



TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY  
CORPUS CHRISTI

# 2024

ANNUAL REPORT





TEXAS A&M-CORPUS CHRISTI FOUNDATION

# DIRECTORS LIST

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Dr. Scott Elliff '82, '86, '12

*1st Vice President*

Dr. Gregg Silverman

*2nd Vice President*

Suzelle Tinnell '89

*Treasurer*

Ed Cantu '81

*Secretary*

Tim Stephens

*Past President*

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Diane DeCou

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Nancy Eshleman

President Kelly M. Miller, Ph.D. (ex-officio)

Govind Nadkarni

Stephen Rybak '05

Dr. Gregg Silverman

Dana Sisk '01

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Rosie Vela '79, '80

.....

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Laurie Cook, CPA | *Accountant*

Michael Dellinger | *Financial Advisor*

Jaime Nodarse Barrera | *Vice President for Institutional Advancement*

Julian Lopez '23 | *Foundation Coordinator*





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## Dear Islanders,



*“Your generosity empowers students to dream boldly, faculty to innovate fearlessly, and our university to make a lasting impact in our community and beyond.”*

As we celebrate the achievements of the past year, I am filled with immense gratitude for the unwavering support from you, our donors. At Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi, generosity isn't just about giving — it's about shaping futures, honoring legacies, and strengthening the bonds that make our Islander community extraordinary. Within the pages of this annual report, you'll find stories that illustrate how your philanthropy transforms lives and fuels the university's mission. These stories, though unique, share a common theme: the power of giving to inspire, uplift, and create a lasting impact.

Take, for instance, Patty and Hank Nuss, whose love story began in a college library in North Texas and grew into a lifelong passion for history and travel. Their journey led them back home, where their generous gift to our university will help preserve the rich history of Corpus Christi. Or Anya Carlson '25, a civil engineering major whose scholarships have allowed her to excel academically while building a future for others — literally — by founding the university's chapter of the American Society of Civil Engineers.

Some legacies are built over generations, like that of Jessie Frances Neal, a trailblazing businesswoman whose impact endures through a scholarship in her name, helping future business leaders chase their dreams. Others take shape in spaces where art and culture thrive, such as our Performing Arts Center. As it marks 20 years of hosting world-class performances, show-

stopping student productions, and thought-provoking lectures, the PAC embarks on a new chapter, thanks to three generous donor gifts that have resulted in newly named spaces within that building.

Then there's the story of Baffin Bay, a treasured stretch of the Texas Gulf Coast where generations of anglers have cast their lines. Thanks to the Louis “Scott” Murray Endowed Fund for the Conservation of Baffin Bay, the Harte Research Institute is ensuring this ecosystem remains vibrant for years to come.

And in the heart of our campus, where victories and challenges are met head-on, you'll find student-athletes like Dian Wright-Forde '25. During the Islanders Men's Basketball Southland Conference run last season, he carried not only the weight of competition but also immense personal loss. Through it all, he found strength in his teammates, his coaches, and the Islander spirit — a reminder that TAMU-CC is more than a university; it is a family.

These stories, and so many others, are made possible because of donors like you. Your generosity empowers students to dream boldly, faculty to innovate fearlessly, and our university to make a lasting impact in our community and beyond. Thank you for being part of this journey.

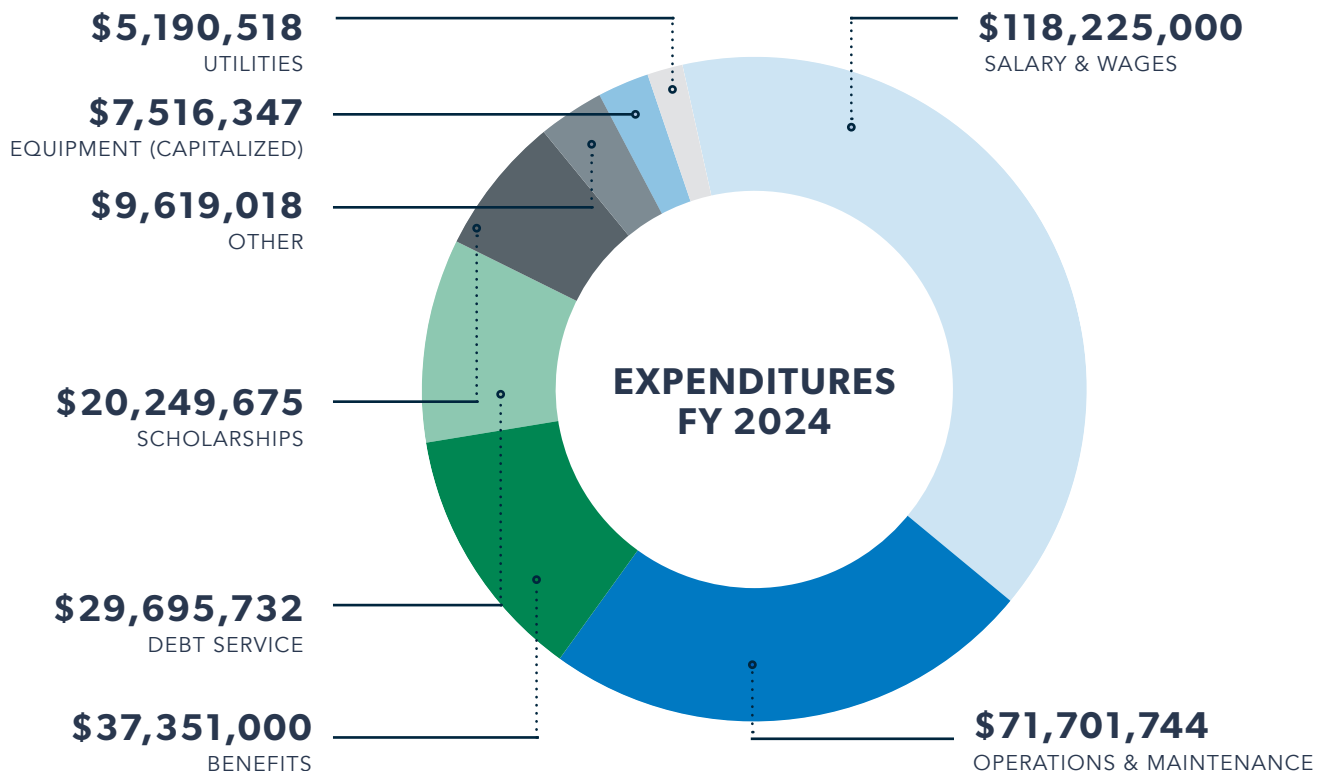
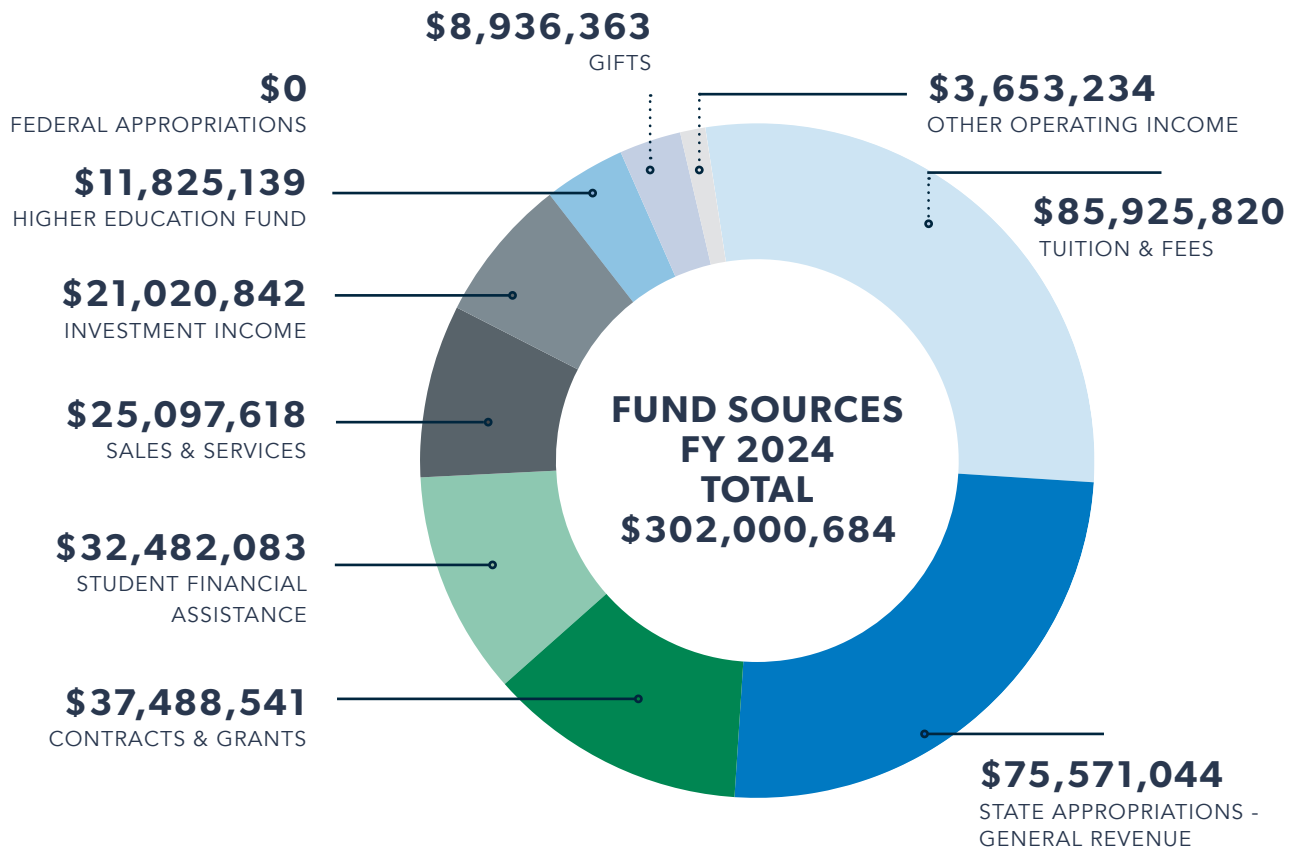
Sincerely,

**Kelly M. Miller, Ph.D.**

*President & CEO*

*Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi*





## Dear Islander Supporters,



*“Thanks to the dedication of our founding and past board members, our generous donors, and the unwavering support of our community, we are making a profound difference in the lives of students at our beloved Island University.”*

**S**erving as the president of the Texas A&M-Corpus Christi Foundation continues to be an honor that fills me with immense pride. Thanks to the dedication of our founding and past board members, our generous donors, and the unwavering support of our community, we are making a profound difference in the lives of students at our beloved Island University.

Our mission remains steadfast — to enhance the growth, quality, and impact of Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi. I am pleased to share that the foundation’s endowment now stands at \$58 million, a testament to the generosity and commitment of those who believe in the power of higher education. These funds have played a critical role in advancing the university’s initiatives, from scholarships and scientific research to endowed faculty positions and state-of-the-art classroom technology.

As we look toward the future, the foundation has launched the “30x30” campaign, an ambitious initiative to establish 30 new endowments by 2030. This campaign represents our commitment to expanding opportunities for students, ensuring long-term sustainability, and strengthening the university’s ability to attract top talent. To reach this goal, we need your help.

Whether through establishing a new endowment, contributing to an existing one, or spreading the word about our mission, every effort brings us closer to transforming lives through education.

Under the continued leadership of Dr. Kelly M. Miller, we remain committed to supporting student success and strengthening the vital connection between the Coastal Bend community and the university. Working alongside Dr. Miller as foundation president is both inspiring and rewarding, as we contribute to the education of future teachers, innovators, engineers, nurses, artists, and business leaders who will leave a lasting impact on our region and beyond.

On behalf of the university, the Texas A&M-Corpus Christi Foundation, and all of our students, thank you for your steadfast support. Your generosity fuels the dreams of so many and helps shape the future of our community.

Sincerely,

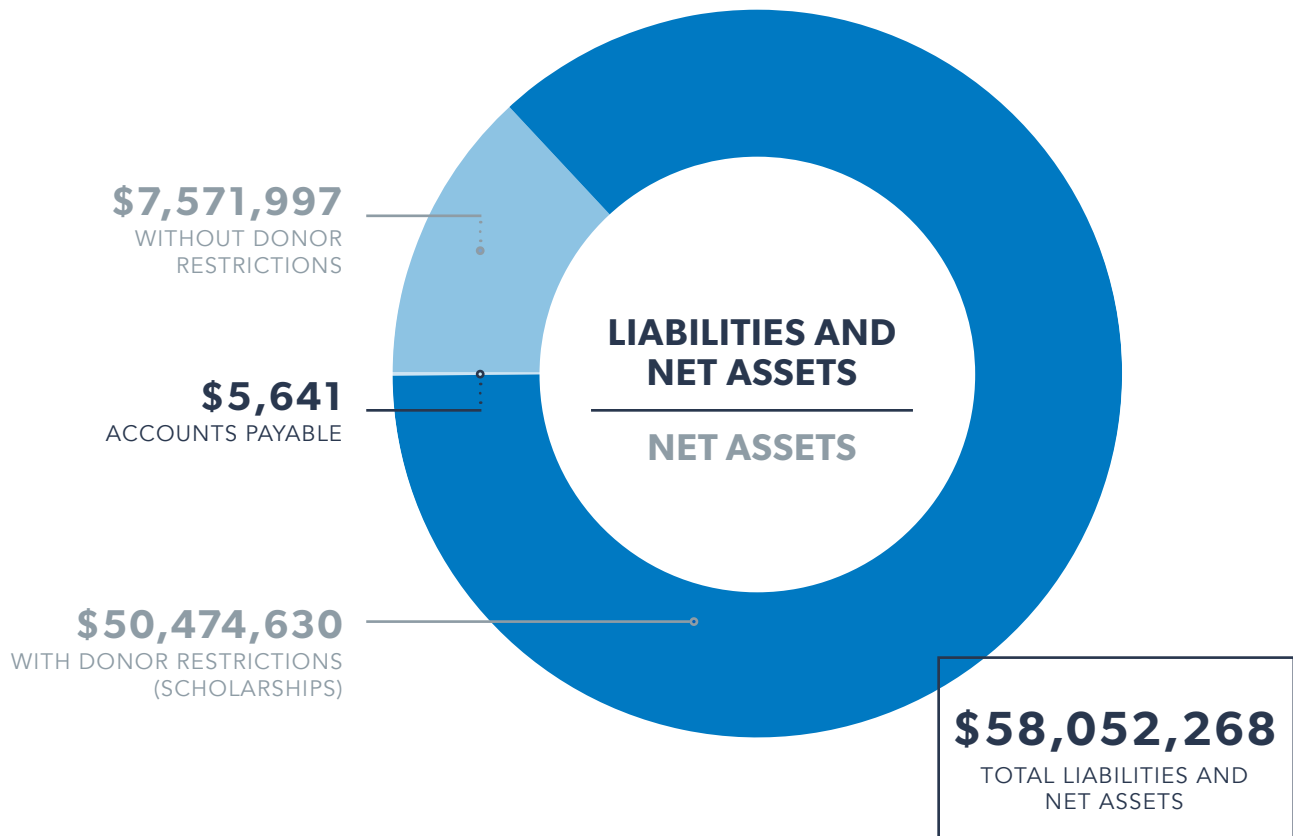
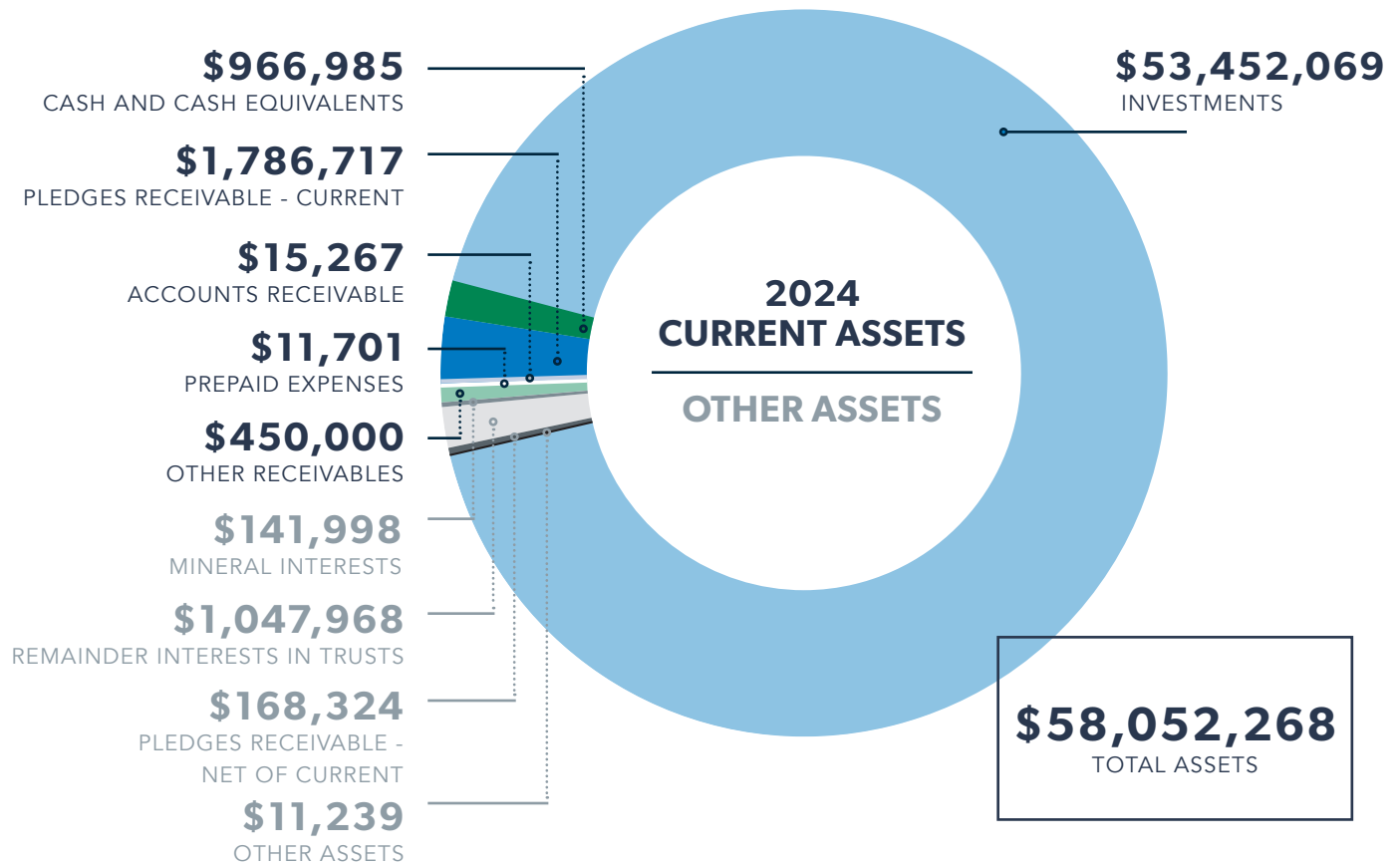
A handwritten signature of Nancy Eshleman in black ink.

**Nancy Eshleman**

*President*

*Texas A&M-Corpus Christi Foundation*



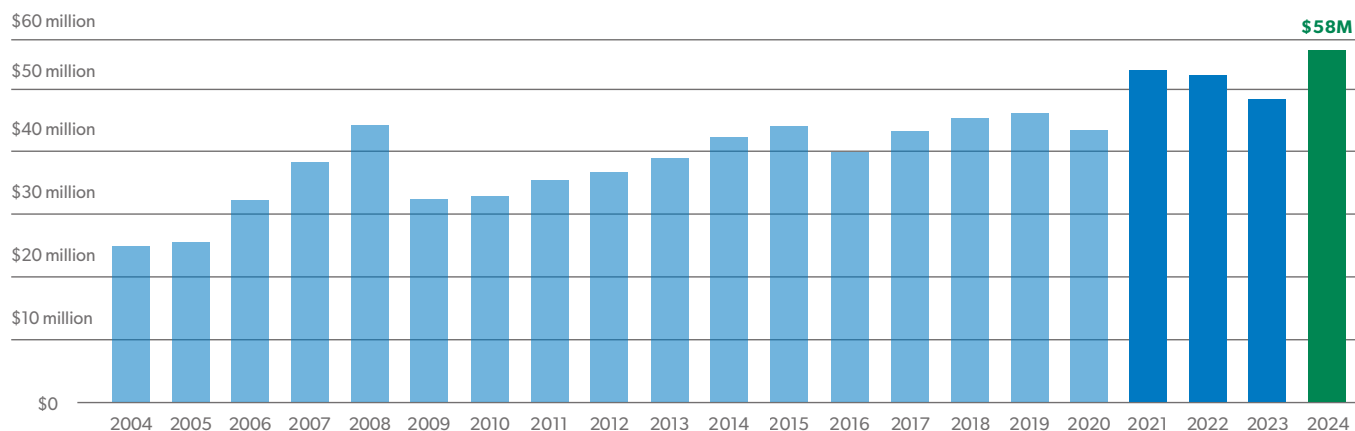


## STATEMENT OF FOUNDATION FINANCIAL POSITION

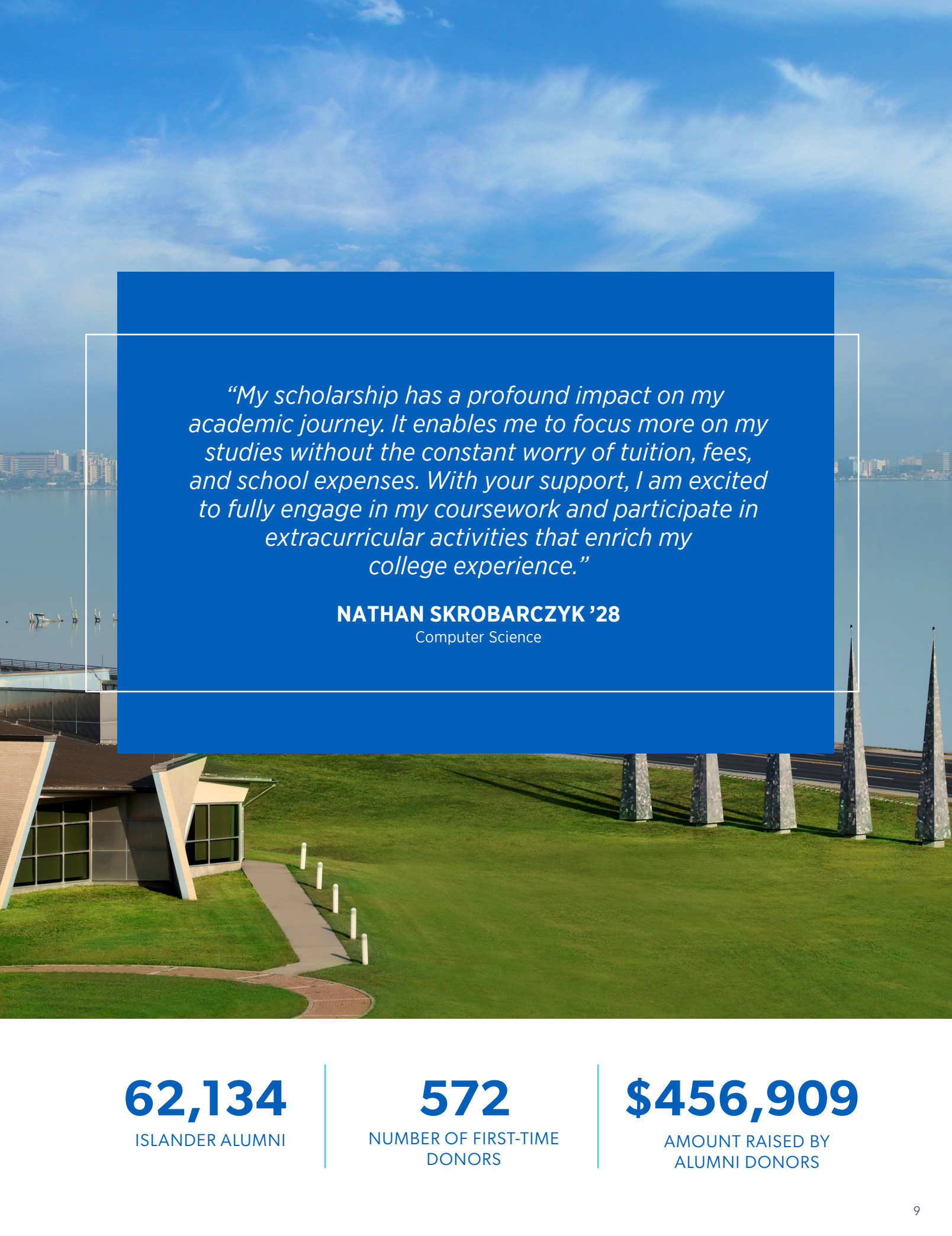
For the years ending March 31, 2023, and March 31, 2024

ASSETS	2023	2024
<b>CURRENT ASSETS</b>		
Cash and Cash Equivalents	\$2,161,546	\$966,985
Accounts Receivable	\$54,403	\$15,267
Pledges Receivable - Current	\$116,267	\$1,786,717
Investments	\$44,936,999	\$53,452,069
Prepaid Expenses	\$11,713	\$11,701
Other Receivables	\$0	\$450,000
<b>OTHER ASSETS</b>		
Mineral Interests	\$336,984	\$141,998
Remainder Interests	\$737,140	\$1,047,968
Other Assets	\$7,217	\$11,239
Total Other Assets	\$1,081,341	\$1,201,205
<b>PLEDGES RECEIVABLE - NET OF CURRENT POSITION</b>	\$103,180	\$168,324
<b>TOTAL ASSETS</b>	<b>\$48,465,449</b>	<b>\$58,052,268</b>
<b>LIABILITIES &amp; NET ASSETS</b>		
<b>LIABILITIES</b>		
Accounts Payable	\$66,297	\$5,641
<b>NET ASSETS</b>		
Without Donor Restrictions	\$7,387,805	\$7,571,997
With Donor Restrictions - Scholarships	\$41,011,347	\$50,474,630
Total Net Assets	\$48,399,152	\$58,046,627
<b>TOTAL LIABILITIES &amp; NET ASSETS</b>	<b>\$48,465,449</b>	<b>\$58,052,268</b>

## FOUNDATION FYE TOTAL LIABILITIES & NET ASSETS







*“My scholarship has a profound impact on my academic journey. It enables me to focus more on my studies without the constant worry of tuition, fees, and school expenses. With your support, I am excited to fully engage in my coursework and participate in extracurricular activities that enrich my college experience.”*

**NATHAN SKROBARCZYK '28**

Computer Science

**62,134**

ISLANDER ALUMNI

**572**

NUMBER OF FIRST-TIME  
DONORS

**\$456,909**

AMOUNT RAISED BY  
ALUMNI DONORS

# Building Opportunity

## MEET ANYA CARLSON '25, CIVIL ENGINEERING MAJOR

**FOR ANYA CARLSON '25, THE PATH TO** civil engineering at TAMU-CC began unexpectedly. While in a middle school woodshop class, she discovered an interest in design and construction. This hands-on experience, paired with her love for technical drawing and math, made her want to create a meaningful, global impact.

Growing up, Carlson divided her time between Illinois and Texas before settling just north of Houston during

middle school. A 2022 graduate of Cypress Creek High School, she excelled as captain and lead runner of the cross-country team, served as captain of the water polo team, and participated in several honor societies. Drawn by the vibrant community and coastal lifestyle, Carlson set her sights on the Island University as the next step in her journey.

“Corpus Christi is its own kind of beautiful,” Carlson said. “It has the charm of a small town within a

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*“The Island University has given me the tools to engineer change that extends far beyond the classroom.”*

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good-sized city. Plus, the university campus is welcoming and offered me a perfectly sized place to start my education without feeling overwhelmed.”

As an Islander, Carlson has not only excelled academically — maintaining a 4.0 GPA and earning a spot on the Dean’s List multiple times — but she also helped create a new student organization.

“One of my proudest achievements is founding the university’s American Society of Civil Engineers chapter,” Carlson said. “Building ASCE from the ground up took months of drafting proposals, organizing events, and securing support from faculty and the university.”

The ASCE chapter now serves as a resource for civil engineering students, offering networking and professional development opportunities that will prepare them for careers in that field.

Carlson’s academic efforts have been supported by various scholarships, including the Presidential Merit Scholarship. This financial aid, she said, has been instrumental in allowing her to focus on her studies and her campus involvement without the burden of financial stress.

In summer 2024, Anya Carlson '25 was selected as a field engineering intern at the Harbor Bridge Replacement Project, where she shadowed field engineers and observed the construction process.







In 2023, Anya Carlson '25 helped found the TAMU-CC American Society of Civil Engineers, which now has more than 80 active members.

"I couldn't do what I want to do without scholarships," Carlson said. "I'm grateful to be considered worthy of a scholarship."

In summer 2024, Carlson took a significant step toward her career goals through an internship related to the Harbor Bridge Replacement Project. There, she shadowed field engineers and gained a comprehensive understanding of the construction of cable-stay bridges.

"It was a great opportunity to see engineering concepts come to life on a massive scale," Carlson said. "The internship was a prime example of how TAMU-CC is preparing me for real-world challenges."

Carlson credits much of her success to the encouragement she has received from her parents — her mom is a nurse, and her dad is a chemistry teacher. Their steady encouragement was bolstered by the guidance of mentor Dr. Hua Zhang, Associate Professor of Civil Engineering and ASCE faculty advisor.

"Anya's creativity, dedication, and professionalism have been the driving force behind almost every milestone of ASCE," Zhang said. "Her unique contributions have been highly recognized by the Corpus Christi and Texas Section of ASCE."

Carlson's post-graduation goals are both ambitious and grounded in her desire to serve.

"I hope to work with an engineering firm that will support me in becoming a licensed Professional Engineer," she said. "Ultimately, I hope to use my technical skills to make a difference, whether through infrastructure improvements for underserved communities or mission-driven projects overseas."

For Carlson, her college journey has been more than building structures — it has been about building opportunities and giving back.

"I feel well-equipped," Carlson said. "The Island University has given me the tools to engineer change that extends far beyond the classroom." •



# NEW ENDOWMENTS

## 2024

The Art Museum of South Texas Curator of Exhibitions Endowment

The Art Museum of South Texas Director Endowment

Jason M. Balsom Memorial Endowed Scholarship

The Cedar Bayou Endowed Restoration Fund

The James A. "Buddy" Davidson Charitable Foundation Endowment

Dr. Scott Elliff and Michael Briones Endowed Scholarship in Education

Maxine Flournoy Memorial Endowed Scholarship

Texas Made Lures (LLC) Endowed Scholarship

Dr. William and Suzelle Tinnell Endowed Scholarship for  
Falfurrias High School Graduates





# ENDOWED SCHOLARSHIP COUNCIL

Scholarship endowments that have reached a book value of \$50,000 or more are inducted into the Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi Endowed Scholarship Council and recognized at various levels.

*Below are new inductees for 2024.*

## GOLD WAVE

\$250,000-\$499,000

Erin Caroline Donalson Memorial  
Endowed Scholarship

Dr. and Mrs. Hugh A. Kennedy  
Endowed Scholarship

## SILVER WAVE

\$150,000-\$249,999

American Bank Endowed  
Scholarship in Business

ArcelorMittal Texas HBI Endowed  
Scholarship for Residents of  
San Patricio County

Behmann Brothers Foundation  
Endowed Scholarship

Thomas John Ferguson Endowed  
Scholarship in Marine Biology

Dee Stephens Endowed  
Scholarship in Nursing

## GREEN WAVE

\$100,000-\$149,999

Drew M. Bingham Foundation  
Endowed Scholarship

The Corpus Christi Medical Center  
Endowed Scholarship for Graduate  
Students in Nursing & Health  
Sciences

Maite Yuleana Rodriguez Memorial  
Quasi-Endowed Scholarship in  
Marine Biology

## BLUE WAVE

\$50,000-\$99,999

Leslie Aigner Endowment for the Arts

Paul and Annie Hafernik Endowed  
Scholarship Fund

Perron Quintana Family Endowed  
Scholarship

Nina Sicking Memorial Scholarship

Dagoberto and Rosie Vela Endowed  
Scholarship



# \$1,506,071

AMOUNT AWARDED IN  
ENDOWED SCHOLARSHIPS



# 1,067

STUDENTS AWARDED AN  
ENDOWED OR ANNUAL  
SCHOLARSHIP

# Supporting the Rich History of Corpus Christi

## THE PATTY AND HANK NUSS MULTIPURPOSE ROOM IS LATEST ADDITION TO TAMU-CC'S SPECIAL COLLECTIONS AND ARCHIVES



Patty Nuss and her husband Hank traveled the world, from Tibet to Patagonia and everywhere in between. Their adventures are well documented in photo albums that Hank created.

**WALK THROUGH THE HOME OFFICE** of the late Henry “Hank” Nuss III and you will see mementos of a life well lived — pictures of smiling family members, awards and recognition, and binders of photos documenting the amazing sights around the world, which he and his wife had the privilege of visiting. Every binder is named after a country they once visited including Greece, Kenya, Germany, New Zealand, and China.

“We loved to travel and see new cultures and countries,” said Patty Nuss, Hank’s wife of more than 60 years. “Hank would come home from a trip and immediately delve into creating an album with pictures and further research into the history of the country we just visited. He loved history.”

It’s that love of history that makes it fitting that Patty and Hank’s

names will be associated with the rich history of Corpus Christi. Their latest gift to TAMU-CC has led to the creation of the Patty and Hank Nuss Multipurpose Room, a new space supporting the university’s Special Collections and Archives, which will be located in the university’s building in downtown Corpus Christi.

“I hope that since it’s a downtown space it will be very accessible for people who might not attend the university,” Patty said. “I hope the citizens of the community will walk in, sit down, and look into the vast history of this amazing city.”

Patty and Hank Nuss called Corpus Christi home for over 60 years. They saw the area grow from a small, promising town on the Texas Gulf Coast into a vibrant, ever-growing community.

“My father was a great promoter of the city,” Patty said. “He grew up here, built several shopping centers here, and always believed in the future of Corpus Christi.”

Patty experienced the growth and transformation of Corpus Christi first-hand. She was there to witness Corpus Christi High School become Miller High School, where she proudly became a Battlin’ Buc. After graduation, she pursued an English degree at Southern Methodist University in Dallas. It was on that campus where she met the son of Erna and Henry Nuss.

“Hank and I first met in the library. I was there to study, and a mutual friend introduced us,” Patty recalled. “I immediately liked Hank and his clean-cut demeanor.”

A first date eventually led to a proposal, and in 1960, they were married. After Hank’s military service, the couple returned to Corpus Christi in 1963, where they built a life together and raised a family that grew to include three children and four grandchildren.

Hank pursued a career in law, joining the firm once known as Kleberg, Mobley, Lockett, & Weil, now called Welder Leshin, where he worked until his retirement. During this time, Patty and Hank became integral members of the Corpus Christi community, serving on numerous business, nonprofit, and faith-based boards. Their connection with Texas A&M-Corpus Christi began in the 1990s, marking the start of a meaningful relationship with the institution.



"We were so proud when our local college became TAMU-CC," Patty said. "Our first contributions went to the President's Council which Hank thought was quite worthy since the money went to student scholarships."

Their generous contributions over the years have supported countless students in achieving their dreams of earning a college degree. Now, their enduring legacy of giving back will be permanently honored with the multipurpose room that bears their name — a space poised to make a lasting impact in the community they have long cherished.

"The donation from Patty and Hank Nuss for the multipurpose room is not only inspiring — it's critical to our progress," said Dr. Catherine Rudowsky, TAMU-CC Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs. "This gift reaffirms that our vision for this downtown archive space and its impact on the community is a shared

one, embraced by people who care deeply about its success."

Patty can't help but smile, knowing their contribution will make a lasting impact on both the university and the city. She is certain that Hank, who passed away in October 2023, would have been proud to be part of this exciting new chapter for TAMU-CC.

"It's so humbling, and really an honor, to be able to put our name on something that will help enrich the community for years to come," Patty said. "If another person sees our room and is inspired to give, that would be great. Also, I want our grandchildren to know that we believe in supporting our community and feel pride in this accomplishment."

Crews are currently working on revitalizing the university's five-story building at 223 N. Chaparral Street. The multipurpose room, which will open this spring in phase one

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*"The donation from Patty and Hank Nuss for the multipurpose room is not only inspiring — it's critical to our progress."*

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**DR. CATHERINE RUDOWSKY**  
Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs

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of the project, will be located on the first floor and will be used for programming related to the university's special collections and archives, as well as general educational and community events. •

A longtime supporter of downtown Corpus Christi, Patty Nuss is also actively involved in other historical preservation projects in the area.





# TAMU-CC

*by the numbers\**



## MORE THAN \$140 M

AWARDED IN SCHOLARSHIPS & AID



## \$974.2 M    \$644.7 M    \$638.9 M

TO THE STATE OF TEXAS

TO THE COASTAL BEND

TO THE CORPUS CHRISTI  
COMMUNITY

IN TOTAL ECONOMIC BENEFIT GENERATED ANNUALLY BY THE UNIVERSITY



## 49 & 56

STATES    COUNTRIES

REPRESENTED BY OUR  
STUDENT POPULATION

## #1

TAMUS REGIONAL  
UNIVERSITY IN RESEARCH  
EXPENDITURES

## 150+

STUDENT  
ORGANIZATIONS

\*Using data from FY24 (Sept. 1, 2023 - Aug. 31, 2024)

# INNER CIRCLE OF EXCELLENCE

The Honor Wall of Recognition, located in the University Center's Legacy Hall, showcases the university's most generous donors and reflects cumulative giving. It affords visual recognition of these most inspired donors.  
*Below are new inductees for 2024.*

## LEGACY SOCIETY

Gifts of \$10,000,000 or more

Harte Research Support Foundation

## PLATINUM INNER CIRCLE OF EXCELLENCE SOCIETY

Gifts of \$1,000,000 - \$9,999,999

Dr. Donald E. Joyner and  
Dr. Betty C. Joyner

## SILVER INNER CIRCLE OF EXCELLENCE SOCIETY

Gifts of \$250,000 - \$499,999

Art Museum of South Texas

Gulf Coast Growth Ventures/  
ExxonMobil

## BRONZE INNER CIRCLE OF EXCELLENCE SOCIETY

Gifts of \$100,000 - \$249,999

Cheniere Energy

CHRISTUS Fund

Corpus Christi Medical Center

Jim and Candace Moloney

Dr. Thomas Shirley and Susan Shirley

Texas Parks and Wildlife

Dagoberto and Rosie Vela

## HERITAGE SOCIETY

Estate and Life Income Gifts

Nadine Vasquez Hefner and  
Ronald Hefner



# \$10 M+

RAISED BY DONORS  
IN FY24



# 5,477

TOTAL NUMBER  
OF GIFTS

# 20 Years and Counting

## PERFORMING ARTS CENTER CELEBRATES 20-YEAR MILESTONE WITH \$1.5M IN TRANSFORMATIVE GIFTS

### THE TEXAS A&M-CORPUS CHRISTI

Performing Arts Center (PAC) is celebrating its 20th anniversary in 2025 with the announcement of three transformative gifts.

These contributions, totaling over \$1.5 million from individual and corporate donors, underscore the PAC's pivotal role in enriching the local arts and culture scene.

"If athletics serves as the front door to the university, the PAC is an equally important gateway," said Jaime Nodarse Barrera, Vice President for Institutional Advancement. "Many people who have no prior connection to the university first experience it through an event at the PAC."

The gifts highlight these donors' commitment to the arts as well as the Coastal Bend's cultural vibrancy. They also include naming rights within the venue, including the Louise and John Chapman Lobby, the H-E-B Performance Hall, and the Lucy and Dick McCracken Concession Stand.

The PAC has changed a great deal since it opened in April 2005. Recent enhancements, such as the addition of a state-of-the-art video screen and the installation of new seating, have elevated the venue's guest experience. However, these updates are merely the prelude to what university officials envision as a renaissance for the PAC — one that they hope will draw greater attention and welcome more visitors than ever before.

Don Luna, emeritus professor of theatre who retired from TAMU-CC in 2021 after 28 years of service, was appointed as interim director of the PAC while the university conducted

a national search to fill an executive director role. The new executive director begins June 1.

"The next leader of this facility will play a pivotal role in elevating the PAC to new heights," Luna said. "They will bring a deep understanding of performing arts, a strategic mindset, and a strong background in philanthropy to enhance the PAC's impact, expand its usage, and boost revenue generation."

In addition to hosting world-renowned performances, the PAC stage is regularly filled with student showcases from the university's music and dance programs. However, the demands of those departments often leave limited availability for other events. That will change in 2026 with the opening of the university's new Arts and Media Building. This two-story facility will feature appropriately sized performance and rehearsal spaces tailored to student needs, easing scheduling constraints at the PAC.

"With many student performances moving to better-suited spaces, the PAC will have greater flexibility to host a wider range of events, allowing it to further solidify its role as an artistic hub for all of South Texas," Luna said. "While our primary mission will always be to serve our students, I believe we can fulfill both goals simultaneously — supporting our students while also serving our community."

As the PAC enters an exciting new chapter, the university is collaborating with consultants to explore innovative ways to maximize the building's potential. With a seating capacity

of 1,350, the PAC offers an intimate yet spacious venue, perfectly suited for performances that may feel overshadowed in larger spaces located in downtown Corpus Christi.

"This unique size positions the PAC as an ideal destination for acts seeking a more personal connection with their audience," Barrera said. "We also will use the consultants to help us define a unique niche for the PAC and explore programming options that are accessible, affordable, and appealing to families." •

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*"While our primary mission will always be to serve our students, I believe we can fulfill both goals simultaneously — supporting our students while also serving our community."*

### DON LUNA

Interim Director, Performing Arts Center

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For more information about upcoming events at the Performing Arts Center, visit [pac.tamucc.edu](http://pac.tamucc.edu) or call the box office at 361.825.2787. To offer philanthropic support or to learn more about additional naming opportunities at the Island University, contact Jaime Nodarse Barrera at [jaime.nodarse@tamucc.edu](mailto:jaime.nodarse@tamucc.edu) or 361.825.3320.







Dian Wright-Forde '25, a 6'3" guard for Islanders Men's Basketball, is majoring in communication.



In the 2023-24 season, Dian Wright-Forde '25 played in 31 games and finished second on the team in scoring with an average of 10.4 points per game.



# *More than Teammates*

## **ISLANDERS MEN'S BASKETBALL TEAM RALLIES AROUND ONE OF THEIR OWN AFTER THE LOSS OF HIS MOTHER**

**DIAN WRIGHT-FORDE '25, GUARD ON** Islanders Men's Basketball team, can still remember the pain of twisting an ankle during a highly competitive basketball tournament on the courts of a New York City park. Wright-Forde, then 12 years old, took a moment to compose himself while a frenzied crowd looked on and the fate of the game hung in the balance. What happened next is what movies are made of: he tightened up his shoelaces, grabbed the ball, and made the game-winning shot. On that day, he turned pain into triumph.

"My whole team dogpiled me on the concrete court," Wright-Forde said. "At that moment, I just knew basketball was my thing and that I might be pretty good at it."

Wright-Forde's journey to the Island University began on another island almost 2,000 miles away — Long Island, New York. He is one of six children born to Jacqueline Wright.

"She was the life of the party, always giving off great vibes. But she was also the toughest person I ever met," he said. "She wasn't going to be swayed by peer pressure. If she had a stance, nothing was going to change that. That's how I am today, strong in my convictions. I got that from her."

Another guiding light for Wright-Forde and his siblings was their grandmother, Juanita Forde.

"My nana is old school. She worked full-time and traveled long hours every day to get into New York City,"

he said. "I was raised by women who taught me how to be a good man."

Wright-Forde's twin older brothers also made a major impact on his decision to play basketball.

"They used to play basketball in high school, and everyone loved them," Wright-Forde said. "I wanted to be like that. I used to play soccer, but I started bouncing the basketball on the concrete and fell in love."

That love would first take him to Odessa Junior College in East Texas where he played two years before entering the transfer portal. His Division I dream finally came true at TAMU-CC.

*Continued on the next page.*



*"I kept this basketball journey alive to honor my mom, inspire my family, and become the man she always hoped I'd be."*

"I felt a real family-oriented vibe," he said. "I felt I could trust the people here and that they were going to put me in a position to be successful."

Success would come quickly for Wright-Forde and his new team. Islander Men's Basketball made it to the semifinals of the Southland Conference Tournament his junior year and would go on to earn a bid to the CollegeInsider.com Postseason Tournament (CIT). He finished his first Islanders season as the second-leading scorer on the team. What made the success all the more remarkable was the heavy weight on his heart.

"In November 2023, right as our season was just getting underway, my mother started complaining about back issues," Wright-Forde remembered. "She joked that maybe she was just getting old. Turns out she had stage 4 cancer — lymphoma."

What would follow would be the toughest balancing act of Wright-Forde's young life. There were his basketball commitments, his schoolwork, and most importantly, there were daily FaceTime conversations with his mother. His grandmother convinced him to keep playing because she said his mother wouldn't want him to stop chasing his dream.

"It was unbelievably inspiring to have him continue playing on the court at such a high level," said Jim Shaw, Islanders Men's Basketball Head Coach. "I think basketball was a little bit of safe haven and escape for him, and we were there for him. Whether it

was a hug or sitting down and talking with him, we made sure he knew we cared."

Unfortunately, Wright's health deteriorated quickly. In February 2024, Wright-Forde made a return trip home to see his mother for the final time.

"She didn't want me seeing her that way because she didn't want my last memory of her to be her looking weak," Wright-Forde said. "She always wanted me to see her strong, and that's how I remember her — strong."

Jacqueline Wright was just 45 when she passed away, leaving her son, only 22, to face the most profound loss of his life. Yet, Wright-Forde has always known how to fight through adversity — just as he did at 12 years old on a basketball court in New York City. Once again, he found strength in his teammates and coaches, a group that grew from a squad into a family.

"It goes back to the reason I came here, a family-oriented vibe that rallied behind me," Wright-Forde said. "I could have hit the transfer portal to get closer to home, but I love it here. And my nana told me to finish what you started, where you started it."

That advice from his grandmother, paired with the love and support of the Islander community, gave Wright-Forde the will to keep going. On and off the court, he found a family who lifted him up when he felt he couldn't stand. Together, they turned his grief into resilience and reminded him that even in his hardest moments, he would never walk alone.

"I'll never understand why my mom was taken from me so soon, but one thing I know is that she is always by my side, and she will never leave me," he said. "I kept this basketball journey alive to honor my mom, inspire my family, and become the man she always hoped I'd be." •



Dian Wright-Forde '25 shares a smile with his mother Jacqueline as she courageously fought cancer.

# ISLANDERS ATHLETICS POINTS OF PRIDE

## 2023-2024 SEASON



6

SOUTHLAND CONFERENCE  
CHAMPIONSHIPS

- Men's Cross Country
- Women's Basketball Tournament
- Beach Volleyball Regular Season (back-to-back)
- Women's Tennis Regular Season
- Women's Tennis Tournament (4 straight)
- Beach Volleyball Tournament (3 straight)



3

SOUTHLAND CONFERENCE  
PLAYERS OF THE YEAR

- Mathayo Kiptoo Bundotich '26 – Men's Cross Country
- Kyndal Payne '24 – Volleyball  
(also AVCA All-America Honorable Mention)
- Emma Aucagne '26 – Women's Tennis



22

FIRST-TEAM ALL SOUTHLAND  
CONFERENCE HONORS



43

PLAYER OF THE WEEK HONORS



4

SOUTHLAND CONFERENCE TOURNAMENT MVPs

- Paige Allen '25 – Women's Basketball (first in program history)
- Ana Veroux '26 – Women's Tennis
- Chloe Tome '24 & Cassie Dodd '24 – Beach Volleyball



**BEACH VOLLEYBALL**

BECAME NATIONALLY RANKED

RECEIVED THE SOUTHLAND CONFERENCE ACADEMIC  
PERFORMANCE AWARD FOR THIRD YEAR IN A ROW



**3.0+ GPA** CUMULATIVE FOR  
20 STRAIGHT SEMESTERS

**57** STUDENT-ATHLETES WITH A 4.0 GPA



**2,815 HOURS**

OF COMMUNITY SERVICE COMPLETED BY  
STUDENT-ATHLETES



**WOMEN'S BASKETBALL**

COMPETED IN THE NCAA TOURNAMENT FOR THE  
FIRST TIME EVER



# Lifetime of Impact

## JESSIE FRANCES NEAL SCHOLARSHIP KEEPS LATE BUSINESS PIONEER'S LEGACY ALIVE

### FOR MORE THAN A DECADE, THE

Jessie Frances Neal Scholarship has helped business students at Texas A&M-Corpus Christi learn the necessary skills to be successful in business without having to worry about paying for their education.

Established in 2014, the scholarship awards several incoming College of Business freshmen \$10,000 annually for four years and annually pays for more than 20 students' education.

"It's a really big relief," said Jazmin Narvaez '27. "It more than covered my entire tuition, and I used the rest to cover my books and meal plan."

Narvaez, a first-generation student from Corpus Christi, studies

accounting at the Island University.

"I read into the scholarship, and in the process, I learned about Mrs. Neal and her background," Narvaez said.

Born in 1936, Jessie Frances Neal was the eldest daughter of Jess J. and Hazel Neal. In 1965, she wrote her first oil lease, five years after oil was discovered on her family's ranch in Upton County, Texas. Having studied business at San Angelo Business College, Neal managed her family's interests for more than 50 years before she passed away in 2023.

"Her story motivates me to not give up and to continue going, especially during tough classes," Narvaez said.



Jazmin Narvaez '27



Jessie Frances Neal in 2017.

That drive to succeed is a hallmark of Jessie Frances Neal Scholars. Every scholarship recipient is expected to major in business, enroll in at least 15 credit hours per semester, and maintain a GPA of 3.0 or higher.

"Mrs. Neal was a truly exceptional woman," said Dr. Brian Tietje, Dean of the College of Business. "She was in a male-dominated industry, and she was, as far as I know, one of the toughest negotiators anyone has ever experienced. She also wanted to reward hard-working, high-achieving students."

Blake Farr '26, a Neal Scholar from Portland, Texas, chose TAMU-CC for its proximity to home and academic rigor. Like Neal, Farr's interest in business was inherited from his father. Farr chose to pursue an accounting degree, which he hopes leads to a successful career as an entrepreneur, like his father who owns an HVAC business.

“Receiving this scholarship gives me that much more motivation,” Farr said. “I want to do well because I have been supported so generously. I want to do well for Mrs. Neal.”

Neal and her husband Clifton W. Coonrod spent several years living in Corpus Christi, and during that time, they developed a strong affinity for the city — and the university. Even after leaving the Coastal Bend, the Island University and its students were never far from Neal’s thoughts. From her home in Laredo, Neal forged a relationship with the university, one which eventually resulted in the endowment of the Jessie Frances Neal Scholarship.

“She could have chosen to do anything she wanted with her resources, and yet, she has been incredibly generous to our students,” Tietje said.

Neal was highly invested in the success of her scholars and often invited students and their faculty to intimate luncheons so she could learn more about their lives. She also gifted each scholar with an executive pen



Jessie Frances Neal, surrounded by Neal Scholars, during a luncheon in the university's Michael and Karen O'Connor Building.

bearing the name of her foundation for use in their offices and when signing their future contracts.

“Mrs. Neal wanted to hear student stories and find out their plans,” Tietje said. “She would memorize the stories of different students receiving her scholarship and always asked how they were doing.”

To show their appreciation, Neal Scholars wrote her letters thanking her for her generosity. Today, those letters are sent to the Jessie Frances Neal Foundation.

“Mrs. Neal strongly believed in the importance of being proficient in business,” said Carmina Butler, Jessie Frances Neal Foundation secretary. “She felt that having a solid business foundation would set anybody up for success, no matter their path in life. She chose TAMU-CC because she believed the university provided an excellent education.”

While he never met her, Farr hopes one day to express his gratitude by paying Neal’s gesture forward.

“I definitely want to be successful,” Farr said. “If I’m in the financial position where I can, I would absolutely love to give back to

someone someday who’s just like me.”

Since its inception, 118 students have been awarded the Jessie Frances Neal Scholarship with 79 Neal Scholars so far having earned their degrees. In recognition of its generous support, the foundation received TAMU-CC’s Platinum Inner Circle of Excellence award in 2019, the same year Neal was granted an Honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters from TAMU-CC.

In addition to the scholarships, in 2020 the Jessie Frances Neal Foundation created an endowed chair position in the College of Business, named for the foundation and her late husband. The current Jessie Frances Neal Foundation and Clifton W. Coonrod Endowed Chair in Accounting is Dr. Dana Forgione.

“It is a great honor and privilege to have been selected as the inaugural holder of the Neal-Coonrod Endowed Chair,” Forgione said. “I believe Mrs. Neal is an outstanding example for our students of how someone can begin with little and through hard work, determination, and faith can achieve great things during their lifetime.” •



Blake Farr '26





# ISLANDER FOREVER

## ALUMNI BOARD & CHAPTER PRESIDENTS

Numbers tell a story. Our numbers show that our Islander family is steadily growing. But our most important number is *one*.  
One Island. One family.

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### 2024 ALUMNI AWARDS

#### DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI AWARDS

Distinguished Alumnus

Alex Harris '89

Outstanding Alumnus

Musanna Al-Muntasir '08

Young Alumnus

Amy Montez Frye '14

#### ATHLETIC HALL OF HONOR INDUCTEES

2002 Women's Cross Country Team

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Rachel Hudson-Freeman '03, '06

Leeann Jimenez '05

Laura MacLellan

Jennifer Miller Reasner

Anita Quirino '06

Yvette Rodriguez '07

Yvonne Rodriguez '05

Annie Marie Roque

Karla L. West '06

Bree Wilson-Soileau



*“As a long-time member of the South Texas business community, I’ve witnessed firsthand the incredible contributions TAMU-CC graduates make. From health care heroes to inspiring educators and savvy business professionals, the Island University produces a powerhouse of talent. TAMU-CC truly serves students at all stages of life — whether they are traditional students seeking a degree to start their careers, or individuals like me advancing their education to prepare for new opportunities. My family and I are thrilled to be part of the Islander legacy!”*

**DANA SISK '01, CPA**

Master of Accountancy



# *Dedicated to a Texas Treasure*

## **NEW ENDOWMENT AND BOAT DONATION HONORS CONSERVATION LEGACY OF LOUIS “SCOTT” MURRAY**

### **DURING A FISHING TRIP ON BAFFIN**

Bay in the late 1990s, David McKee discovered how much Scott Murray knew about the unique coastal waters between Corpus Christi and Brownsville. McKee recalled how Murray, guiding a group of fishermen, gave precise instructions: once they exited the boat, they were to wade about 75 yards until they felt shells underfoot — then, and only then, should they start casting their lines.

“Immediately we started catching fish,” McKee said. “We had 13 (speckled sea) trout, and the smallest one was 27 inches. And during all of this, Scott said, ‘They are not big enough. I hear there were some big ones over there.’ And we left while they were biting.”

The excursion to another part of the bay was cut short because of a thunderstorm, but that instance was one of many where Murray, who passed away in February 2024, showed not only his knowledge of the bay, but also his passion to keep it healthy.

“Scott and I lived and breathed hunting and fishing, and when you do that, you start seeing changes on the ranches, changes in the water,” McKee said. “Scott was very observant and passionate about all of us being good stewards of our environment.”

Murray’s lifelong dedication to coastal conservation, education, and the future of Baffin Bay continues to inspire new efforts and support for vital research initiatives at the Harte Research Institute at the Island University.

The Louis “Scott” Murray Endowed Fund for the Conservation of Baffin Bay was established by his family and

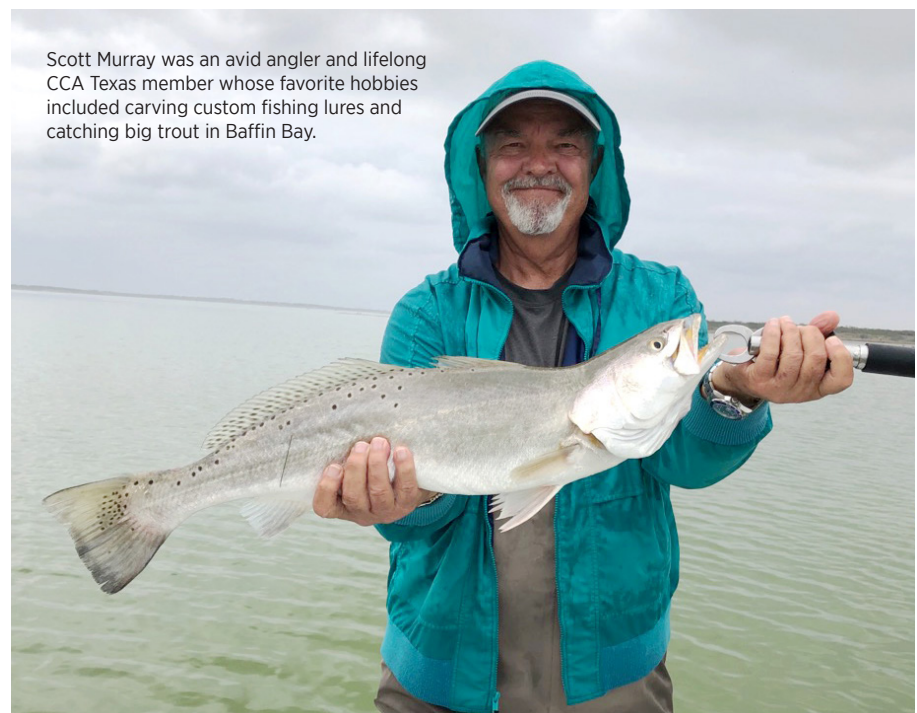
friends to ensure the next generation of coastal and marine researchers have opportunities to learn and grow, personally and professionally. The funds administered from the endowment will help with the enhancement of the Bringing Baffin Back™ initiative. The endowment is profoundly important because it provides a perpetual source of support, offering financial security, stability, and the ability to pursue long-term objectives without relying solely on annual funding sources. The current market value of the fund is more than \$42,000.

The Bringing Baffin Back™ initiative, which officially launched in 2022, is a collaborative conservation program spearheaded by HRI and the Coastal Bend Bays and Estuaries Program. Its mission is to restore and protect the health of Baffin Bay and its surrounding watershed, which is

known for its ecological significance and unique hypersaline environment. Murray’s efforts to help restore Baffin Bay began long before the launch of the Bringing Baffin Back™ initiative. He was among the first to notice his beloved bay was in trouble, as environmental challenges such as nutrient pollution and habitat degradation threatened its ecological balance.

“Scott was always observation minded,” McKee said. “On the bay or hunting lease, that’s just the way he operated.”

In 2013, Murray was among a group of “citizen scientists” that helped HRI researchers begin studying water quality of the bay, and five years later, the Baffin Bay Stakeholder Group formed. The group now includes more than 350 members as they expand the efforts to restore a “Texas treasure.”



Scott Murray was an avid angler and lifelong CCA Texas member whose favorite hobbies included carving custom fishing lures and catching big trout in Baffin Bay.





*"The Scott Murray family is honored to see Scott's name on a beautiful Haynie Magnum and dedicated to a worthy mission."*

**KIRK MURRAY**  
Son of Scott Murray

Murray also helped with the creation of the Baffin Bay Volunteer Water Quality Monitoring Group and served on multiple boards and councils.

Murray's friends and family said he worked hard during his lifetime to make sure the Baffin Bay he knew as a youngster was passed down to future generations, so that they could also land the big trout he loved catching so much.

"He was a pretty humble guy," said Mike Wetz, HRI Chair for Coastal Ecosystem Processes, the lab which works on the Bringing Baffin Back™ initiative. "Everybody in the community knew Scott and knew of

his love of fishing. Bringing Baffin Back™ is a big part of his legacy. We would not be here if Scott hadn't gotten people together initially and got this thing going."

In November 2024, a 25-foot Haynie Magnum boat, donated and financed by CCA Texas, was dedicated and named in his honor. The boat's primary use will be in support of the Bringing Baffin Back™ initiative.

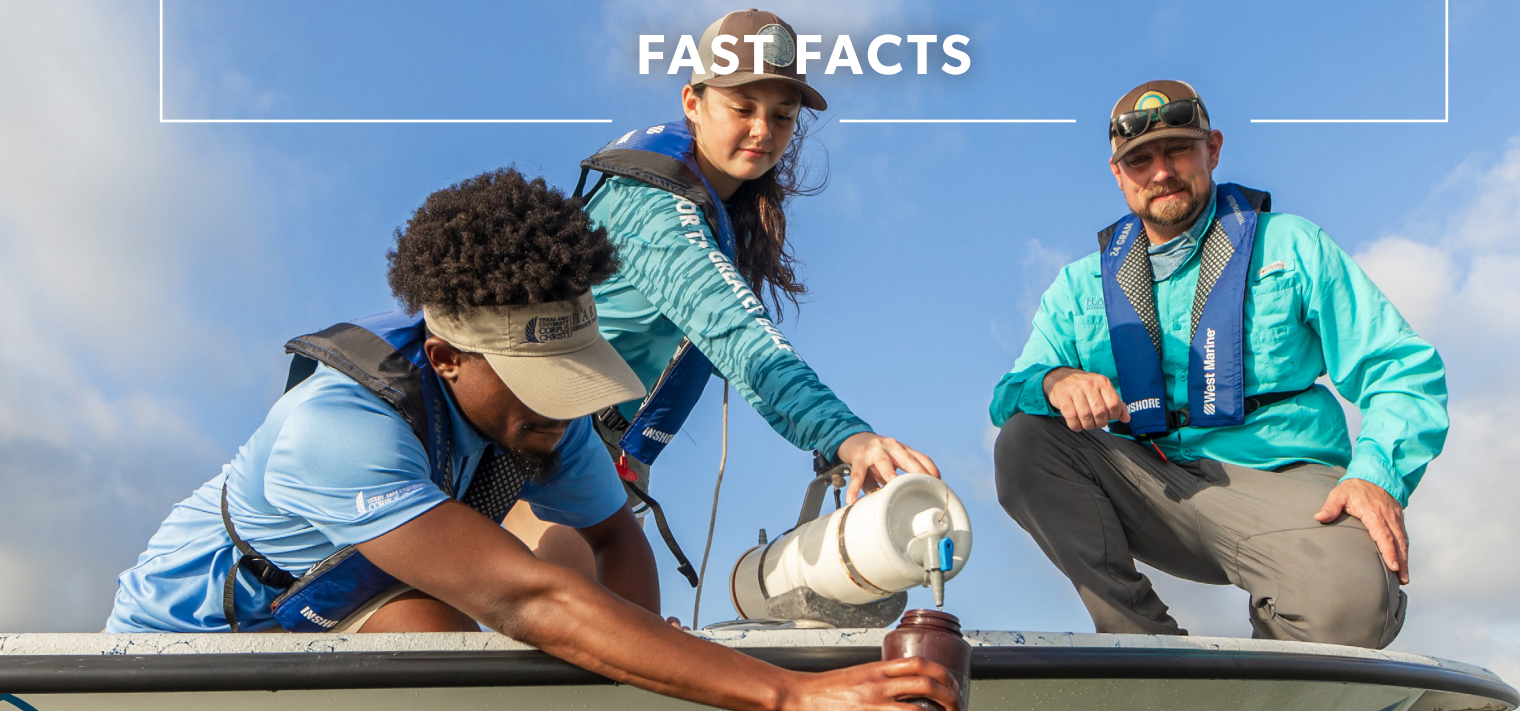
"The Scott Murray family is honored to see Scott's name on a beautiful Haynie Magnum and dedicated to a worthy mission," said Kirk Murray, Scott's son.

Murray's legacy will be forever woven into the fabric of Baffin Bay, reflected in the ongoing commitment to conserve and protect this unique coastal treasure. His passion for the bay's beauty and fishing inspired countless others, and through the efforts he championed, future generations will continue to enjoy and preserve the bay he loved so deeply. •



# HARTE RESEARCH INSTITUTE

## FAST FACTS



**177**

UNIQUE DONORS TO  
HRI IN FY24



**\$4,507,272**

HRI FUNDS RAISED IN FY24



**10,000+**

SHARKS TAGGED BY HRI  
AND CITIZEN ANGLERS



**1M**

VIEWS OF PORTUGUESE  
MAN O'WAR  
BEACHCOMBING  
EPISODE



**8**

DISCOVERY SHARK WEEK  
EPISODES FEATURING HRI



**13**

HRI GRADUATE STUDENTS  
SUPPORTED IN 2024 BY NOAA  
CENTER FOR COASTAL & MARINE  
ECOSYSTEMS PROGRAM

*“HRI provided opportunities to conduct fieldwork on a small vessel, manage laboratory operations, analyze data, and write a manuscript. In my current role, I continue to draw from and build upon my experiences at HRI. The mentorship of the scientists at HRI was instrumental in shaping my career trajectory. I appreciated the friendly and welcoming culture of the support staff and administration. From the all-hands meeting to the chili cookoff, events at HRI helped foster meaningful connections.”*

**JENNIFER GILMORE '23**

M.S. Coastal and Marine System Science



**45**

ACRES OF OYSTER REEF  
ACRES RESTORED VIA  
SINK YOUR SHUCKS™



**100**

GENOTYPES OF CRITICALLY  
ENDANGERED STAGHORN  
CORAL HOUSED AT HRI



The background of the entire page is a photograph of several palm trees against a clear blue sky with some light, wispy clouds. The palm trees are green and have brown trunks. One tree on the left has a cluster of orange coconuts hanging from it. The text is centered in the upper half of the image.

# DONOR HONOR ROLL

Thank you for your continued support to the Island University.  
With your support, Islanders succeed.

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## DONOR HONOR ROLL

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United Ways of Texas  
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UPS  
Chuck Urban, PE and Yma Urban  
Karen and Larry Urban  
Urban Air Adventure Park  
USAA  
USS Lexington Museum

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Julie Van Der Werff  
Litton Van Der Werff  
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Lucilla Vasquez  
Arturo Vasquez, CPA Memorial Foundation  
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Kathryn and Royce Vaughn



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Diana Velazquez  
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Jamie and Steve Villarreal  
Captain Otto Vindekilde  
Virginia's on the Bay  
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The Annual Report recognizes gifts from Jan. 1, 2024, to Dec. 31, 2024. Every effort has been made to avoid errors, misspellings, and omissions. If, however, an error has been made, please accept our most sincere apologies and notify Sarina Garcia '20, '22 at [sarina.garcia@tamucc.edu](mailto:sarina.garcia@tamucc.edu) and we will correct our records. Thank you.