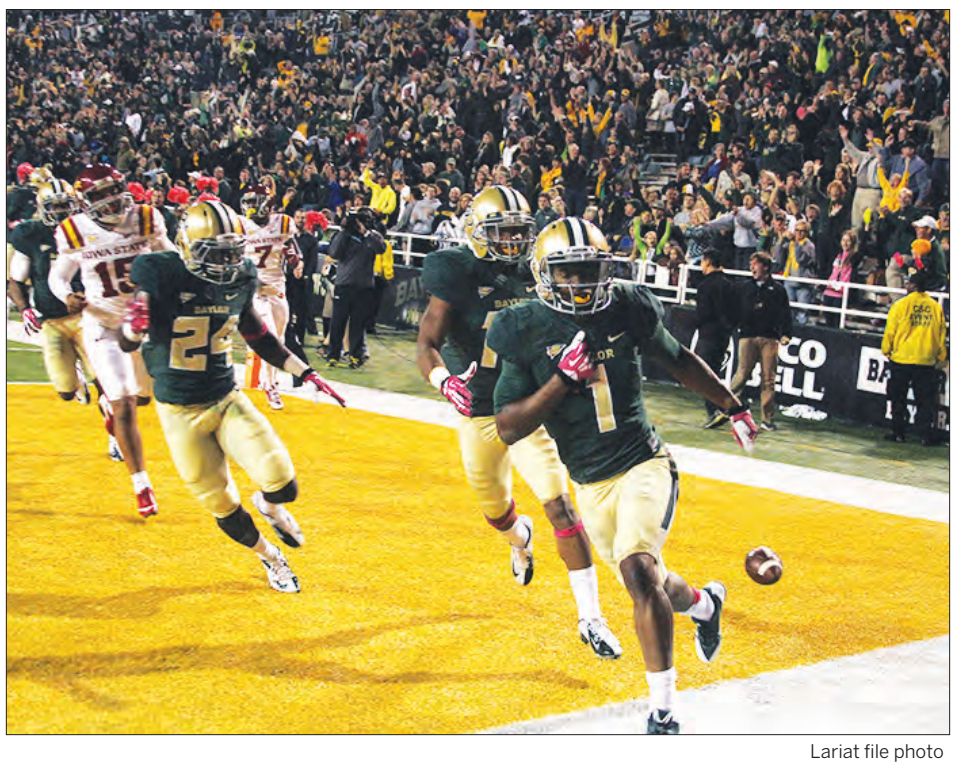
"I'm not from Waco, so I didn't know the tradition, what they've been through," Williams said. "And so just kind of learning about Baylor and understanding what it was before we got here. And now seeing what it is after we've been there, I truly understand how special those years were to Baylor."

The season remains one of the most defining seasons in Baylor football history. The 71-7 victory showed a culmination of talent and chemistry the roster possessed and helped the Bears push to become Big 12 champions.



Lariat file photo

PACK THE STANDS Members of the Baylor Line hold up a sign for Baylor Homecoming while they cheer on the Bears during their 71-7 win over Iowa State.



Lariat file photo

TO THE HOUSE Corey Coleman celebrates in the end zone after a 97-yard kickoff return to cap off the 71-7 homecoming win over Iowa State.

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Sports

How a program rebuild shaped former Baylor soccer player HANNA GILMORE



Lariat file photo

CARSON VERCOE
Sports Writer

When former Baylor soccer star Hanna Gilmore arrived in Waco in 2009, she saw a program that was in the depths of a lengthy rebuild.

The Bears entered that year not having a winning season since 2000 and had not reached the NCAA Tournament since 1999.

The tides immediately changed once Gilmore's freshman class came in. Baylor had four winning records in her four-year stint, reaching the NCAA Tournament for the first time this century in 2011.

The team's success culminated in Gilmore's senior season. The Bears sweated out a Round of 32 win over No. 14 Georgetown for a date with No. 13 North Carolina for the program's first Sweet 16 trip.

The historic season ended there in Chapel Hill, but the memory of her team has remained with Gilmore 14 years later.

"Those were awesome moments just from a success standpoint in the soccer world," Gilmore said. "To be able to accomplish that, starting from where we were freshman year to our senior year was great."

Gilmore knew Baylor wasn't a powerhouse when she arrived, but she saw an opportunity to build something special, and that was something she couldn't pass up.

"The thing that initially brought me to Baylor was, one, Marci and Paul [Jobson] were great coaches, and they really invested in their players," Gilmore said. "And two, it was a developing program, and I knew that I would get to have a hand in potentially being a piece that got a program to success."

Players like Gilmore were key to the vision the Jobsons were trying to build at Baylor. They knew they had to add players who believed there could be success in Waco.

"We had a group of kids who committed during a time where we were rebuilding a program," Paul Jobson said. "They believed in a vision that we set forward. Nothing was proven. We just said, 'Hey, we think this is something that we can do.'"

Gilmore bought into the program and did everything she could to make it work.

"Her and her teammates, their fingerprints are all over the success of Baylor soccer," Jobson said.

The Bears didn't possess a handful of stars due to the program rebuilding, but they relied on taking pride in the team and each other on the pitch.

"We were more of a blue-collar team," Gilmore said. "We had no superstars. We all worked together and worked hard."

Jobson agreed with Gilmore's description of the team, adding that Baylor was the only option for lots of the players from those years.

"These were players that got bypassed by basically all the other programs in the Big 12 or, at the time, the Power Five conferences," Jobson said. "Nobody thought they were good enough to play at this level. And we believed in them, and they believed in themselves."

This mentality was instilled in every player, including Gilmore. That chip on their shoulders helped bring the team together. The Bears had become a team with Big 12 championship potential by Gilmore's senior season in 2012.

The success showed years of hard work that Gilmore and her teammates spent putting into the program. She had seen everything from sitting toward the bottom of the conference to rising on the national stage. The tournament run in 2012 was not just built in one season; it was built in the previous four.

For Gilmore, the influence of her coaches and team went far beyond what the game of soccer could give her. The culture the team created was an environment where Gilmore could thrive spiritually. Through the culture the way the team went into games was an expression of their faith.

"If you're using God's talent and abilities, it's an act of worship at that point," Jobson said. "You're not really playing for your coach. Yes, you're playing for your teammates, but ultimately, you're playing for your creator."

The players internalized that idea of incorporating faith into their competition.

"Marci and Paul instilled this idea of putting God into the way that you played and who you were," Gilmore said. "How you play soccer was how you can be off the field, too."

Baylor gave Marci and Paul a platform where their faith could create a culture around the team and its identity.

"One of the things that attracted Marci and I to Baylor was that we were going to be able to really be outward in our faith in building a culture that could embrace Christ and help develop young people through that," Paul said.

This approach showed Gilmore that competing at a high level and caring for the well-being of those around her could coexist.

"You can be really tough and try really hard and love people and try to win and be your best and be excellent," Gilmore said.

Gilmore added that with this mindset, she learned to love her teammates while playing right beside them. This became a key aspect of her personal growth while in Waco.

One lesson from former head coach Marci Jobson also stuck with Gilmore beyond her days of playing soccer.

"Learn the battle now, or else you're going to have to learn it later," Gilmore said.

Gilmore continues to use the advice about mental toughness she developed from her playing days now as a mother of four. The importance of staying strong and trusting the process has been important, although the challenges may not be the same.

Although soccer is no longer in her life, Gilmore still views Baylor soccer as a special program. The program may look different now compared to 2009, but Gilmore still believes representing Baylor soccer is important.

"Baylor soccer is always special," Gilmore said. "It's a privilege, and it's a responsibility."

During her time in Waco, Baylor soccer gave Gilmore lots of memories of goals, wins and friendships, but what her coaches gave her was something more. As a freshman, Gilmore walked in looking to build a program from the ground up, and when she left she did just that through faith, hard work, and perseverance.



Underwhelming performances, impact mark Aranda's tenure

JEFFREY COHEN
Sports Editor



Layla Bazan | Photographer

FINAL STAND Former head coach Dave Aranda runs onto the field before Baylor's 17-6 loss to TCU on Oct. 17 at McLane Stadium. The defeat was Aranda's second-to-last game before being fired.

Following the announcement that Baylor fired head coach Dave Aranda, he had one more chance to talk to his team. The last moments of his seven-year tenure at Baylor were described by his appreciation for his players.

"He just shared his gratitude, his thankfulness for what we've meant to him and the things that we've been able to do for him over the years," fifth-year safety Michael Allen said.

Aranda's time saw its highs and lows, leaving the Bears' fanbase restless for on-field success. While a coach is ultimately measured by his wins and losses, the job allows him to make a profound impact on hundreds of players each year, and Aranda embraced that.

Aranda faced backlash throughout his time in Waco after the Bears' historic 2021 season. Baylor failed to reach a .500 record and a bowl game in three of the last four seasons, leaving a sour taste from the underwhelming and disappointing finishes.

"I think he's great, but 40 and 40 [record], I think it's time for a change at that head coach position," Waianae, Hawaii, senior Boston Opetaia said.

One of the primary critiques of Aranda as a leader was his stoic demeanor on the sideline. Fans looked to the Baylor bench over the past few years and saw Aranda standing with a relatively nondescript expression.

Some fans attributed the Bears' lack of energy at times throughout Aranda's tenure to his absence of animated leadership. It got to a tipping point in Baylor's 17-6 loss to TCU.

"During the TCU game … our guys on the sideline, what was going on there?" Westlake junior Jack Willbanks said. "There was no energy, not a single bit of energy. I'm going to go ahead and credit that to Dave Aranda."

The players never gave up on Aranda, despite the Baylor faithful not being sold on Aranda the years after winning the Big 12 Championship.

"Our team really rallied," Greer said. "They wanted to play well for Coach Aranda."

That sense of fight stemmed from Aranda's effect on the guys that played for him.

Aranda gave players and coaches a sense of belonging, and even a calling, when they arrived in Waco.

"When this opportunity presented itself through Coach Aranda, just something inside of me felt like this was right to be here in Waco, to be at Baylor," interim head coach Joe Klanderman said.

Klanderman had job security and a grounded life at Kansas State, serving as defensive coordinator for seven seasons before joining Baylor in the same role.

"I didn't have to leave the comfort that I was in," Klanderman said. "I had a routine; I had friends. I had all the things that everybody craves, and I just felt like I needed to get out of that circle somehow. I needed to get uncomfortable, and I needed to grow."

Aranda also gave multiple walk-ons a chance to make an impact at the Power Four level. Alongside guys like former Bear Josh Cameron and senior safety Jacob Redding, Allen was able to develop as a player and a coach under Aranda.

"I think of how sad where college football is now and how the walk-on rule doesn't really exist anymore," Allen said. "He's poured into me, and given me roles and given me opportunities I probably wouldn't have."

Once players entered Aranda's program, he invested in them beyond the gridiron. His "Person>Player" philosophy touched players as they reached meaningful milestones in their lives.

"I tell people all the time, I'm like, 'I came to Waco as a boy, and under his program and his values, I'm a man," senior tight end Matthew Klopfenstein said. "I'm married now, and I can credit that to the things I've learned under his program."

Aranda also connected with his coaching staff through the insight he has learned over his 30 years as a coach. That insight looks to stick with them after Aranda left the program.

"The cool thing about my experience being here with him was that he was willing to share [his wisdom]," defensive line coach Jacori Greer said. "I took a lot of different things that are ... precious to me. They're intangible, but I'll always have [them]."

He left such an impact on those he worked alongside that they made sure to write it down and implement it for teams to come.

"I have a notebook ... one of those five-section notebooks, and I swear it's filled up already," defensive line coach Jacori Greer said. "I had to go get another book, and I'm like, 'Gosh,' just because he's got so many sayings, he's got so much wisdom."



Why homecoming traditions matter to students

LILYANA CANALES
Arts & Life Writer

As homecoming traditions kick off this week, Baylor alumni, students and family join together to celebrate and honor Baylor legacy. Campus has bubbled with anticipation for weeks now, and the months of planning from students and faculty alike will soon be brought to fruition.

This year marks 117 years of Baylor homecomings, and there have been many changes since 1909. From barricade kissing to "Hawny Frog" skits, many traditions have come and gone through the years and across generations. As students gear up to honor old traditions and celebrate new ones, they reflect on what homecoming means to them.

For some students, their favorite part of homecoming is the parade. Los Angeles freshman Tiara Wood said seeing floats that she made go by is "pretty cool."

Similarly, Double Oak senior Gracie Gallagher said she feels there is nowhere else to see a parade like Baylor's.

"It's so fun, and there's always something so creative going on in the parade," Gallagher said. "So even though it's really early in the morning, it's definitely worth waking up and watching it because there's nothing like it."

Arlington junior Tori Saulsby also said that the parade is a showcase of "Baylor student's creativity and pride."

Bridgeport sophomore Cason Lanfear is looking forward to the football game. Lanfear said he loves Baylor's football team and is hopeful for a win.

While there are numerous traditions to fall in love with, the Baylor community is the crown jewel of homecoming. Whether it is the community of faith or the collegial community, alumni and students alike return every year to their second home.

Saulsby, Lanfear and Wood all said that the Christian environment was what made Baylor a home away from home. Saulsby said that everywhere she turned she was "reminded that God is good all the time."

> Even though it's really early in the morning, it's definitely worth waking up and watching it because there's nothing like it.
>
> **DOUBLE OAK SENIOR GRACIE GALLAGHER ON THE PARADE**

"I feel like everybody here ... you can see Jesus in them," Wood said.

Gallagher and Southlake sophomore Thomas Hall said he had a fondness for Baylor's collegial and inviting atmosphere.

"I feel like every single person on Baylor's campus is just so friendly and welcoming," Gallagher said.

Hall, who spent his high school days leading the parade in marching band, now looks forward to leading Baylor's parade with the Baylor Student Foundation.

"I would say the traditions that we have in terms of the football games and in terms of the parade ... reminds me of home of back home," Hall said. "The whole town would come together for the homecoming parade, and we would have all the different school organizations walking throughout Town Square. And so, I think it's kind of cool that that continued into Baylor ... I think that's the tradition surrounding homecoming, it reminds me of home."

Similarly, Gallagher said that the friendly environment at Baylor was one that would have her coming back to homecoming every year, and to Baylor after graduation.

"Everywhere I go, I run into someone I know, and it's never in a bad way," Gallagher said. "They're always so kind ... everyone opens their homes to each other ... No matter where I go in the future, I can always come back to Baylor and know that this is a safe space. I absolutely love that."



Roundup file photo

When hoverboards rolled the earth: How to hoco like 2016



Lariat file photo

ROLLING OUT Colorado Springs alum Ben Breier hits a ping-pong ball while riding a hoverboard in 2016. Hoverboards are a 2016 staple alongside frappuccinos, photo filters and Musical.ly.

REIGHA WEAVER
Arts & Life Writer

Despite the pastels being 10 years in the past, 2016 is back now more than ever. If you're nostalgia crazy and crave the "simpler times," you're in luck. It's time to travel back in time and hoco like it's 2016.

WHAT TO WEAR

The best way to bring 2016 to homecoming is to dress the part. This includes skinny jeans, a sherpa jacket, plenty of Kendra Scott jewelry and crop tops galore. A way you can show up and show out 2016 style is to pair your line jersey with leggings and sneakers, with the most notable sneakers are from Vans or Adidas.

For those who want something less casual, you can pair some skinny jeans with a 2016 top of your choice. The most accurate choices are crop tops, off-the-shoulder tops, bell-sleeved tops, or a Baylor-themed graphic tee. You can also never go wrong with a chevron print. In case you get chilly, throw on a bomber jacket, a sherpa half-zip or an infinity scarf. Make sure to pair this outfit with suede booties or Converse shoes.

HOW TO DO YOUR HAIR

If you're wondering what to do with your hair, you can never go wrong with a side part. You can whip out your straightener for the full effect. If you prefer updos, space buns, french braids or classic messy buns will do nicely.

HOW TO DO YOUR MAKEUP

Makeup should not be dewy and Hailey Bieber-esque like we're accustomed to. Whip out your matte foundation, Anastasia Beverly Hills DIPBROW Pomade and Kylie Jenner lip kit. In fact, pull up Kylie Jenner's old Instagram posts and take heavy inspiration from the queen herself. On top, apply a Baylor temporary tattoo for some glammed up school spirit.

WHAT TO DO

Now that you're ready for homecoming, it's time to kill some time. If you're hungry, you could go to George's Restaurant before the game. Afterward, if you're in the mood for a sweet treat, you can go visit Silos Baking Co. Make sure to go with friends and take some pictures for Instagram. However, do not post it without slapping on the Clarendon or Rio de Janeiro filter.

On your way to the game, get a frappuccino, listen to some boyband music and reapply your Baby Lips chapstick. Close your eyes, take a deep breath and return back to a time where Tiktok was still called Musical.ly and hoverboards were a primary mode of transportation.



Lariat file photo

LIFTING VOICES Voices fill Seventh & James Baptist Church at the Singspiration in 2016.

Singspiration to enter new home, keep old traditions

LILYANA CANALES
Arts & Life Writer

One of Baylor's oldest homecoming traditions has a new home.

After decades of Singspiration celebrations in Seventh and James Baptist Church sanctuary, which was demolished this summer, the 78th annual service is now being held in Jones Concert Hall of the Glennis McCrary Music Building.

The event has a free registration and will take place 7 to 8 p.m. Friday. Those who cannot attend in person but wish to celebrate may join Singspiration via livestream.

Since its beginning, Singspiration has invited Baylor alumni, students and parents to worship and praise together. The worship night has been a faith-filled expression of Baylor spirit, and unique in its invitation for worship regardless of denominational differences.

Chason Disheroon, interim director of the Dunn Center for Christian Music Studies, said he is excited for the opportunity to bring together generations of Baylor alumni, students and friends for a collective moment of worship.

"This year's Singspiration will feature performances by the Baylor University Men's Choir and the Baylor Religious Hour Choir, each presenting selections as part of the service," Disheroon said. "Their participation reflects Baylor's rich tradition of musical excellence and helps create a worship experience that is both inspiring and deeply connected to the university's heritage."

By adopting an interdenominational worship practice, Singspiration has stood out not only as a tradition, but also a demonstration of the unity of faith. The event's inclusion of all denominations is a goal that is integral to BRH Choir as well.

Portland junior Madison Tietze, president of BRH Choir, said that the choir exists to share the love of God through worship and praise. Her favorite part of choir is the community of faith and witnessing the beauty of the unity of believers while worshiping at various different churches.

As for Singspiration, one of her favorite memories was from last year's celebration, when a BRH alum filmed the choir's rehearsal.

"He was just like, 'I just love hearing y'all sing and I just feel so blessed by the experience,'" Tietze said.

Tietze said the choir has gained many alumni since its founding.

"It's just so beautiful and amazing, and especially since we were founded in 1948," Tietze said. "We have a pretty big alumni base that [is] all different ages. It's just a really special experience to be part of."

Disheroon said that last year's celebration was memorable because it provided fresh perspectives and different leadership voices while honoring traditions that have defined the event for many generations.

Though the location has changed this year, the spirit of the event — to corporately honor the Christian heritage of Baylor — has remained the same.

"This year will be especially meaningful as we welcome the event into Jones Concert Hall for the first time in Homecoming history," Disheroon said. "With orchestra, choirs, alumni leaders and the broader Baylor community all contributing, the evening will celebrate cherished traditions while also marking a new chapter for this beloved gathering."

BYX to serve up Pigskin debut

REIGHA WEAVER
Arts & Life Writer

Beta Upsilon Chi is preparing to fight for their right to grill once again at their first Pigskin Revue performances.

Last semester, BYX took first place and warmed both grills and hearts at All-University Sing. Now, with their Pigskin performance almost underway, BYX is reflecting on their last performance and gearing up to take the stage again.

San Antonio senior Robert Gulley, BYX president, said that winning Sing showed BYX that they can find success.

"Winning Sing meant a lot to our guys," Gulley said. "It showed us that we could have a great time, follow Jesus relentlessly, but still see a success on this campus."

Even as BYX prepares for Pigskin, their focus on God remains the same.

"Moving forward presented a new challenge: what does it look like to succeed with humility and a complete pass off of that success to God?" Gulley said. "Heading into Pigskin our mindset is one thing, continue to have an amazing time, while not allowing the pressure of Pigskin to take us off our purpose and path, honoring God."

Gulley said the Pigskin practices have been a bonding experience.

"The opportunity to hang out with your best friends every single day, have fun and dance until you're exhausted is one of the greatest memories I'll have ever made in college," Gulley said. "They leave every single day having grown closer together and it is just so awesome."

In preparation for Pigskin, BYX has been working and practicing, pushing through learning curves and growing their brotherhood. Pantego senior Miles McCavit, BYX Sing chair, said that the setbacks have brought BYX closer together.

"The practice has been hard, but good," McCavit said. "It's definitely been a learning curve, but overall, the BYX guys have grown closer through this experience, and I can tell that putting on such a fun act has been a highlight for so many of them this semester."

For BYX's recent success, Gulley and McCavit point to God as the main force behind it all.



Lariat file photo

GRILL DADS Beta Upsilon Chi dress up as patriotic dads and dance with spatulas working grills in their All-University Sing act, titled "Grill of Rights."



Lariat file photo

GRILL OF RIGHTS Beta Upsilon Chi's All-University Sing act won first place in the spring and is coming to Pigskin.

"I want people to know that not for one second do we think any of this success is because of our own doings," Gulley said. "Without the Lord we wouldn't even be on this campus."

"None of this would be possible for BYX without the amazing power of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ," McCavit said. "Because of him, we have the amazing joy inside that spills out onto the stage."

According to McCavit, viewers should expect laughter and fun from BYX's performance.

"Get ready to have so much fun watching this act," McCavit said. "It is a rollercoaster of emotions, but overall, we love being silly and making others laugh."

What to Do in Waco: Homecoming Edition

ARDEN BERRY
Arts & Life Editor

Bears, get out the green and gold because we have made it to homecoming. Here are the events happening in Waco for the students, alumni and anyone else in town.



Sarah Jane Matteck | Cartoonist

TEN AT TEN: A MASS MEETING EXPERIENCE

Nov. 5 | 10-11:30 p.m. | Fountain Mall, 1400 S. Fifth St. | Free | The Mass Meeting recalls the story of the Immortal Ten, the Baylor students who died in a bus-train accident in Round Rock and whose memorial now sits at Vara Martin Daniel Plaza. First-year students can come learn the story and see the presentation of the Eternal Flame.

PIGSKIN REVUE

Nov. 5-7 | Times vary | Waco Hall, 624 Speight Ave. | $35-43 in-person, $28 streaming | The top Sing 2026 acts are back for three nights only. Get your clapping hands ready for some grilling, chilling and thrilling acts. The Homecoming Court will also be announced at the first show. If you missed out on the notoriously hard to get in-person tickets, you can purchase streaming tickets for the final show.

ARMSTRONG BROWNING LIBRARY 75TH ANNIVERSARY HOMECOMING OPEN HOUSE

Nov. 6 | 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. | Armstrong Browning Library, 710 Speight Ave. | Free | Check out Armstrong Browning Library and help celebrate its 75th anniversary with guided tours, a video montage of its history and a special exhibit with Browning manuscripts and rare materials. There will be refreshments and an anniversary keepsake.

HOMECOMING AT THE HURD

Nov. 6-7 | Times vary | Mark & Paula Hurd Welcome Center, 901 S. University Parks Drive | Free | Head over to the Hurd Welcome Center for food trucks and a full schedule of events, including:

BAYLOR HISTORY EXHIBITS

Nov. 6-7 | 8 a.m. to 9 p.m. Friday, 8 a.m. Saturday | Carlton Hall | For those who love Baylor history, Carlton Hall will feature historical exhibits for the parade, football and spirit squads, the Baylor Line, mascots, Sing and Pigskin and the Immortal Ten accident.

RANCHER HAT BAR

Nov. 6 | 4-9 p.m. | Carlton Hall | Come get your own custom cowboy hat at the Hurd Welcome Center.

FOREVER DOWN THE YEARS DECADES WALK

Nov. 6 | 4-11 p.m. | Third Street | Walk forever down the years as long as stars shall shine Friday evening and enjoy photos of past alumni experiences.

HOMECOMING FESTIVAL

Nov. 6 | 5:30-8:30 p.m. | Hurd Lawn and Third Street | This festival will feature miniature golf, an obstacle course and a giant mural.

ROYAL & PURE HOMECOMING STROLL-OFF

Nov. 6 | 7-9 p.m. | Experience an evening of step-dancing performances at the annual Royal & Pure Homecoming Stroll-Off, run by the Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc. and the National Pan-Hellenic Council. While the most recent stroll-offs have been in Barfield Drawing Room, this year's tunes and talent are making their way to the Hurd Ballroom.

SINGSPIRATION

Nov. 6 | 7-8 p.m. | Jones Hall, Glennis McCrary Music Building, 110 Baylor Ave. | Free The Baylor Religious Hour Choir and Baylor Men's Choir will share inspiring worship music with students, alumni and other visitors Friday evening. While Singspiration's typical location of the Seventh and James Church sanctuary is no longer here, this unifying, uplifting annual experience persists in the new location of Jones Hall.

EXTRAVAGANZA, PEP RALLY AND BONFIRE

Nov. 6 | 6-10:30 p.m. | Fountain Mall,1400 Fifth St. | Free | This fun-filled evening begins with the Extravaganza at 6 p.m., featuring a variety of carnival games and food trucks. Next comes the Pep Rally, beginning around 9 p.m., which includes hype-building performances from the Baylor University Golden Wave Band and spirit squads. Finally, the night ends with the iconic Homecoming bonfire, beginning around 9:45 p.m.

HOMECOMING PARADE

Nov. 7 | 7 a.m. | Starts downtown, parade route available at the Baylor website | Free | Rise and shine for the annual and highly historical Homecoming parade. Be prepared to see some beautiful handmade floats and catch some candy. If you cannot make it in person, there will be a livestream on Baylor's YouTube channel. If you missed the parade entirely, do not fret. Afterward, the floats will be parked in front of Waco Hall until 8 p.m. Sunday.

GRAHAM ST. CLAIR BAND

Nov. 7 | 11 a.m. | McLane Stadium, 1001 S. M.L.K. Jr. Blvd. | Tickets free for students, other prices vary | Come support the football team against the Iowa State Cyclones.

FOOTBALL VS. IOWA STATE

Nov. 7 | 15 minutes after football game ends | Outside McLane Stadium, 1001 S. M.L.K. Jr. Blvd. | Free | The Graham St. Clair Band is coming home to Baylor for the homecoming stretch of the Baylor Backyard Live concert series.

Seniors celebrate last homecoming as students

ADDISON GERNENZ
Copy Editor



Caleb Garcia | Photo Editor

GOOD AS GOLD Dallas senior Caleb Griffin, Houston senior Elaine Adams and Mandeville, Louisiana, senior Maria Petrolia are celebrating their last homecoming together as students. However, as is suggested by the name, alumni can always return home to their alma mater at homecoming.

Baylor Homecoming is just around the corner, and for many students on campus, this time brings nostalgia and bittersweet happiness as seniors prepare for their final homecoming as undergraduate students.

Throughout the week, banners are hung from trees and buildings, Fountain Mall is prepared for the bonfire, Dr Pepper Hour gears up for its biggest hour of the year and campus comes alive with heightened school spirit.

Pantego senior Miles McCavit is among these seniors feeling sentimental as the weekend approaches.

"Getting to see the atmosphere come together is, to me, a big part of it," McCavit said. "I like walking around campus at this time of year … that's something I'll miss a lot as a student."

McCavit is a member of BYX — the All-University Sing winners of 2025. He has continued his role as Sing chair from the Spring, this time as a Pigskin chair.

He said he is honored to have this opportunity, specifically because it connects him to his mom, a Baylor graduate.

"This one is especially sentimental because of being in Pigskin," McCavit said. "It's just a different thing being able to participate in such a cool tradition, and it may be the last time that I ever get to do that kind of thing."

Pigskin is just one of the many homecoming traditions around Baylor. There's also the homecoming parade, the football game and the bonfire. Coppell senior Jenna Branstetter said she holds all of these traditions fondly.

"My freshman year, I have a really fond memory of watching the parade with my friends early in the morning and picking up candy from the ground," Branstetter said. "I also loved the bonfire. It was a great time to spend with friends late on campus, and it is something I am definitely going to miss."

This is the first year Branstetter will be participating in homecoming as more than an onlooker, and she is excited to ride a float for Eta Sigma Phi, Baylor's chapter of a national Classics Honors Society.

When Dallas senior Caleb Griffin thinks about homecoming, he looks back on his childhood and forward to life after graduation.

"I've actually been coming to homecomings for longer than I have memory of my own life," Griffin said.

A multi-generational Bear, Griffin grew up attending Baylor football games and watching the Homecoming parade.

"Afterward, we would go walk by and meet all the people who made the floats, and sometimes they would give us little pieces of the floats," Griffin said. "… I still have some of those pieces that I got from a dozen different floats throughout years past."

Griffin, who originally came to Baylor for academic and career opportunities, said he'll miss the friendships he found at Baylor most after graduation.

"Joining communities in Baylor has really been unlike anything I've experienced before," he said.

Griffin said he takes great pride in Baylor culture and is looking forward to contributing to the experience and giving back.

"I think it's my last chance to really ... participate from the side that is putting on the event for both former and future Bears to come and get at least a sliver of the full Bear experience," Griffin said.

For Griffin, Baylor has changed his life. He sees homecoming, and his time as a student, as a way he can impact others' lives.

Branstetter, who credits the university for being part of her personal growth, echoed this sentiment.

"To me, being a Baylor Bear means getting to participate in a community of people who genuinely care about my growth as a person, whether it's intellectually, spiritually or emotionally," Branstetter said.

McCavit encouraged students not to take advantage of the time and opportunities Baylor provides, especially during homecoming.

"It's a unique thing to get to be in this time and place and get to participate in these super fun things which … honestly, I probably take for granted more than I should," McCavit said.

For some seniors, knowing this is their last homecoming as a student is bittersweet. As they transition into the alumni phase, new opportunities open up.

"I don't like to think of this homecoming as my last homecoming ever," Griffin said. "I like to think of it as my last homecoming as a student, because I'll definitely be back in future years."



Stroll-Off to forge cultural legacies step by step

GISELLE LEE
Staff Writer

As Baylor celebrates the many traditions of its annual homecoming, the Black community on campus has found a unique way of expressing itself and its culture: the Royal and Pure Homecoming Stroll-Off.

Strolling, also known as stepping, is an organized line movement or a cultural dance performed in groups to symbolize unity and strength. The event will take place from 6 to 9 p.m. on Friday at the Mark & Paula Hurd Welcome Center Ballroom.

The Stroll-Off consists of three rounds: fast, slow and freestyle; routines are usually inclusive of steps that are traditional to the fraternity or sorority's culture. The top three acts receive a cash prize of $1,000, $500 and $250, respectively, to fund programs and support their chapters.

The event has historically only included the Divine Nine of the National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC), but has expanded to include other multicultural organizations on campus. This year, these groups will compete under a Hollywood theme.

Austin senior Damo Kouakou, president of the Phi Beta Sigma fraternity, said the Stroll-Off's new home in the Hurd Welcome Center Ballroom is due to the large number of attendees at the annual event, after its previous venues, such as the Hippodrome.

"We surpassed what previous rooms were able to cater to, so [moving to the Hurd was] one thing that we had to change on our part," Kouakou said.

Houston junior Tan Green, a member of the Phi Beta Sigma fraternity, said planning for the Stroll-Off began as early as summer break, split between chapter members and logistical assistance from the National Pan-Hellenic Council.

"It takes a lot of work and dedication for us to be able to get this show situated and everything, but we do appreciate everyone who is able to help us out and whatnot," Green said.

For Green, the Homecoming Stroll-Off is an opportunity to "come together" as a community and connect past and present Baylor students.

"This is a really big event that brings back a lot of alumni," Green said. "This is one of the times of the year where a lot of people get to see some of their old friends who may have graduated; people's parents also come for this because it all falls right in that homecoming weekend time, and for me that's the biggest thing."

On the other hand, Kouakou said the Stroll-Off acts as a bridge between the history behind fraternities and sororities of the NPHC and the broader Baylor community.

"It's brought more of an understanding of why we were made into fraternities and sororities, because we are more than just paying to be in a group," Kouakou said. "We do a lot of services together, which every single one of these orgs that are performing have services that are either in their principles or their motto."

Houston junior Jesenya Wrightsil, the second anti-basileus for the Zeta Phi Beta sorority, said the Stroll-Off has been significant for representing Black culture compared to other Greek life events.

"Even as a student before I joined [my sorority], there isn't a lot of representation within Panhellenic sororities of people who look like me or I feel I could identify strongly with," Wrightsil said. "Stroll-Off still has performance aspect that Sing and Pigskin has, but it's less packed and it's free."

As the defending champions, Wrightsil said their sorority has been practicing up to six times a week. She said there was an "added level of pressure" after their monumental win last year.

"That was the first time we had ever won or even placed," Wrightsil said. "Up until this past year, my sorority wasn't known for doing very well in the dancing category, then we won. Now we have this new reputation about us that I think it's good to have, because we happen to have more experienced dancers. But I think our reputation is at stake."

Aside from including step and an important message in their routine, Wrightsil said their sorority hopes to use its originality to preserve its cultural history of dance, music, and rhythm as a key outlet of expression.

"You have three rounds to really get whatever story that your chapter thinks is important to get across," Wrightsil said. "[Step is] such a significant part of our culture, going back all the way to Africa: the drums, the rhythmic ways of expression and how to get messages across through rhythm and through stepping. Thinking about those important nuances is the way we've gotten closer."

Moving forward, Kouakou hoped to leave a legacy of continuous growth for future chapter members to expand Homecoming Stroll-Off after his graduation.

"I know as of right now, it's not what I think it should be, because the event is so good we're just entertaining that no matter what, we can always add something to make it even better," Kouakou said. "By the time I'm gone, I just want it to be better than how I was here."

Wrightsil encouraged students to attend Stroll-Off as it is a "huge way to bridge the gap" across Baylor's student body.

"Whenever I've invited somebody to Stroll-Off, they're not necessarily plugged into the NPHC community; they've never seen strolling or stepping," Wrightsil said. "I think it's a good way for the rest of Baylor to see who we are, what we do. This is how we have fun. This is how we express ourselves. It looks different, but it's still a beautiful thing. I've never met anybody who's left and said it was boring."



Mesha Mittanasala | Photographer

STEPPING UP Members of the Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity practice their strolling for the annual Royal and Pure Homecoming Stroll-Off 6-9 p.m. Friday at the Mark & Paula Hurd Welcome Center Ballroom.



A&L

‘This is our home’: Alumni to headline homecoming tailgate

ARDEN BERRY
Arts & Life Editor

Not long ago in a house on Second Street, the Graham St. Clair Band would move the furniture out of the living room and jam for hours.

“[We would] get together and just make the neighbors mad for four hours straight,” Graham St. Clair, lead vocalist, said. “You know, we weren’t very good, but we thought we sounded OK. And we just practiced and practiced and practiced.”

While many alumni from all over come to the sidewalks and stands to observe homecoming festivities, the Graham St. Clair Band, made up of Baylor alumni and formed at Baylor, are coming to the stage.

The band will perform 15 minutes after the football game ends. Saturday at the Baylor Backyard Live stage outside McLane Stadium.

The band performed at a previous one-off tailgate concert September 2025 before the football game against Arizona State, and now the band returns as part of the Baylor Backyard Live concert series. St. Clair said the band received the offer a few months ago.

“We were super excited,” St. Clair said. “We are some big Baylor Bears, big Baylor fans, and I am psyched. It feels like a real honor to be asked to come back and play homecoming.”

Sean Douglas, lead electric guitarist, said the band would not have met if not for Baylor.

“I mean, it’s the place where we started,” Douglas said. “ … So it’s pretty special to us.”

These connections began when Jackson Wright, rhythm electric and acoustic guitarist, met St. Clair through St. Clair’s older brother.

“Graham’s brother said, ‘Man, you got to meet my little brother,’” Wright said. “‘Y’all got to play guitar.’ Sure enough, we did. We hit it off real quick. And yeah, we just spent a lot of time playing guitar. And that’s what we did.”

When the band needed a bass player, Wright said he remembered the first friend he had made at Baylor three years earlier: Raymond Spell.

“He was playing guitar one day, and I said, ‘What’s up?’” Wright said. “I think it was move-in day or something … I was like, ‘Hey, I think I think I might know a guy.’ And Raymond was him. And so yeah, Ray is the best musician we know.”

St. Clair was living next door to their drummer, Jackson Cossey, at the time, and Douglas met Wright and St. Clair their sophomore year.

“I told [St. Clair] that I played a little bit of guitar, I think, when we first met,” Douglas said. “And they’re jamming one night. I was at one of the houses listening to them. And they asked me, they’re like, ‘Sean, you want to strum along’ or something. And that literally started a three-hour jam sesh. And I was like, ‘Holy smokes these guys can play.’ And I think I think I got their approval, too, because here we are. But that was a good night.”

For their sixth band member, the band had heard rumors about someone on campus who could play pedal steel guitar.

“We couldn’t believe it because it’s not very common that you’d find a 20-year-old pedal steel guitar player,” St. Clair said. “So we had to track him down. We looked and looked and looked for that guy. He was supposed to be playing a gig on Fountain Mall, and we showed up to the gig to try to poach him from whatever band he was in, and he wasn’t there because he had broken his wrist. And so we were: ‘Must be a myth. He must not exist.’”

Eventually, the band found Stiles Clements on Snapchat and invited him to band practice.

However, the band did not come together in earnest until St. Clair was asked to bring a full band to a show opening for Cameron Allbright in San Marcos.

“We had all played together just for fun, but we had never played a gig,” St. Clair said. “ … So then I called all these guys, decided to get it together. And we worked our tails off. We had about two weeks.”

The band has many favorite memories from their time at Baylor, including road trips, shows and late nights on a balcony on Bagby Avenue.

“We would just play and play and play up there,” St. Clair said. “And sometimes we’d get people hollering at us from the street. Sometimes, you know, we would end up with 15 people out on that tiny little balcony. Sometimes it would just be two of us or three of us just playing until late into the morning hours. And we had so much fun up there.”

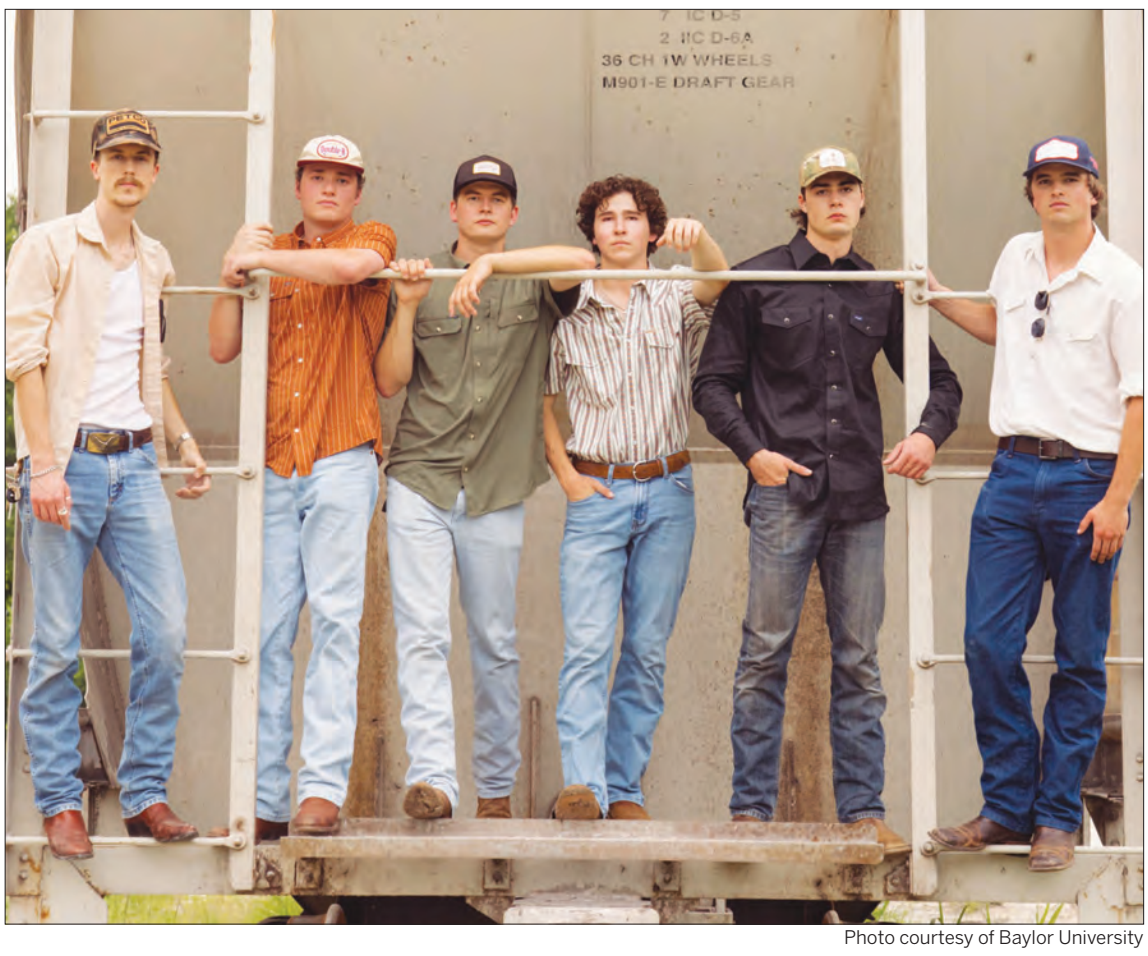


Photo courtesy of Baylor University

BACK AT BAYLOR The Graham St. Clair Band is an all-alumni group returning to their alma mater to perform Texas country jams. The show will be 15 minutes after the homecoming football game Saturday outside McLane Stadium.

Though the band members now live all over Texas with their own jobs and lives, St. Clair said they still play together on weekends and at shows around Texas, much like when they were undergraduates.

“When we get to the show, we can hang out all day,” Wright said. “And whether we have 60 minutes or 90 minutes, that time on the stage is just, let’s go have as much fun as we can and put on the best show as we can. Something Graham’s been saying to audiences is ‘Thank y’all for coming out and spending this free part of your week. This is our favorite time of the week,’ and it truly is. I think we get to enjoy it just as much as the crowd.”

While coming home might not mean returning to a cleared out living room in that house on Second Street, the band has many places they like to visit in Waco. Douglas said he stopped at Memorial Dining Hall the last time he visited Waco for a cookie, but he also loves Schmaltz’s Sandwich Shoppe.

“That’s actually the first spot J-Wright and I, we had a class together,” Douglas said. “We’d go to like lunch or something every Thursday or something and he took me to Schmaltz’s once and I fell in love with it there. I didn’t know sandwich could be that good.”

Wright said he and St. Clair have a standing tradition at Shorty’s Pizza Shack.

“I think Graham and I have watched the Texas Rangers’ opening day the last three years at Shorty’s for lunch on Thursday,” Wright said. “So hopefully we can keep that thing going.”

As for Saturday’s show, the band said there may be some guest appearances from other Baylor alumni.

“We’re going bring a good show to y’all because this is our home,” Douglas said. “… Just get ready to party.”

St. Clair said being invited back to these tailgate shows is encouraging.

“I think it’s also a testament to what the Baylor family means to how much they care about not just their current students, but the alumni post-grad,” Douglas said. “It was pretty cool to get a call back because I’m sure they could pay a billion other bands a lot more and, you know, get a lot more people at shows, a lot bigger bands. But it’s amazing they chose us and that we can make that happen. I think it’s just a testament to the Baylor family and how much they take care of everyone that’s involved.”



For $50, Baylor fans can watch parade, give back to students

REAGAN HUNTER
Reporter



Lariat file photo

PARADING The money from grandstand tickets contributes to Student Foundation scholarships. Student Foundation also walks in the parade.

As Baylor Homecoming approaches with floats, marching bands and generations of Bears back in Waco, some Baylor fans have the chance to skip the scramble for a good viewing spot. The grandstands provide a comfortable view of a beloved Baylor tradition, but the ticket's impact can last far beyond the parade route.

For $50, fans can reserve a seat in the grandstands in front of the Bill Daniel Student Center and enjoy a prime view of the homecoming parade. But beyond the convenience of a guaranteed seat, each ticket helps support Baylor students through the Student Foundation scholarship fund.

The grandstands offer a front row seat to one of Baylor's most recognizable traditions while giving attendees a chance to give back to the student body.

Lauren Emiliani, assistant director of Student Activities and Troy and Betty Lou Mays director of Student Foundation, said proceeds from the event go directly toward Student Foundation scholarships after expenses are covered.

Student Foundation has awarded scholarships to Baylor students since the organization was founded in 1969. The scholarships are available to undergraduate students and provide recipients with $3,000 each year.

This school year, the organization awarded 145 scholarships totaling about $405,000.

For Emiliani, the impact of those scholarships is what makes fundraising events like the homecoming grandstands meaningful.

"We even heard students who say that that $3,000 has been the make or break moment for them of if they could return to Baylor for the next academic year or not," Emiliani said.

The money raised through grandstand ticket sales covers expenses such as processing fees and renting the bleachers. The remaining funds are donated to the scholarship fund.

While the parade itself is free to attend, the grandstands offer something that can be difficult to find on a busy homecoming morning: peace of mind.

Emiliani said the reserved seating gives attendees a stress-free experience without having to arrive early to search for a place along the parade route.

"They get a pretty prime view and prime location of the parade," Emiliani said. "One of the main reasons why they are willing to spend the $50 to get seats is because it gives them a lot of peace of mind and convenience."

There are 285 seats available this year, and the tradition has been part of Baylor homecoming for at least a decade. Emiliani said Student Foundation has been selling grandstand seats since at least 2016.

Brentwood, Tennessee, senior Owen Reed, Student Foundation co-president, said fundraising for scholarships is acentral part of the organization's mission to serve Baylor's past, present and future.

For Reed, one of the most rewarding moments of being involved with Student Foundation comes when scholarship recipients gather each fall. After months of reviewing applications and raising money, the reception gives members a chance to see the people behind the names and numbers.

"We see a lot of names on paper," Reed said. "We see a lot of numbers. There's a lot of work behind the scenes. But when we have these receptions with all our recipients, it's actually putting a face to these names."

The scholarship selection process considers a combination of merit and financial need. Applicants are asked about their dedication to Baylor, their service in Waco and how receiving a scholarship would support them. Applications are reviewed anonymously by multiple graders.

For some recipients, Reed said the scholarship can be the reason they are able to remain at Baylor.

"It's a make or break situation," Reed said. "The reason they're able to stay at Baylor is this $3,000 scholarship."

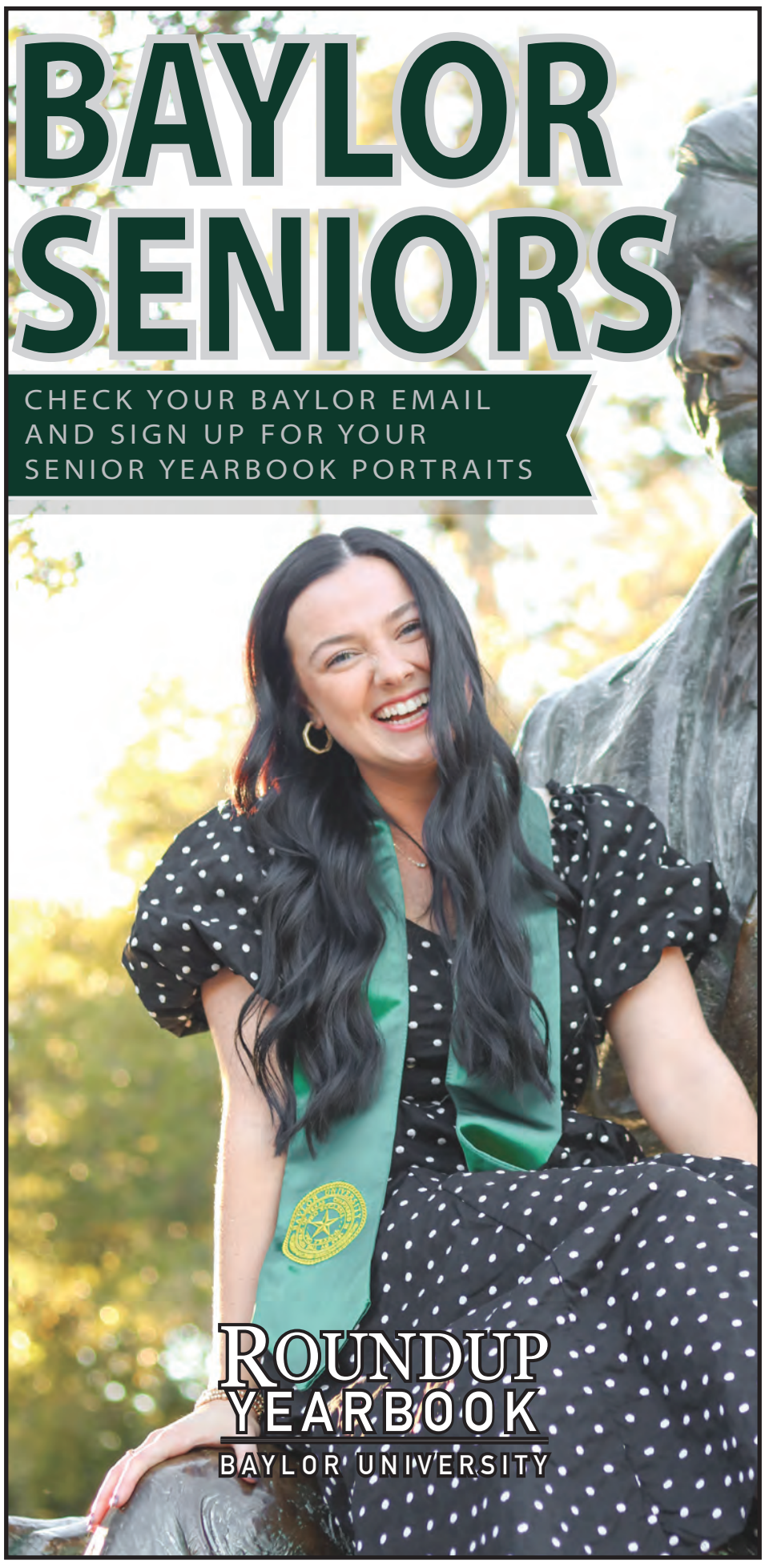
That impact is the bigger story behind the rows of grandstands that will sit in front of the SUB during the parade. What might look like a convenient place to watch floats roll by also represents a fundraising effort that can make a difference for students across campus.

"I hope people see it as not only nice seats for homecoming, but it's also their way to give back to the student body," Reed said.

For Student Foundation members, the work begins long before the first float appears. Emiliani said the organization's members wake up as early as 4 a.m. to help set up the grandstands, motivated by the stories they hear from scholarship recipients.

"Those are just the most rewarding part, and why we put so much work and energy into doing these events," Emiliani said. "It really does have an incredible impact for students."

Tickets for the homecoming parade grandstand seating are still available through Baylor Student Activities. Those interested in learning more about Student Foundation and its scholarship program can visit the Student Foundation website.





5 songs to add to your homecoming playlist

KALENA REYNOLDS
Editor-in-Chief



Photos courtesy of Spotify

TUNE TIME Throwbacks and new jams alike, nothing will beat a curated playlist this homecoming season.

A great playlist combines two things — diversity and vibes. Whether you're waking up at 5 a.m. to throw candy off the side of a float or enjoying the game from the comfort of your couch, it's crucial to have the right tunes for homecoming.

A few deep cuts mixed in with some classics is always a safe bet. Here is a list of five songs to add to your homecoming playlist to ease the effort of finding songs yourself.

"The Time (Dirty Bit)" by Black Eyed Peas

I really miss the 2000s era of flip phones and juicy sweatsuits. I would pay money to go back in time and have a decked out Myspace with a closet full of American Eagle.

While most of Generation Z were only young kids during the early 2000s, I can confidently say we all have a nostalgic connection to the mesmerizing music that came from the time period. "The Time (Dirty Bit)" is a great example of this.

First, the Black Eyed Peas rarely missed when it came to funky synth songs. Second, "The Time (Dirty Bit)" is a celebration song. This tune is truly a foolproof pump-up song and deserves a spot at the top of your homecoming playlist.

"I'm Not Alone" by Calvin Harris

Continue the party with an upbeat club hit that is bound to raise spirits for the nation's oldest homecoming celebration. "I'm Not Alone" is similar to Harris' other popular hits but is a little more underground.

Anything off Harris' "18 Months album" is also a great choice for your homecoming playlist, but if you want a deeper cut, go with "I'm Not Alone." It encapsulates the uber-catchy synths that Harris' is known for and includes a chorus that's impossible not to dance along with.

Throw this in the middle of your playlist for an energy boost that combines clever beat drops with unbeatable synths.

"The Captain Is Drunk" by Jack Johnson

After you've raised everyone's heart rate with the combination of nostalgic synths and upbeat 808s, it's crucial to throw a more mellow tune in the mix. "The Captain Is Drunk" is a perfect slow song for your homecoming day playlist.

While Johnson has a foolproof way of raising spirits, his records are also great for yearning, long walks on the beach or enjoying a special moment with friends. While Johnson is largely known for his song "Upside Down," which is the "Curious George" theme song, it's worth diving deeper in his discography. He is an uber talented musician that creates dopamine-infused tunes with a side of beautiful acoustic guitar.

"Why Georgia" by John Mayer

Follow up the nostalgic acoustic sound with an upbeat guitar-heavy tune from John Mayer. "Why Georgia" is bound to get stuck in your head, but is also a safe bet for a playlist with friends. Let's be honest, creating a playlist that appeals to your entire friend group is a tall order. Gen Zers have an incredibly diverse taste in music and are harsh judges of playlists.

While "Why Georgia" is an acoustic yearning-heavy song, its catchy vocals are what make it attractive to any listener. Relieve yourself from the worries of putting a risky song on your playlist by adding a John Mayer hit into the mix.

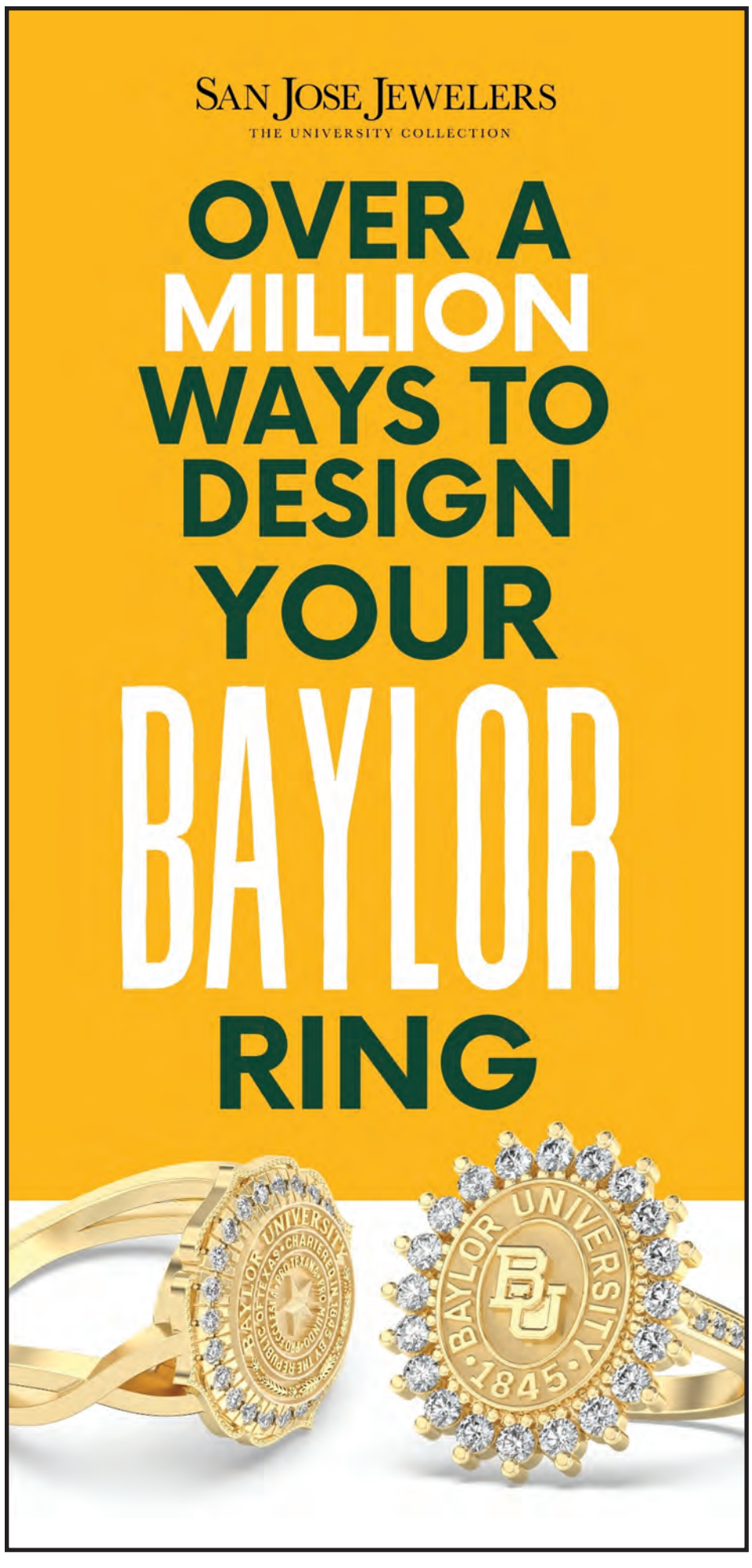
"Everywhere" by Tim McGraw

Simply because we live in Texas, it's acceptable to throw a country hit in the mix — just promise me you will steer clear of Morgan Wallen. The truth is, country music gets a bad rap, and that's largely due to Top 40 country. However, I promise you, good country music does exist.

"Everywhere" is a safe bet for the country connoisseurs and the skeptics. The tune incorporates the catchy hook, key to any good country song as well as an essence of raw emotion. It's better to add the risky songs toward the bottom of your playlist so that you've already built up some rapport by the time you get to it.

If you don't like Tim McGraw, George Strait, The Chicks or Chris Stapleton are also safe options.





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