

PEOPLE THEY WANT TO HIRE

THE SOUTHERLAND AGGIE LEADER SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM GIVES A PAT ON THE BACKS—AND MONEY IN THE POCKETS—OF STUDENT GO-GETTERS

In the mid-1990s, then-Texas A&M University Student Body President Brooke Leslie '94 approached the vice president for student affairs about the need to create scholarships for campus leaders. Such a program, she contended, would help ease the financial burden of these students, enabling them to fully participate in the “other education.” The awards would be given to sophomores, upperclassmen and even graduate students—those who often missed out on scholarships, since the vast majority of these awards were focused on freshmen.

It didn't take much to convince the student affairs vice president, Dr. J. Malon Southerland '65, of the idea's merits. With approvals in place and gifts from former students secured, the Aggie Leader Scholarship program was born, and the first scholarships were awarded in 1996.


Little could Southerland know that the very program he helped establish would one day bear his name.

On the receiving end of Southerland

When referring to Texas A&M “student leaders” in her pitch to Southerland, Leslie might as well have been describing Mollie Lastovica '14. At the end of her second year of college, the Fredericksburg Aggie's résumé read more like that of a corporate CEO.

Before she even got to Texas A&M, Lastovica represented more than 600,000 of her 4-H counterparts in her role as Texas 4-H Council president. During her sophomore year in college, she served as a vice president on the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences Student Council and led a caucus on the Texas A&M Student Senate. In other student organizations, she promoted her academic department, volunteered as an Aggie Muster host, and provided input to scholarship and financial aid directors.

In 2011 and 2012 alone, Lastovica was awarded nine academic honors, including two outstanding freshman awards. She also received a Buck Weirus



Mollie Lastovica '14 is on her own in terms of paying for school. The Southerland Aggie Leader Scholarship is a welcome financial relief.



Spirit Award, which recognizes student involvement.

She accomplished this while working 22 hours a week in the dean's office for the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, serving as communications coordinator for an agricultural organization—and maintaining a 4.0 grade point average. She's pursuing degrees in both political science and in agricultural communications and journalism, with plans to become a journalist.

Lastovica explained that while her parents provided her with a solid foundation, they also taught her to be independent. So she's on her own in terms of paying for school, using scholarships and her paychecks to fund her education.

The \$1,000 Southerland Aggie Leader Scholarship Lastovica received was a welcome financial relief. But she's particularly proud that it recognizes her accomplishments—not her lack of finances. "I really appreciate a scholarship opportunity that rewards my involvement and my leadership," she said.

The late Margaret and Roland Prove '35 funded Lastovica's endowed scholarship through the Texas A&M Foundation. In the 2011-12 academic year, more than 20 Southerland Aggie Leader endowments provided scholarships to 92 students, while an additional 25 scholarships were funded by The Association of Former Students.

Both of Lastovica's parents—Abban Lindsey Lastovica '84 and Robert Lastovica '84, '88—are Aggies,



but she said they never pressured her to attend A&M. Nevertheless, she always felt like she'd end up there. It was only after she arrived, however, that she realized it was where she was meant to be.

"I'd always heard about the Aggie spirit, but it's really not until you come to A&M and start getting involved on campus that you understand what the Aggie family is all about," she said.

Lastovica's high school class numbered 207. But she learned quickly how to keep from being overwhelmed by the size of A&M. "As a freshman, you have to come in and stick your feet in

the water and try out different groups," she said. "By doing that, the campus seems a lot smaller."

On the giving end of Southerland

Like Lastovica, Jason Chaka '02 of Houston took full advantage of "other education" opportunities during his time at A&M.

"I was fairly involved at A&M, and it changed my life," Chaka said.

He was a co-chair of both Fish Camp and of the MSC Spring Leadership Trip; an executive for MSC Hospitality; and a member of the Traditions Council. He and a friend

"THESE ARE THE YOUNG PEOPLE
THEY WANT TO HIRE.
THEY ARE GOING TO BE LEADERS
IN WHATEVER THEY TOUCH."

—DR. J. MALON SOUTHERLAND '65

Jason Chaka '02 took full advantage of “other education” opportunities at A&M. Now he is funding an endowed scholarship.

co-founded “Change” to help fellow students with financial need purchase Aggie rings. He was also the recipient of a Buck Weirus Spirit Award.

As soon as he left Texas A&M, Chaka began thinking of ways he could give back. Apart from an industrial distribution departmental scholarship, his parents covered the cost of his education, meaning he didn't have to work while attending school. He wants to enable students to fully enjoy the A&M experience like he did.

When he learned about the Southerland program, Chaka knew he'd found a good fit for his giving goals. Through a matching program available by his employer, KBR, an engineering and construction company, he funded a \$30,000 Southerland award endowment in 2008.

“I didn't want financial hardships holding anyone back from being a leader on campus,” Chaka said.

A worthy recognition

Southerland has dedicated virtually his entire life to helping students succeed. Three years after his 1965 graduation, he returned to campus as a counselor to the Corps of Cadets. From there, he rose through the ranks of university administration, serving in numerous capacities in student services, educational placement, the president's office and student financial aid. He taught in the management and edu-

cational administration departments, served as interim Corps commandant, and, for 10 years, led Texas A&M's massive student life program.

In the meantime, he furthered his own education, earning a master's degree from Texas A&M in 1974 and a doctorate in 1980.

Upon his 2003 retirement, Southerland was named vice president for student affairs emeritus.

At his retirement party, two new Aggie Leader endowments were announced—both created in Southerland's honor and funded by his friends. The bigger surprise, though, was that the name of the entire scholarship program had changed, as well. Thanks in great part to the efforts of Southerland's staff, a group of former students, and, ultimately, the Texas A&M University and Texas A&M Foundation presidents, it would be forever known as the J. Malon Southerland Aggie Leader Scholarship program.

Southerland himself is one of the most generous donors to the program, having personally funded six endowments and actively working on his seventh. He's also included a significant gift in his estate to endow even more scholarships.

Cindy Munson '99, Texas A&M Foundation director of development, said Southerland's dedication to the program shows why naming it for him was so appropriate. “Not only is the program named in his honor,” she said, “but he backs up that honor with

his time and financial commitment.”

Southerland said he'd love to see the number of endowments grow exponentially to reward even more student leaders.

During his time on campus, Southerland was known for his practice of treating students to lunch if they scored a 4.0 grade point average. He forges even closer ties with his scholarship recipients, following their career and personal paths well after graduation. He takes great pride in sharing stories about these students, whether it's the scholarship recipient who acquired an audience with the Pope or one who has quickly advanced through military ranks.

“These are the young people they want to hire,” he said of potential corporate donors. “If they could just throw a net over the room of award recipients, these are the people who could really do something great. They are going to be leaders in whatever they touch. It's just the nature of really involved young people who are attracted to Texas A&M.”

—BY KARA BOUNDS SOCOL

To learn how you can support the Southerland Aggie Leader Scholarship program, contact:

Cindy Munson '99
Director of Development
Texas A&M Foundation
(800) 392-3310 or (979) 862-7231
c-munson@tamu.edu

J. Malon Southerland '65 is one of the most generous donors to the Southerland Aggie Leader scholarship program; he has personally funded six Aggie Leader endowed scholarships and has committed to a seventh.

