PUSHING THE ENVELOPE

TOPGUN INSTRUCTOR
XAVIER KELLEY '09
St. Thomas High School Community Magazine

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RAREST THREE OF A KIND
Gus Boettcher ’21, Luke McLane ’21, and valedictorian Patrick Pham ’21 infused the academic year with exulted examples of gain through goodness, discipline, and knowledge.

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LIEUTENANT XAVIER KELLEY ‘09

IS A GIFTED FLIGHT INSTRUCTOR AT THE UNITED STATES NAVY, BRIMMING WITH UNFLINCHING CONFIDENCE AND CONVICTION.
And then Kelley subtly reveals that his TOPGUN is not about reckless bromancing aerial antics. Not at all about unmeasured machismo and rebellious whiz kid daredevils out to determine who within the group is the most alpha. It is the absolute respect that flying is the ultimate unforgiving exercise, the margin for error minuscule, and consequences often don’t allow for a second chance.

“We take the institution very seriously,” Kelley insists. “At the core we are teachers - humble, credible, and approachable. We pride ourselves in intense, effective instruction. There’s a rigorous peer review process so that all times we prioritize informed decisions.

“Talent and self-assurance in the aircraft are obviously essential. But with that conviction there must be a recognition that mistakes will be made regardless of the talent. No excuses, no defensive posture, just address it and improve. That’s what we’re looking for.

“Occasionally, we encounter a candidate with an attitude that is in conflict with that objective and we deal with it immediately. If we don’t see a correction, they will not graduate from the class.”

Kelley progressed through a standard training pipeline - Naval ROTC at Texas A&M at Galveston, then Aviation Preflight Indoctrination in Pensacola before preparation at the master jet base in Virginia Beach, Virginia. Basic Instruments, Precision Aerobatics, Formation, Radio Navigation, Night Familiarization.

From Strike Fighter Weapons and Tactics to becoming a wingman for his first deployment - glorious and terrifying - to teaming with his own wingman, then leading three other aircraft. From simulator flights to formation flights, from air combat maneuvers (called hops) and patrol exercises to a permanent squadron.

Ever improving his skills, Kelley cruised through each phase, mastering multiple concepts before manning some of the Navy’s supreme air war machines - huge, luxurious monsters that could have been designed by a Jerry Bruckheimer special effects crew. Kelley has proven acutely proficient at slicing through the atmosphere in straight lines and square corners at max Gs (the force of gravity). “Every time you’re in the air, there’s a combo of thrill and tension and gratification.”

All of which positioned Kelley at the Naval Strike and Air Warfare Center at Naval Air Station Fallon in Nevada, about 70 miles east of Reno. “Diamond Dave” Kelley grooms the next eager class of flying aces through vertigo-inducing instruction, imparting the latest avionics, techniques, and procedures.

Minus the 80s power chord soundtrack.

Kelley commands the F/A-18E/F Super Hornet, the backbone of the Navy’s carrier air wings. Strapped and secured in his two-seat cockpit, catapulted off a flight deck, pushing the throttle into afterburner as white-hot flames shoot from the plane’s exhaust nozzles, the magnificent machine screaming and exploding forward, hanging at high velocity in the skies. Where ego doesn’t fly. Supported by the serious and cerebral. Discipline mixed with collaboration to brand the next band of American airborne assault.

Beach volleyball, not required.

For Kelley, up there with the best of the best is significantly more than a Hollywood tagline. Only the elite 1% of naval aviators have the opportunity to engage in the 13-week combat qualifying, which in turn is a force-multiplier accelerating learning back to the fleet.

Xavier Kelley. You mean, like Pete “Maverick” Mitchell? Top Gun? Feel the need?

“It’s a great conversation starter.”

Until the obligatory grin-and-bear, cringe-worthy “Danger Zone” referencing ad nauseam - Goose, Iceman, Viper, Charlie, “I could tell you, but then I would have to kill you.”

HIS EXPLOITS INCLUDE NAVIGATING A SERIES OF DIZZYING, ADRENALINE-PUMPING AERIAL RITES AND PASSAGES TO LAND AS AN INSTRUCTOR AT THE PREEMINENT FIGHTER JOCK SCHOOL TOPGUN.

“ feel the need?”

“IT’S A GREAT CONVERSATION STARTER.”

“Unil the obligatory grin-and-bear, cringe-worthy “Danger Zone” referencing ad nauseam - Goose, Iceman, Viper, Charlie, “I could tell you, but then I would have to kill you.”
When presenting in front of the group. We all embrace the highest standards. There’s a responsibility to bring optimal effort. An exhausting series of evaluations where we all lock into the necessary demands. The expectations are to take personal pride in energy management, weapons employment, honoring rules of engagement. It’s all central to improving and perfecting. Mentally, it’s a mix of lectures, labs, and debriefings that may last into the early evening. Spatial and situational awareness, flight discipline and integrity, it’s all about the Navy. I knew I would give it my best and see what I could do. “For me, that introductory learning curve in Pensacola was surviving the firehose effect. Tons of data, rapid-fire. Six weeks to weed out candidates. I was well prepared to manage the curriculum and perform on exams. And once I got a taste of flying, I was hooked.”

Top Gun rose to the No. 1 blockbuster film at domestic and international box offices after it jetted across screens in the summer of 1986 and turbo-thrusted Tom Cruise into super cinema stardom where he has remained for decades. Naval Air Station Miramar near San Diego served as the backdrop for the Cold War-era action flick. The much-anticipated sequel was delayed for takeoff until November 2021 by the coronavirus pandemic, but Kelley’s real-life Navy Strike Fighter Tactics Instructor Program wasn’t prevented from graduating the next wave of combat aviators. “The trainees are up at 6:00 a.m.,” Kelley says. “For every 90 minutes they’re in the air are hours and hours on the ground in lectures, labs, and debriefings that may last into the early evening. Spatial and situational awareness, flight discipline and integrity, energy management, weapons employment, honoring rules of engagement. It’s all central to improving and perfecting. Mentally, it’s an exhausting series of evaluations where we all lock into the necessary demands. The expectations are to take personal pride in presenting in front of the group. We all embrace the highest standards. There’s a responsibility to bring optimal effort.”

The urgency for a program to hone Navy fighter tactics became clear in the early years of the Vietnam War. While addressing technical and reliability flaws in the equipment, Navy decision-makers also considered the importance of raising the standard of training. TOPGUN was born - to optimise air combat methods and better execute missions. The reality bears smart, skilled flying rather than cinematic make-believe mavericks. Graduates earn the unmistakable TOPGUN patch that sits on the shoulder of every flight suit, representing aeronautic superiority around the world and honoring a center for excellence. “That patch is worn throughout your career;” Kelley says with obvious reverence. “Those who reach the rank of admiral are still wearing it on their shoulders. In my opinion, it’s the most valuable patch in the Navy. At heart, we are teachers and it symbolizes a responsibility to maintain credibility. I’m expected to always accept a willingness to learn and teach, and make the fleet better. Not merely make myself better, but make someone else and therefore the fleet better.” Soaring rank and reputation aside, Kelley laughs that he’s “never left high school, in the best of ways.” Relationships with Class of 2009 cohorts Gavin Falcona and Hendrik Streuding remain particularly strong as all three are flying with the Navy. Falcona graduated from Auburn University while Streuding earned his degree at the Texas A&M flagship in College Station. One year remains for Kelley to complete his current three-year ways-of-the-sky tract before accepting the next 24-month commitment. The assignment is, of course, unknown, except that it’s all about the Navy. The not too far future may involve tutelage for Aidan ’21 if the youngest of three follows the recent family military trend. For now, launch and land stations on rolling flight decks are the routine with edge-of-the-seat, hard flying. Not cross-country cruising but intense, mind-bending, pull the stick and jolt up 7-Gs into the huge blue dome flying. “I’m fortunate, to say the least,” Kelley says of his path and discovering both passion and success. “The rush inside that Super Hornet is beyond description. To participate in our mission is incredibly rewarding. But the joy is not, ‘Look at me and how great I am.’ The joy is teaching the Navy’s best who come through the course and playing a role in their development. The joy is identifying a guy who may struggle at the start, and by the end of 13 weeks, we’re sending him on his journey. We all understand that we share in this allegiance together.” The TOPGUN adventures continue. The aura of the great gunslingers of the Old West. And at Mach 2 and 40,000 feet, it’s always high noon.
By every metric, their lives and careers were outrageous St. Thomas successes.

They crafted renowned academic acclaim with signature style and resounding selfless leadership. They flashed an exhaustive effervescence with a mature command and composure well beyond their years.
The phenomenal threesome from St. Cecilia Catholic School arrived independently together as freshmen and remained perched at peak positions atop the Class of 2021: an improbable buddy movie boldly unfolding on the Eagle campus in real time.

Patrick Pham, the 2021 valedictorian and president of the St. Thomas Chapter of the National Honor Society who received the Rev. Carl M. Alnoch, CSB Athletic Memorial Trophy for Excellence in Academics. 2021 Student Body President Luke McLane, the Principal’s Service and Leadership Award recipient. And his Vice President, National Commended Scholar Gus Boettcher, the Rev. Albert R. Gaelens, CSB Award winner.

Excited, inspiring examples of gain through goodness, discipline, and knowledge. Best friends before and now, often inseparable. And an integral element of their bond - mutual amazement.

Boettcher wrote “one of my college essays about Patrick and Luke and how I value our relationship. I wouldn’t be where I am without either one. Patrick knows how to get what he wants. I’m the idealist, the dreamer. He’s the pragmatist who navigates the details. We’ve all grown up together.”

Pham and McLane routinely sport wry grins and boundless energy. Bubbly and outgoing. Boettcher is similar but the persona doesn’t always translate. For him, there’s a fine line between the public and private, and a part of his personality remains steadfastly on one side, a tad more reserved and focused. Despite some subtle demarcation between them, the Fab Three unanimously chime that “we bring the best out of each other.”

“Gus and Patrick are an essential part of who I’ve become,” McLane says. “They’re passionate, always competitive within the group in a healthy way. Our freshman year they were non-stop out of the gate. I’ve become,” McLane says. “They’re passionate, Gus and Patrick are an essential part of who I’ve become,” McLane says. “They’re passionate, ’tad more reserved and focused. Despite some subtle demarcation between them, the Fab Three unanimously chime that “we bring the best out of each other.”

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Yet, as the terrific trio unspooled a wealth of individual wizardry, there was no divide, no jealousy. They emerged in equal measure to capture identities on campus and beyond.

Their crowning masterstroke was stoking and fueling the latest record-smashing Round Up eruption. The unmatched student body fundraiser overcame Mount Everest-esque odds to total nearly $600,000 in raffle ticket sales.

All monies contribute directly to St. Thomas tuition assistance, a Basilian tradition for nearly a century. “That Round Up was the most striking takeaway of my four years,” Boettcher says. “Round Up that year sold me and I knew that the (2021) freshmen needed that same reassurance. With the COVID limitations, they didn’t have an accurate understanding of how St. Thomas works for every student. How could they with all the restrictions? As a senior class, we had to corral that group and trigger that fire, that brotherhood. We were not going to be denied.”

McLane was one of more than 30 Eagle scholars from the graduating class accepted into Texas A&M University. He plans to study “physics and engineering, perhaps an astrophysics track to pursue a role with NASA.”

But McLane has already soared to soaring heights serving as the student body president as “my payback for what St. Thomas did for me my first two years - the community, the experiences that I would not have gotten anywhere else. I can’t express how those times helped build me as a man, my character. I never believed that was the school’s responsibility. Their job was to educate, but the faculty and staff made it a priority to do so much more. When I reflected, I was so grateful. I knew that if I had the chance to be thankful, I had to do my best to give back to the school that gave so much to me.”

The Fab Three’s unique blend of profound personality and performance was punched without regard to class ranks, Q ratings, and Instagram raves - wunderkinds remembered as ambitious and outgoing, thoughtful and charming. Their friendship propelled them to each become better together.

Boettcher is attending Vanderbilt University with a focus on human organizational development, business psychology, and political science. Pham was accepted into the Canfield Business Honors Program at the University of Texas at Austin where he’ll study marketing and finance. He succinctly speaks for the three of a rare kind, inexorably linked, comets gaining speed and trajectory on the far horizon.

“My years at St. Thomas were anything and everything I could have imagined when I arrived as a freshman,” Pham says with delight. “I’m proud to say that I don’t have a single regret. I surrounded myself with committed students, embraced every extra-curricular opportunity, engaged in wide-ranging communities, sought meaningful relationships with the faculty, created friendships that I expect to last deep into my adult years, and made an impact on the campus community. I leave with a true sense of fulfillment.”

“İ saw St. Thomas as much more organic, a community where I could have an impact.”
Thousands of residents were displaced, victims during an extraordinary series of national misfortune on top of a pandemic. In a slog toward recovery, Diamond answered the dire needs of a city overlooked in a year of disaster and unrest. “After witnessing the devastation caused by Hurricane Harvey, I knew what Lake Charles was facing,” Diamond says. “I have family there and felt a need to do something. I organized a drive for necessities, teamed with my father (Sean) and (Senior) Michael Bevers to accept donations. We got out the word, collected enough items over a matter of days to load an 18-wheeler, and got the items into the city for distribution at a small Catholic church.”

For his compelling relief efforts and many less obvious compassionate acts throughout his St. Thomas career, Diamond received the 2021 Rev. Ronald G. Schwenzer, CSB Campus Ministry Award for most exemplifying the Man of St. Thomas motto of Faith, Service, and Leadership. “Service has always been a driving force in my life. It’s rewarding to give to the less fortunate and allows you to have a greater appreciation for what you have,” Diamond says. Diamond entered St. Thomas from St. Martha Catholic School in Kingwood with a specific purpose, but he never anticipated the richly rewarding possibility awaiting him his junior year. Even with a full commitment to a rigorous AP curriculum and a full array of discretionary projects, Diamond was pulled to join an inner circle of friends - valedictorian Patrick Pham, Griffin Gregory, and National Merit semifinalist Dylan Michaels - igniting Eagle Swimming to unprecedented heights. “I had played soccer my entire life but never competed in swimming,” Diamond says. “This was an established group that had won the program’s first-ever state championship and was looking to repeat. Not much room for a rookie. But I was welcomed with such enthusiasm even though I was starting at ground zero. The coaches spent extra time with me working on technique.”

The dividend of Diamond’s due diligence was a contributing role in the 2020 Aqua Eagles successfully defending their state title and posting a strong second-place finish as a 2021 encore. “I never saw myself playing in that kind of situation and the lesson will last me a lifetime,” Diamond says. “Never be afraid to take a risk. That first week and first month of practice were rough. I was exhausted after workouts. But I stuck it out and learned the value of seizing every opportunity that comes my way.”

Next on Diamond’s docket is the Honors Program at the Mays School of Business at Texas A&M University. “What’s exciting is that I don’t yet know what career path I ultimately want to pursue. I intend to perform academically the best I possibly can. And I want to fortify the moral character that I’ve built so far. Service to others will always be a priority in various forms. But I’m excited to see all what A&M has to offer, in and outside of the classroom, and start the adventure. In some ways, I anticipate the journey will include developmental and incremental goals similar to what I encountered at St. Thomas.”
Whatever its impact, the pandemic didn’t derail them. Or defeat them. And it certainly didn’t define them. The 121st graduating class from St. Thomas wouldn’t let it. And neither would their campus community.
The relentless Class of 2021 emerged triumphantly. Through the COVID-19 shutdowns and lockdowns and the forced migration to remote learning through hybrid academic models and social isolation and unending uncertainty. Through the Great Texas Blackout throwing much of the state into the dark and cold. Their prevailing journey through the endless epoch to diploma day required steadfast resilience and will, unwavering resolve and faith.

The St. Thomas commencement celebration welcomed an exuberant audience of family and supporters assembled in Granger Stadium under overcast skies. President Fr. James Murphy, CSB, Principal Dr. Aaron Dominguez ’96, Assistant Principal Mary Criaco, and St. Thomas Board Chair Hector Herrera ’79 led the salute for exceptional academic fulfillment. The 151 graduates overcame unprecedented trials to be awarded nearly $13 million in merit-based scholarships to renowned colleges, universities, and academies throughout the United States. Most importantly, the freshly minted Eagle alumni elevated to embody the value of a formative college preparatory experience rooted in the Basilian ideal of Teach Me Goodness, Discipline, and Knowledge.

Acclaimed former St. Thomas faculty member Dr. Edward J. Martinich delivered the keynote address. Drawing on his acumen gained from more than three decades in academia, Dr. Martinich related a series of invaluable habits for the Class of 2021 in crafting future accomplishment with references to Albert Einstein, poet and civil rights activist Maya Angelou, rock-drilling expert Greg Hall - and Woody Allen.

“Consider your words. Their impact may be far greater than you ever imagined. ... Set your priorities. If you follow what you know is right, people will value you and positive results will follow. Constantly question, not only others but yourself ... Positive thinking and belief in yourself attracts positive outcomes. If you’re going to develop and advance, you cannot dwell on honest mistakes. If you’re not failing now and then, it’s a sign you’re not doing anything innovative. No matter how smart you think you are, remember that every person you meet knows something you don’t. Every year, St. Thomas men have left (this campus) prepared, not only academically, but with a sense of right and wrong. It’s one of the school’s defining characteristics. Each of you holds a special talent. Discover what you’re passionate about.

“Pursue your passions. Inspire others. And change the world.”

The word valedictorian comes from the Latin vale dicere or “to say goodbye.” The consummate St. Thomas scholar and ultimate showman delivered a sensational final farewell that captivated the audience with insight both rare and incandescent.

Patrick Pham conjured a milestone moment into manhood - going to the bank “without my mom.” After providing the necessary information to open a personal account, Pham was informed that he was, much to his amazement, “a millionaire.” He was instructed to peer into the computer screen that revealed a seven-figure total that rushed wonderment through his consciousness.

“Thirty million, 500 thousand and 54. I’m rich! I’m a millionaire! But as I looked at the amount a little bit closer, I saw the number ticking down. ‘Hey, someone is stealing my money.’” Much to his dismay, Pham was informed that the account didn’t reflect financial assets but rather a much more valuable currency - time banked for this life. Pham was advised that such a commodity was the most valuable because “it is the most finite, so spend it wisely.”
Pham then advised his Eagle brothers with signature oratorical style to “manage your time like it’s your money. ... You never know how much you have left. It turned out I had no real money to my name but I have what millions of people wish they had right now. More time. In that sense, we are all millionaires. Embrace every moment of the present because it is a gift. ... You have a chance to live a life without regret. Chase it. Whether you’re eight, 18, or 85, do it. Start that new career, ask that girl out, travel the world. The sand will start sinking regardless of what you do. Don’t live with regret. Live with purpose. Chase that passion. Be someone. Be hungry. Be bold. Be great. Be inspirational. Be remembered. Be authentic. Be phenomenal. Be courageous. Be someone. Not just a footnote, but the headline. Be the person a younger version of you would look up to. There is not enough time in this world for you to be mediocre. So be someone. And never forget to be kind. To be compassionate. To be grateful. At the end of your time, you will be able to look at your heavenly Father and say, ‘I am proud of the life I have lived.’”

“Class of 2021 - we are joining an elite company of alumni of St. Thomas High School. ... We’re all millionaires with millions of minutes in our pockets and a whole world of opportunity in front of us. Let’s go do something special.”

Pham and salutatorian Hayden Diamond were the highest-ranking academic members of their class. The two champion achievers shared NHS and St. Thomas Club distinction. Diamond received the 2021 Reverend Ronald G. Schwenzer, CSB Campus Ministry Award for most exemplifying the Man of St. Thomas motto of Faith, Service, and Leadership. He was accepted into the Honors Program at the Mays School of Business at Texas A&M University. Diamond was introduced by student body president Luke McLean ’21 as a “brilliant student, a devout man of faith, a best friend, and a brother. He transforms the learning environment and brings the classroom to life. He is truly a man of St. Thomas.” Diamond detailed a series of student experiences, all of which “made a specific impact on me, adding unique detail to who I am.”

“The memories we make today are the people we become tomorrow. Those memories are the building blocks of our souls ... and dictate who we are and where we go from here. So, let’s create some good ones. Not just memories that cause us to laugh or think back to good times. Memories that build character, experiences that better ourselves ... and form us into men of goodness, discipline, and knowledge.” Diamond is among more than 30 Eagle scholars entering Texas A&M with two others attending Texas A&M at Galveston. Eleven graduates will study at Texas Tech University, ten at the University of Houston, and four at the University of Texas at Austin.

The Class of 2021 is also represented at an array of academic destinations including Baylor University, Southern Methodist University, Texas Christian University, Trinity University, The Catholic University of America, Clemson University, Louisiana State, Marquette University, New York University, Purdue University, Rice University, Syracuse University, Tulane University, the United States Naval Academy, and the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. Collectively, the Class of 2021 provided superior leadership to fuel yet another astounding Round-Up fundraising effort which produced a record take of nearly $600,000 in raffle ticket sales. The resounding total means Eagle students crashed the half-million dollar mark for the fifth consecutive year, raising the recent eight-year mark to more than $3.5 million. All monies are annually and always devoted to St. Thomas tuition assistance, a Basilian practice that dates for nearly a century.

Perhaps more than any generation in recent memory, and not since the World Wars and Great Depression of the 1930s, has a graduating class had to overcome such trauma and adversity to reach such a moment. The trauma and adversity of global events swirling within the trauma and adversity of self.

Yet, through the hardships rose a sense within their campus community of shared responsibility and unity. The Class of 2021 was forged in the fire of history to excel and lead. A host of dreamers and doers, pioneers and visionaries and change agents. More than graduates, they are thinkers living in curiosity and discovery, fortified by the shared qualities that bond the Eagle brotherhood - faith and integrity, ambition with humility, giving cause for optimism about the future during a still turbulent present.
Virtual classrooms may have left much to be desired, as a screenful of boxes oftentimes offered only a dimmed sense of who was there in the room, but the St. Thomas educational mission remained and moved unflinchingly forward.

In the Socratic dialogue Republic, Plato famously wrote that “our need will be the real creator.” And the essential needs within the Eagle academic community during the tumult of COVID-19 brought the opportunity for wider change and an untimely, unwanted invitation to pursue new directions.

Now.

Chrisy and Phil Gensheimer have totaled nearly 50 years of combined leadership experience within the St. Thomas faculty. Before the COVID-19 onslaught, Chrisy also expanded her responsibilities to include dean of instruction, working with Assistant Principal Mary Criaco in the academic program in various areas such as course selection, admissions, and onboarding new parents.

Claudia Mundell was in the midst of her sixth academic year in the St. Thomas English department when the coronavirus roiled the country and rocked individual worlds.

Their first-person accounts offer insight into the reality of distance learning, the myriad of trials and tribulations that required vision, action, resolve — and an endless navigation of web logsins. The perspective includes the strains, pains, and gains of their senior sons. Adam Gensheimer ’21 followed his older brother Josh ’18 to St. Thomas and will next attend the University of Tulsa. Joe Mundell ’21 established a path for his younger brother Ben, a seventh-grader at St. Theresa Catholic School, and is advancing to the University of Houston.

Phil Gensheimer (26th year at St. Thomas): Once the outbreak took effect, we were confronted with dramatic changes with a large learning curve on technology, student management, and adapting new materials. The immediate challenge was keeping remote students engaged and on topic.

I knew I had to hold their attention when I most needed their focus. The first few weeks of the spring were rough. It was assignment-driven, breaking into group discussions. There were mistakes but you adjusted and moved forward.

Chrisy Gensheimer (25th year at St. Thomas): I’m not a tech person so this was an immediate crash course in transitioning to the remote model. I had never used Microsoft Teams or Zoom. I was uncomfortable but learned how to implement it.

All my teaching plans had to be completely reworked. Nothing that I utilized before was directly applicable. I worked more hours on actually teaching than I ever have.

In the afternoons, I switched gears to work on bigger picture objectives with the senior staff. Just the matter of mass scheduling demanded four to five times more effort and hours to meet the various needs. Freshman students and parents had no previous high school experience to draw from. It was a relentless cycle of adjustments.

Claudia Mundell (seventh year at St. Thomas): I admit I’m somewhat old school, pen to paper, and to make an almost overnight transition to a fully digital world was a stiff challenge. It demanded utilizing the laptop and desktop computers simultaneously, incorporating the document camera, an array of tech variables I never had to rely on during traditional settings. At that point, my comfort zone was irrelevant. I had a deep dive with (assistant director of technology) Uriel Cortes, then summer workshops on campus to custom particular needs - Google Classrooms, Microsoft Teams, Zoom, whatever fit my students’ needs the best.

I had to embrace the new world on all the various platforms. Same for my students. There were no excuses.

The coronavirus pandemic surged into a summer of discontent and fall of further disconnect as quarantine fatigue grew in proportion. St. Thomas launched the new seminar on August 17 with an advanced version of the remote learning delivery system that concluded the previous cycle. And the campus remained essentially closed.

In-person classes resumed September 14 with the transition to the Eagle Hybrid Learning model that had students returning to campus for the first time since the mid-March suspension.

Claudia: For six years I taught English I (freshmen). In 2020-21, I moved to two sections each of Advanced English II (sophomores) and AP Literature (seniors). I had one clean semester before the pandemic. My particular curriculum plugged into a Zoom or a hybrid model but the challenge was making sure the students were staying with me in the class session. It’s them and the text.

In a classroom setting, I knew who’s attentive, not so much with a screen and all I see are multiple heads. In the hybrid, it was funneling enough attention to the students at home as well as those here in the room.

For both Mundell and the Gensheimers, career and family care were suddenly conducted under one roof. Working at home meant working more than ever within the echoing din of each other’s zoom rooms. And the persistent question forever lurking - Are you muted?

Chrisy: We had four people in our home all draining the Wi-Fi at the same time for hours. Phil was in the dining room with his mission control set-up. I was in a breakfast area. Adam would leave his room for the home office. And Josh would work from his bedroom. Somehow we managed to stay out of each other’s way long enough to be productive.

Phil: I like to control my environment. I had two monitors, built a stand so my laptop camera would be face-height, added an extra keyboard, and customized a bookshelf for materials. Everyone had their space but there were days when Chrisy and I would operate out of St. Thomas just for a change of scenery and to relieve some of the internal traffic.

Claudia: I had a high school senior at home. A seventh-grader at home for periods because of quarantine protocols. And my own commitments. It wasn’t the most practical teaching space. Mentally, I had to leave the house for my classroom at St. Thomas to create as professional an environment as possible. We seemed to be adapting and revamping every day, every week.

In the Socratic dialogue Republic, Plato famously wrote that “our need will be the real creator.” And the essential needs within the Eagle academic community during the tumult of COVID-19 brought the opportunity for wider change and an untimely, unwanted invitation to pursue new directions.

Now.

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It was one proposition in the spring of 2020 when teachers moved online with students they already knew, who knew them, and who knew one another. It was another in a fresh academic year when so many were strangers to one another. Among the avalanche of sizable hurdles to clear was re-creating the rapport teachers naturally had in the classroom, where they would read signals regardless of how small for clues to comprehension and mood. Emotional connections matter because they facilitate learning, motivation, and belonging — all for successful student outcomes.

Phil: I felt some frustrations as we progressed deeper into the fall semester. It was much more difficult to get to know my students, that familiarity was not nearly the same. In that first spring, we had built some common ground during the fall. I knew them, knew their work, knew their class. We started in August of 2020, some students had a tough time working online and it was extremely difficult to identify the root causes. The Gansheimer and Mundell quickly understood the value of students in shared class time working together, forming groups to work on activities, breaking off into smaller chat rooms, or holding group discussions. And they proceeded in lockstep with their St. Thomas colleagues in refusing the temptation to narrow their lessons or limit their content to the essentials. They covered the same amount of rigorous material online they once did in the classroom.

Phil: When we moved into the fall semester, there was much more emphasis on live instruction. I was fortunate to have three sections (of AP U.S. History) with upperclassmen who had an intrinsic motivation, I was still forced out of my box to incorporate new ideas, become more creative to reach students at home and in the classroom in the same way at the same time. I shared some of the stress the students were experiencing with so many moving parts. How to test remotely that was a fair assessment of what the students learned? How to test remotely and in the classroom simultaneously was equitable to different groups of students because you cannot give them the same test. I saw that it was much harder to measure how much the students were learning. I couldn't rely merely on traditional models, that wasn't going to tell me what I needed. Every other day I customized emails to each student on the upcoming agendas, what was due, constant reminders. There was never a day to relax.

Adam Gansheimer was undaunted in completing an acclaimed academic career - National Merit Commended Scholar, National Merit Hispanic Scholar, a two-year member of the National Honor Society, and crew member coordinator within the prestigious St. Thomas Theater program. Joe Mundell overcame the periods of social isolation and emerged as a vibrant senior leader in a diverse series of student initiatives, including ranking as a top-10 raffle ticket seller (nearly $9,000) in the 2021 Round Up event that produced a record-smashing $159,145 for St. Thomas tuition assistance.

Claudia: My AP students and advanced sophomores all responded and worked as hard as in previous years. They owned an internal desire and motivation to invest whatever effort was required to reach the goal. So many times during remote, students would reach out and ask if they could stay on a few additional minutes for questions, or Zoom later. They showed a self-advocacy that wasn’t as evident in person. That attitude and discipline were unmarkable. And their cooperation and results gave me confidence in moving forward.

Chrisy: I was fortunate to have three sections of AP U.S. History with upperclassmen who had an intrinsic motivation, I was still forced out of my box to incorporate new ideas, become more creative to reach students at home and in the classroom in the same way at the same time. I shared some of the stress the students were experiencing with so many moving parts. How to test remotely that was a fair assessment of what the students learned? How to test remotely and in the classroom simultaneously was equitable to different groups of students because you cannot give them the same test. I saw that it was much harder to measure how much the students were learning. I couldn’t rely merely on traditional models, that wasn’t going to tell me what I needed. Every other day I customized emails to each student on the upcoming agendas, what was due, constant reminders. There was never a day to relax.

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Phil: It certainly wears on you. It’s a slog. The most challenging cases were the students who didn’t respond to the remote model. I could tell in the way they weren’t involved. In a normal class situation, I would go directly to that student and bring them back into the group. But in a remote setting, that option is unavailable. Some students didn’t have the discipline to take care of their business and were literally out of my reach.

The endless anxiety created by the pandemic caused unmeasurable disruption and disorder, but the chaos also provided countless opportunities to reflect on and appreciate how uniquely blessed and positioned is the St. Thomas community. Eagle scholars were driven to develop and improve, to relate, to take a stand. The institution found innovative strategies to advance in the face of the unimaginable, to pursue wisdom in academic ventures, and to unite in fortifying a stronger institution where all may thrive and succeed.

Claudia: I was reminded that I love learning and learning literature. And I’m a problem solver. During the last weeks of the spring semester, I was excited every day to see students in class, in the hallways, and around each other. There was an appreciation for personal interaction, and to some extent, re-learning those abilities, face to face, eye to eye.

Chrisy: Through it all, I discovered that I was meant to be an educator. I love working with young men. I had to find ways to connect with them that were unusual but it proved to be incredibly gratifying. This group of students from 2020 and 2021 will always be a special group for me because of our shared experiences and what we overcome together.

Phil: When I arrived at St. Thomas (for the 1995-96 academic year), my plan wasn’t necessarily to make teaching a career. I had great enthusiasm for the material, related well to people. I was young, single, out of college. The routine allowed for travel during the summer, camping and hiking. I decided to invest, see how it developed, but I wasn’t convinced this was the start of a 30-year journey. When I look at what we as a professional group accomplished through the pandemic, there’s great pride in knowing we did the absolute best we could for the benefit of the students. And that is always the sole purpose of what we do.

Simple strategy, Sublime execution.
Roman Ochoa ’21 epitomizes the power of and.

His profound academic excellence encompasses membership in the National Honor Society and the prestigious St. Thomas Club - elite students with a minimum 4.0-grade point average for seven consecutive semesters.

He rose as a National Merit Commended and National Merit Hispanic Scholar.

And a TAPPS state wrestling champion.
And a nationally recognized fine arts performer.
And was accepted into the United States Military Academy at West Point.

Sweeping success with astounding significance.
“Wrestling made all the difference for me during my time at St. Thomas. I would have had zero chance of going to West Point without that experience.”

“T...
Creighton Ward ’21 strategically plotted his future by taking root in a formidable history dating back to the days of the American Revolution and the Founding Fathers. No family tradition captivated (or clouded) his intent, no twin Towers atrocity swayed his emotion. Yet, his altruistic decision to pursue the United States Naval Academy, sealed in the final weeks of his St. Thomas career, resembled fact accompli. “I was always attracted to the academies, a sense of higher purpose, and especially the Navy” is how Ward describes his choice to accept his nomination. “It’s a chance to serve my country, put a uniform on, help another country,” he says. “The postgraduate options are pragmatic, both as an officer and in the private sector. I was all but convinced when I made the campus visit in April. After seeing the particulars up close, I knew it was what I wanted to do.” Ward conquered sizable odds in gaining his acceptance to Annapolis. He joins an incoming class of roughly 1,200 plebes who rose to the exacting standard and separated from a pack of 16,000 applicants. Ward successfully navigated an extensive admissions maze that was statistically comparable to entering Johns Hopkins, Cornell, Rice, or Northwestern (less than 8%). The labyrinth included a recommendation from Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee representing the 18th district of Texas.

Ward is confident in his preparation after completing his significant St. Thomas development and benefiting from a depth of learning beyond the classroom. He was a National Merit Commanded Scholar, a two-year member in the National Honor Society, and a contributing force in Eagle baseball reaching the TAPPS Division I state tournament in April. After seeing the particulars up close, I knew it was what I wanted to do.” Ward conquered sizable odds in gaining his acceptance to Annapolis. He joins an incoming class of roughly 1,200 plebes who rose to the exacting standard and separated from a pack of 16,000 applicants. Ward successfully navigated an extensive admissions maze that was statistically comparable to entering Johns Hopkins, Cornell, Rice, or Northwestern (less than 8%). The labyrinth included a recommendation from Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee representing the 18th district of Texas.

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Pablo Tager ‘21, the soccer player, possessed a wickedly creative, ball-striking skill set that separated him even from the pack of polished, promising players. Growing up in Texas, however, the football player in Pablo Tager was perhaps always percolating to perform.

The pinnacle of Tager’s soccer career came as an acclaimed performer for St. Thomas, a proclaimed linchpin in a program that reached three consecutive TAPPS state tournaments and a regional final during his four-year career.

The summit of his football career, during which he became a rapid-rising high school kicker in a mere matter of months, still lies in front of him with a prime opportunity awaiting at the University of San Diego.

That scope of scholar-athlete experience is what drew Tager to choose St. Thomas as an incoming freshman from the Regis School of the Sacred Heart rather than accept an enticing invitation from the Houston Dynamo U.S. Soccer Development Academy. His stepfather Dr. Marc Longo ’81 and uncle Victor ’85 had consistently preached the all-encompassing value of the Basilian educational model - uncompromising academics, uncommon brotherhood, and the credo of goodness, discipline, and knowledge.

“I knew the relationships that I would develop at St. Thomas would be superior to anything elsewhere,” Tager says. “And I don’t regret that decision for an instant. Playing for my school and my teammates drove me to become a better player, to play harder for something larger than myself.”

But it is Tager’s mother Paola who provides the family’s unequivocal voice singing the praises of the St. Thomas education. Her passionate testimony in March detailing the benefits of Pablo’s multi-tiered college preparatory experience, including membership in the National Honor Society; captured and enthralled an audience of parents from the Class of 2025.

“I understand all the sacrifices my family has made for me to attend St. Thomas, all the advantages that so many other students don’t have,” Tager says. “The way I reward them is to put maximum effort into everything I did, in the classroom and on the field. Making them proud means a great deal to me.”

Tager’s direct assault on his senior soccer season took an unexpected and decided detour just as the academic year was launching under duress of the pandemic.

Head football coach Rich McGuire was hunting a suitable replacement for the all-state standard set in 2019 by kicker Paul Langemeier ’20. Tager was drafted; then cajoled to fill the void. “They needed someone. My friends pushed me to give it a try. It was as simple as that.”

Less than simple was the immediate transition. Tager’s sublime raw talent required an immediate crash course in technique. Rarely in soccer are two shots in a game ever the same; the quick switch to football demanded a golfer’s mentality and a robotic foot-striking action. And Tager didn’t know the fundamental rules of the game. And he didn’t know how to put on his uniform. Or his helmet. His private kicking coach Nick Gatto assisted in shrinking Tager’s learning curve heading into the weeks of the season-opening contest with El Campo. And with some basics beneath him, all was certain once the novice swung his leg and his thunderous right foot connected to send a projectile sailing deep end-over-end into the skies.

In December at the same private school awards night that the Touchdown Club of Houston toasted McGuire and quarterback Maddox Kopp for individual superlatives following the 2020 season, Tager was named Special Teams Player of the Year, stamping a convincing seal of approval in the succession from inaugural winner Langemeier.

“Tager sought to enhance his profile and carve interest from college scouts through a series of specialty kicking camps throughout the region. In January, he was teeing up at the mothership of all stadiums, the colossal Jerry Jones pleasure palace the Dallas Cowboys call home, featuring among other-worldly amenities, the world’s largest 1080p HDTV video board. “It was the day after the Rose Bowl and all the branding was still on the field,” Tager says. “It was a huge stage and I was going head to head with some of the better kickers moving on to college. I knew I had to elevate my game and make an impression on the people who counted.”

Tager posted a max five-star rating from the JerryWorld exercise and proceeded to sift through his options. He arranged a visit to the USD campus where his Torero escort was one-time Eagle record-smashing quarterback Michael Keating ’16. The virtues of an under-the-radar FCS power in the Pioneer Football League coupled with the stunning Southern California setting and vibe were irresistible. Tager was taken before punching his return ticket to Houston.

“It was the perfect fit, both academically and athletically. I’m thrilled to be a part of what they have moving forward,” Tager says with assurance. “My drive is to be the best in every aspect of my life and St. Thomas played a big part in my having that attitude. The curiosity to constantly discover and learn will motivate me forward throughout my life.”
MAY GOODNESS, DISCIPLINE, AND KNOWLEDGE GUIDE YOUR FUTURE SUCCESS AS YOU MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN THE WORLD.

1 - California
University of San Diego
2 - Arizona
Arizona State University
3 - Idaho
University of Idaho
4 - Colorado
Colorado School of Mines
University of Denver
5 - North Dakota
University of North Dakota
6 - Oklahoma
Oklahoma State University
University of Tulsa (2)
7 - Texas
Baylor University (4)
Coastal Bend College
Rice University
Sam Houston State University (3)
Southern Methodist University (4)
Southwestern University
St. Edward’s University
Texas A&M University - College Station (3)
Texas A&M University - Galveston (2)
Texas Christian University (2)
Texas State University
Texas Tech University (12)
Trinity University (2)
University of Houston (12)
University of Houston - Downtown (2)
The University of Texas at Austin (4)
The University of Texas at Dallas
The University of Texas at El Paso
The University of Texas at San Antonio (2)
8 - Louisiana
Louisiana State University (7)
Louisiana Tech University
Tulane University
9 - Arkansas
University of Arkansas (4)
10 - Mississippi
Mississippi State University
University of Mississippi (4)
11 - Alabama
University of Alabama (2)
12 - Tennessee
Rhodes College
University of Tennessee
Vanderbilt University
13 - Wisconsin
Beloit College
Marquette University
14 - Indiana
Indiana University
Purdue University (2)
Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology
15 - Michigan
Michigan State University
16 - Ohio
Franciscan University of Steubenville
University of Akron
17 - Pennsylvania
Franklin & Marshall College
18 - New York
Fordham University
New York University
Syracuse University
United States Military Academy
19 - Massachusetts
Babson College
 Bentley University
Suffolk University
Wentworth Institute of Technology
20 - Maryland
Morgan State University
United States Naval Academy
21 - Washington D.C.
The Catholic University of America
Howard University
22 - Virginia
Old Dominion University
Virginia Tech
23 - South Carolina
Clemson University (2)
24 - Florida
Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University

EAGLES SOAR

The Class of 2021 embarks on their next chapters all across the country.
HEARD - father Bobby ‘66, brother Bobby III ‘00, and Peter ‘21 (grandfather Vincent Mandola ‘61, deceased).

GREGORY - brother Jeremy ’15, Griffin ‘21, and brother Barrett ‘18.

GREANEY - grandfather Ken Choyce ’31 and Patrick ‘21.

GRENQIION - Rory ‘21 and father Rock ‘75.

GREGORY - brother Jeremy ’15, Griffin ‘21, father Doug ‘87, and brother Barrett ‘18.

DUNDEE - Will ‘21 and father Lance ’90.


CORBETT - father Peter, mother Dana, and Peter ‘21 (grandfather Vincent Mandola ‘61, deceased).

GENTEMPO - father Tommy ’85, Tommy ‘21, and brother John ’14.

GRANKEY - grandfather Ken Choyce ’31 and Patrick ‘21.

GREMILLION - Rory ‘21 and father Rock ‘75.

HEARD - father Bobby ‘66, brother Bobby III ‘00, brother Browning ‘02, and Harrison ‘21.
CONGRATULATIONS

LEGACY GRADUATES CLASS OF 2021

O’HARE - Aidan ‘21, father Dan ‘87, brother Shane ‘25, and brother Donovan ‘19.

LOVE - Andrew ‘21 and father Stephen ‘81.

JARDINE - brother Christopher ‘12 and Charles ‘21.

Koch - uncle Pat Hajovsky ‘83, Henry ‘21, and uncle Marty Hajovsky ‘83.

McCurry - father Jeff ‘88 and Cameron ‘21.

O’HARE - Aidan ‘21, father Dan ‘87, brother Shane ‘25, and brother Donovan ‘10.

MCCURRY - father Jeff ‘88 and Cameron ‘21.

UNCOMPROMISING ACADEMICS, UNCOMMON BROTHERHOOD.

Koch - uncle Pat Hajovsky ‘83, Henry ‘21, and uncle Marty Hajovsky ‘83.

O’HARE - Aidan ‘21, father Dan ‘87, brother Shane ‘25, and brother Donovan ‘10.

Perez - father David ‘92 and JD ‘21.


Love - Andrew ‘21 and father Stephen ‘81.


Perez - father David ‘92 and JD ‘21.


The seniors began their Round Up careers learning the essential lessons from those students who preceded them, mastering the ABCs of their March madness. Always. Be. Closing.

And for the seventh consecutive year, the like-minded and aspirant harnessed a collective and aggressive late surge to trigger an outburst of raffle ticket sales. The Glengarry-esque frantic Friday finish would have had Dicky Roma riveted and Blake ordering coffee for one and all.

The unwavering student body racked another record-smashing total - $595,145 - with all monies contributing directly to St. Thomas tuition assistance, a Basilian tradition for nearly a century. The half-million-dollar mark crashed for the sixth year in a row. The raucous eight-year sales spike rose to more than $4.2 million.

Roll that figure around your brain for the time it takes to consume the latest TikTok video gone viral. Yes, $4.2 million.

The jaw-dropping developments left President Fr. James Murphy, CSB “genuinely in awe. These seniors are one of the most unified, most generous groups that I have witnessed in all my years of education. Their leadership was part of a collective effort clearly without individual motives to stand alone. It was always about what we needed to do. The dollar number obviously grabs your attention but what cannot be underappreciated is what our students learn in achieving adult work. And they did it all with class and dignity for everyone involved.”

Major Gifts Officer Johnny Misleh ’00 set an ambitious sales goal of $525,000. To go record-busting for the 16th time in 18 years would mean measuring beyond $574,000. Audacious, if not simply irrational. The scholars had no idea the challenges the next Everest would present.

But no ascent worth conquering comes easily, particularly through a pandemic and hybrid learning models, the constant churn of COVID-19 protocols and contact tracing, an unprecedented collapse of the state’s electric grids which produced The Great Texas Blackout during a pivotal sales drive, and lockdowns and shutdowns of assorted variety. Their resolve was tested but never bested.

Given the circumstances, a sales result south of what has become the St. Thomas standard would have been understood without alibis. Reasons, not excuses, existed for a commendable Round Up return below a half-million dollars.

But as the late great NBA icon Kobe Bryant wisely observed, “If you don’t believe in yourself, no one will do it for you.” And now a strong argument can be made that the latest Round Up installment represents the grandest of them all. The participants weren’t shy in staking their place in history. "It always starts with the brotherhood," Gus Boettcher ’21 says. "I was with Bishop (Vincent) Rizzotto (from the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston and St. Thomas Hall of Honor inductee) right before he died (in February). We talked about the qualities that make St. Thomas unique, how almost every student believes they’re a part of something special, and it brought tears to our eyes. We’re genuinely excited to be part of this school and to be a part of Round Up for the good of our brothers.”

Boettcher “knew the goal was going to be tough to beat given COVID and the freeze and the lower enrollment. But our senior board was amazing in setting the tone from the beginning and pushing the boundaries. And all through the past year, our class has had a fighting spirit.” Boettcher teamed with Patrick Pham ’21 to stage a video series during the Round Up run-up mocking Bill & Ted’s Excellent Adventure - for fun and frolic, spirit and inspiration. But, whoa, dude! All nostalgic mind-time traveling phone booth journeys aside, the student sellers required their own bodeacious bounce back in the final 72 hours to assure that the Round Up beats would roll bigger, better, and more robust.

“The seniors are one of the most unified, most generous groups that I have witnessed in all my years of education.”

UNWAVERING RESILIENCE, OUTRAGEOUSLY REWARDING

The resilient St. Thomas Class of 2021 united for exactly this seismic moment: The record. The joys. The triumph amid on-going national uncertainty. They remained relentlessly committed to finish in the same monumental manner as they had started.
And for the seventh time in eight years, the heaviest Round Up hammer was swung by a Hotze - brothers David ’17 and Brendan ’21 taking turns as the resident teen titan.

The understated Brendan set the individual sales pace with $19,081 and concluded a sensational four-year spree that included tallies of $22,469 to lead 2018 and $23,240 to front 2019. His $19,760 encore in 2020 ranked as the runner-up only because Zach Kroencke ’20 crushed one of the absolute single-best individual totals in school history - $35,960.

David had proved Goliath during a staggering four-year cycle posting $132,490 from 2014-17 before Brendan immediately seized the torch and appropriately stamped an emphatic legacy. “The Hotze brothers went out with a bang.”

Brendan again paired a savvy strategy with a confident, concise pitch that consistently registered with his targeted audience. “When I made calls, I said it’s my senior year and I want to raise as much money as I can, and I’m hoping you can double what you purchased last year,” Hotze says. “I made as many calls as possible in the early stages and put myself ahead of the game. The biggest donors were approached later. I called one prospect 10 times before he picked up. He became one of my biggest checks and said he wouldn’t have made such a purchase if I hadn’t been so determined. I got his commitment the last Friday. Persistence is key.”

THE KINGPINS

Brendan steered a swaggering top-10 pack of enterprisers who generated nearly $122,500.

> Aaron Schlosser ’21 third overall with $12,800 after $10,100 in 2020 and $7,200 in 2019
> Rory Gremillion ’21 fifth with $11,320 after $7,060 in 2020 and $6,620 in 2019
> Aidan Kelley ’21 eighth with $9,820 after $9,020 in 2020 and $7,140 in 2019
> Hayden Diamond ’21 placed a strong sixth with $11,120 and Mundell 10th with $8,500

The righteous Round Up ringleaders included precocious Simon Pham ’24 who debuted in second place with $18,000. Patrick McCarthy was the only other freshman in the top 10 with $11,500. Caleb Davis led the Class of 2023 with $12,800 for fourth. Peyton Woodlief again emerged as the lone rep from the Class of 2022 posting his third straight top-10 finish with $9,005 following impressive totals of $7,710 and $7,605.

“No seniors were holding back, no alumni waiting with blank checks. We all kept working, literally going door to door, and trying to exhaust every possibility.”

““When I saw their excitement, that’s what told me we had something amazing,” Misleh says. “The reactions were filled with pride and accomplishment. They had a game plan ready for Thursday once the dollars were calculated and came in short. They had a game plan for Senior Hustle that had to deliver. They believed. They invested. They stayed positive. The true spirit of the St. Thomas brotherhood was in play every day. Every single seller pushed that record total.”

McCain believes the resounding collaborative effort “shows what this student body is made of and we refused to compromise for anything. Mr. Misleh instilled that attitude and the senior board embraced it. He wasn’t an administrator. He was in the trenches along with us every step, every up, every down. He led by example.”

“Let’s face it - COVID may prevent some families from providing their sons a Catholic education,” says Hotze. “The finances may not be there. Raising all the dollars we did will go to that cause and help people get through this time a little better. I put as much as I could into that objective.”

SENIOR HUSTLE

The student sales team stared down a decided financial shortfall during money week as the March 5 deadline approached. Even with Director of Student Activities Joe O’Brien orchestrating the annual phone-a-thon/letter campaign that generated nearly $90,000. Even with a preposterous Thursday count of $160,000 for the last group sales turn in.

“No seniors were holding back, no alumni waiting with blank checks,” Luke McLane ’21 says. “We all kept working, literally going door to door, and trying to exhaust every possibility. There was a $10,000 transaction Friday morning and that was a huge momentum swing. But (Senior) Joseph Mundell and I approached donors who we thought would be big buyers and they had written checks which honestly were much smaller than we had in mind. We couldn’t convince them to go for more. But we all kept pushing and didn’t have the totals until 10 minutes before the reveal because the money kept coming in.”

“I made calls, I said it’s my senior year and I want to raise as much money as I can, and I’m hoping you can double what you purchased last year,” Hotze says. “I made as many calls as possible in the early stages and put myself ahead of the game. The biggest donors were approached later. I called one prospect 10 times before he picked up. He became one of my biggest checks and said he wouldn’t have made such a purchase if I hadn’t been so determined. I got his commitment the last Friday. Persistence is key.”

THE KINGPINS

Brendan steered a swaggering top-10 pack of enterprisers who generated nearly $122,500.

> Aaron Schlosser ’21 third overall with $12,800 after $10,100 in 2020 and $7,200 in 2019
> Rory Gremillion ’21 fifth with $11,320 after $7,060 in 2020 and $6,620 in 2019
> Aidan Kelley ’21 eighth with $9,820 after $9,020 in 2020 and $7,140 in 2019
> Hayden Diamond ’21 placed a strong sixth with $11,120 and Mundell 10th with $8,500

The righteous Round Up ringleaders included precocious Simon Pham ’24 who debuted in second place with $18,000. Patrick McCarthy was the only other freshman in the top 10 with $11,500. Caleb Davis led the Class of 2023 with $12,800 for fourth. Peyton Woodlief again emerged as the lone rep from the Class of 2022 posting his third straight top-10 finish with $9,005 following impressive totals of $7,710 and $7,605.

“And for the seventh time in eight years, the heaviest Round Up hammer was swung by a Hotze - brothers David ’17 and Brendan ’21 taking turns as the resident teen titan.

The understated Brendan set the individual sales pace with $19,081 and concluded a sensational four-year spree that included tallies of $22,469 to lead 2018 and $23,240 to front 2019. His $19,760 encore in 2020 ranked as the runner-up only because Zach Kroencke ’20 crushed one of the absolute single-best individual totals in school history - $35,960.

David had proved Goliath during a staggering four-year cycle posting $132,490 from 2014-17 before Brendan immediately seized the torch and appropriately stamped an emphatic legacy. “The Hotze brothers went out with a bang.”

Brendan again paired a savvy strategy with a confident, concise pitch that consistently registered with his targeted audience. “When I made calls, I said it’s my senior year and I want to raise as much money as I can, and I’m hoping you can double what you purchased last year,” Hotze says. “I made as many calls as possible in the early stages and put myself ahead of the game. The biggest donors were approached later. I called one prospect 10 times before he picked up. He became one of my biggest checks and said he wouldn’t have made such a purchase if I hadn’t been so determined. I got his commitment the last Friday. Persistence is key.”

THE KINGPINS

Brendan steered a swaggering top-10 pack of enterprisers who generated nearly $122,500. A powerhouse threesome from the Class of 2021 joined Hotze for the third year in a row...

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The St. Thomas Basilian Fathers and stakeholders extend their deepest appreciation to all in the extended Eagle community for making our 2021 Round Up celebration a student fundraising event without equal in the United States, generating nearly $600,000 for St. Thomas tuition assistance and more than $1 million since 2014. An unrivaled Basilian initiative dating for nearly a century. And more robust than ever.

Eagles caring for Eagles.

The Sunday Drive Thru Carnival brought a different look but delivered the same Eagle brotherhood uniting for family and fun, food and friendship. And a huge welcome of relief in the wake of the pandemic roiling the world in every way imaginable.

Eagles caring for Eagles.

We were blessed to have phenomenal leadership with co-chairs Amber Caver, Barbara Villafranca, Jodi Diamond, and Nicole Herger plus a legion of volunteers who devoted countless hours to support another extravaganza. This was truly a superlative effort.

Eagles caring for Eagles.

See you March 6, 2022! #RoundUp2022
FIRST FOOTBALL FOR FAITH

On Saturday, September 4, the St. Thomas football program will launch more than its road agenda for the promising 2021 season.
A large contingent of the Eagle community will unite in North Texas for the inaugural four-team Catholic Bowl at the Ford Center at The Star indoor stadium connected to the headquarters of the Dallas Cowboys. The Eagles’ spirited competition with Plano John Paul II that kicks off at 2:00 p.m. will seize football as an opportunity for cultural exchange and authentic Catholic identity between three rising powers within the highest TAPPS ranks and an out-of-state college preparatory institution founded in 1930.

The joint venture between the schools is the genius of Global Football, an acclaimed exporter and producer of American football and marquee matchups for U.S. colleges and high schools to play internationally. The landmark contest announced on April 20 is a day-night doubleheader that includes Fort Worth Nolan Catholic taking on Little Rock Catholic at 7:00 p.m.

“St. Thomas is proud to team with Global Football to not only present our school to a much broader audience but also partner in what will quickly develop into a premier event,” Athletic Director Mike Netzel says.

“Our scholar-athletes are thrilled about the chance to play in an outstanding venue. We’ll travel and participate in a way that resembles a college bowl game experience, and many of our parents, alumni, and fans are excited to display their loyal support for St. Thomas.”

The games will be the climax of several days of special activities held to mark the occasion. The St. Thomas involvement is driven by a collaboration between Athletics, Advancement, the Alumni Association, and the Booster Club with the efforts capping months of planning and preparation from the staff across the school.

Cowboys Chief Operating Officer Stephen Jones said in the media release, “we are excited to welcome not only my alma mater, but all of the teams for the Catholic Bowl at Ford Center. This event represents so many of the reasons our family built The Star and so many of the partnerships that have been created with it.”
The weekend fellowship will lead off Friday with a concelebrated Mass hosting an estimated 800-plus attendees from the four institutions. That solemn occasion will be followed by a festive welcome dinner at Roughrider Stadium in Frisco. Honorary Chairman Rocky Bleier will be the keynote speaker at the dinner, the ideal representative to relate how his own life has revolved around faith, freedom, and football. A Notre Dame team captain and member of the 1966 National Championship team, Bleier provides an inspiring journey from wounded Army soldier to four-time Super Bowl champion. He was drafted into the United States Army after his rookie season with the Pittsburgh Steelers. Three months into his deployment to Vietnam, Bleier was shot through the thigh and suffered a grenade blast to his foot, more than 100 pieces of shrapnel maiming his legs and right foot. Doctors told him that he would be lucky to walk properly again. But Bleier then defied even greater odds, returning as a star running back for the Steel Curtain teams of the 1970s.

In 2014-15, St. Thomas staged a historic home-and-home meeting with the Steel Curtain teams of the 1970s. The debut encounter was the first-ever international trek with fellow Basilian St. Michael’s College School from Toronto. The renowned opponent was riding measurable momentum. St. Thomas finished the COVID-19 racked 2020 season with seven straight regular-season wins and its third consecutive district championship with Rich McGuire named coach of the year by the Touchdown Club of Houston. The Eagles closed out 2019 with nine victories in 11 games and reached the TAPPS Division I state semifinals for the first time since 2014-15.

Steenberge personally organizes and manages each excursion. While canvassing for creative yet manageable options for the upcoming athletic cycle, he recognized the St. Thomas road date in Plano was already on the books. The host team was not far removed from the most successful season in its history and led by head coach George Teague (yes, the former Dallas Cowboy, Terrell Owens-blasting safety.).

Steenberge immediately conceived a contest featuring the gridworld clash in Global Football’s Catholic Bowl. The dialogue with Netzel accelerated quickly to determine the Catholic Bowl is a detailed process and the ambition is to enhance our Eagle profile, engage our supporters in an innovative way, and aggressively promote through our digital media platforms. We’ll go above and beyond what might be expected to provide a memorable experience for all who are involved.”

Former Notre Dame quarterback Patrick Steenberge founded Global Football in 1996 and remains as president. The phenomenal success during a quarter-century extends to more than 270 schools and more than 17,000 travelers exploring 28 nations on six continents. The hugely popular Dublin High School Football Showcase in Ireland is annually hosted as a partner event with the Aer Lingus College Football Classic that has featured Boston College, Notre Dame, and Texas Tech, to name a few. The dialogue with Netzel accelerated quickly to determine the St. Thomas interest.

“First and foremost, this is going to give our school a jolt of exposure, which I think it already has with all the talk about games,” Netzel says. “And in many ways, we consider this a just reward for everyone associated with our program after negotiating the pandemic landscape in 2020 without a single outbreak or game postponement while hosting games with limited fans.”

Steenberge’s deep Catholic roots trace to his graduating from Cathedral Preparatory School in Erie, Pennsylvania. He has carried an emphatic commitment to faith and service into his adult life. Steenberge was a member of the 1969 and 1970 Notre Dame teams that played in consecutive Cotton Bowl showdows against no. 1 Texas. The first instant classic marked the return for the Fighting Irish to the postseason scene after a self-imposed 45-year absence. Underdog Notre Dame led 17-14 until Billy Dale’s touchdown plunge with 68 seconds remaining brought the Longhorns from behind to an undefeated national championship. The encore extravaganza saw the one-loss Irish shatter UT’s 30-game winning streak to deny a second straight unanimous title for icon coach Darrell Royal and vault the Irish to the no. 2 ranking in the final Associated Press poll.
Whether it’s on the field, in the classroom or on the job - our students and graduates excel in every competitive area. Our commitment to academic excellence, faith and service means making a difference in the world and building champions for life.
The St. Thomas Catholic Basilian intellectual tradition is the cornerstone of an academic community that develops critical thinkers, strong communicators, and ethical leaders. Students discover passion, path, and purpose supported by renowned faculty in a personalized learning environment. The Academic Awards Assembly is an annual celebration of not only emphatic scholastic performance and fervent mentorship but also the capacity for charity and compassion. Elevating learning and yielding insights.

“This assembly is a joyful yet strong confirmation to the overall strength of the St. Thomas experience and the emphasis we place on successful outcomes,” says Principal Dr. Aaron Dominguez ’96. “Committed students, faculty, staff, and families have tirelessly contributed to making these achievements possible. Vibrant academic accomplishment is a testament to innovative and engaged classroom teachers, building strong relationships, pursuing both independent and team projects. And we collectively approach the pursuit of goodness, discipline, and knowledge as a way to serve our greater society.”

One hundred and 70 notable students were saluted, led by valedictorian Patrick Pham and salutatorian Hayden Diamond, two exemplary scholars who achieved the highest academic ranks within their class. Pham was also among an Eagle coterie receiving exclusive accolades, excelling in a rigorous college preparatory environment while also separating through a compelling identity beyond the curriculum.

Pham was also among an Eagle coterie receiving exclusive accolades, excelling in a rigorous college preparatory environment while also separating through a compelling identity beyond the curriculum.

He follows Cooper Thomas ’20, Ian Wheeler ’19, Parker Rzasnicki ’18, Sam Yebobah ’17, 2016 TAPPS Male Athlete of the Year David Jones ’16, Campbell Clarkson ’15, and Joseph Lowry ’14 as the most recent recipients.

The president of the St. Thomas Chapter of the National Honor Society (NHS) was described by faculty and colleagues as a “fierce giant slayer who strikes fear in his competitors’ hearts” ... “exuding confidence and striving for excellence” ... “driven and focused” ... “who seems to know what he wants and how to get it” ... “and so driven and focused.”

SERVANT LEADERS

Diamond received the Rev. Ronald G. Schwenzer, CSB Campus Ministry Award for most exemplifying the Man of St. Thomas motto of Faith, Service, and Leadership.

Fr. Schwenzer was appointed in 2006 the first president in St. Thomas history after serving eight years as principal, working tirelessly to develop citizen scholars and relentless leaders during his tenure.

Diamond impressed teachers and administrators by exemplifying “the best of St. Thomas, embracing the brotherhood and academic dedication that sets our students apart. He has consistently shown honor and goodness in his dedication to Christ and the practical application of daily faith, whether orchestrating the distribution of more than 4,000 homeless care packages or proposing a detailed Hurricane Eta recovery effort for Lake Charles. His influence will prevail in his younger peers, and he will continue to serve Christ throughout his life.”
Gus Boettcher ’21 was selected for the Rev. Albert R. Gaelens, CSB Award, given to the senior student who best embodied the school motto of Teach Me Goodness, Discipline, and Knowledge. The 21st principal of St. Thomas executed a variety of roles on campus for a quarter-century before retiring in 2007. Seniors are nominated by their peers for this distinction and the faculty then votes on those receiving the most nominations. The student body vice president was said to display the GDK pursuits not only through academics but student government, National Honor Society, speech and debate, and theater during the previous four years. “A natural with people” ... “always enthusiastic and engaged” ... an example of “grace and humility with a spirit of service” ... “an honorable model for future men of St. Thomas.”

The Principal’s Service and Leadership Award was given to Luke McLane ’21. The student body president led his fellow students during the pandemic with “hope, humor, enthusiasm, and action” ... “spared nothing in his determination to make this academic year the best it could be” ... “advocating for student events so that all students could experience the full scope of what St. Thomas has to offer” ... “focusing on what was possible rather than what could not be offered” ... “leading with joy, humility, determination, and action.”

ROBUST SCHOLARSHIP
The National Merit Program previously announced that Zach Bryant ’21, Dylan Michaels ’21, and Zachary Voltz ’21 had earned finalist acclaim in its 66th annual scholarship program. The three quintessential scholars represented among the top one percent of scores taken nationally from the PSAT. Noah Mims ’21 qualified as a National Merit semifinalist, raising the number of elite St. Thomas students who reached at least this phase in the nation’s long-standing academic competition to 34 since 2010.

Adam Gensheimer ’21 and Roman Ochoa ’21 were both named as esteemed National Merit Commended and National Merit Hispanic Scholars. They joined Commended Scholars Boettcher, Travis Cummins ’21, Jacob Hulvey ’21, Raphael Mamaradlo ’21, Creighton Ward ’21, and Johan Webster ’21. The bevy of National Merit Hispanic Scholars also included Andrew Balance ’21, Diego Garcia Nunez ’21, Vince Lee ’21, Benito Moreno-Garza ’21, Michael Requenes ’21, Thomas Valdes ’21, and Bishop Yokubaitis ’21.

Yokubaitis and Ochoa each received the Alexander Briceño ’02 Endowed Scholarship which is awarded to two graduating seniors every four years. The gift was created by the Briceño family to honor Alexander who died tragically in an automobile accident in 2011. His legacy lives with a special award of $20,000 a year for four years. Applicants responded with an essay prompt and were ultimately chosen winners by the Briceño family.

The valedictorian Pham and salutatorian Diamond gained permanent membership into the prestigious St. Thomas Club - champion scholars with a minimum 4.0-grade point average for seven consecutive semesters.

That exclusive group now also admits Boettcher, McLane, NHS treasurer Bryant, Cummins, Gensheimer, Hulvey, Lee, Mamaradlo, Michaels, Moreno-Garza, Ochoa, Requenes, Valdes, Voltz, Ward, and Yokubaitis along with seniors Evan Benavides, NHS vice president Brady Bourgoyne, Arthur Clarke, Christopher Guzman, Aidan Kelley, Leonardo Morales, Luis Reyes, Will Rizzo, Aaron Schlosser, Chris Tan, and Zach Wilson.

Benavides was the NHS secretary and earned select distinction in an impressive series of departmental awards including AP Calculus AB, AP Biology, Advanced Sacred Scripture, and Fine Arts Drawing 2, while Brett Koehn ’22 also gained plaudits in AP English Language, Creative Writing, Advanced Mandarin 3, and Introduction to Journalism.

Elevating learning and yielding insights. Developing critical thinkers, strong communicators, and ethical leaders. Discovering passion, path, and purpose. The St. Thomas Catholic Basilian intellectual tradition in full force.
St. Thomas is proud to celebrate the latest champion scholars earning membership in its prestigious chapter of the National Honor Society.

Commemorating its centennial anniversary, the NHS is recognized as the nation’s premier organization rewarding high school students who demonstrate excellence in scholarship, service, leadership, and character - the four pillars of the NHS since its beginnings.

The St. Thomas inductees maintain a superior academic performance while engaging in rigorous college preparatory and Advanced Placement courses. Members are expected to maintain their acclaimed standing and mentor underclassmen while selflessly making a difference in the world, no matter where they are. “The St. Thomas campus community salutes these scholars for their resolute efforts toward highest achievement,” says Principal Dr. Aaron Dominguez ’96. “They model the power of resilient work and embody the Basilian values of goodness, discipline, and knowledge. As they continue their academic experience and spiritual journeys, I encourage them to embrace the joy of inspiring others to realize their dreams.”

THE ST. THOMAS NHS OFFICERS FOR THE 2020-21 ACADEMIC YEAR WERE:
President Patrick Pham ’21 • Vice President Brady Bourgoyne ’21 • Secretary Evan Benavides ’21 • Treasurer Zachary Bryant ’21 • Parliamentarian Hayden Diamond ’21

THESE COMMENDED STUDENTS JOINED 53 FELLOW EAGLES FROM THE CLASS OF 2021 WHO HAD PREVIOUSLY DEMONSTRATED THE ABILITY TO EXCEL, SERVE, LEAD, AND SUCCEED WITH A GENUINE QUEST FOR CHALLENGE AND ACCOMPLISHMENT.

THE NEWLY INDUCTED NHS MEMBERS INCLUDE:

Joe Anton ’22
Grant Arnold ’22
Nate Babineaux ’22
Patrick Bates ’22
Robert Beausean ’21
Carrick Brogan ’22
John Brooks ’22
Henry Brown ’22
Bruno Castilla ’22
Mark Cheek ’22
Landon Croker ’22
Andrew Cromwell ’22
Travis Ealy ’21
Luke Evans ’22
James Gibson ’21
Wyatt Green ’22
Octavio Hinojosa ’22
Evan Benavides
Michael Bevers
Cael Boeckman
Gus Boettcher
Brady Bourgoyne
Zachary Bryant
Maximillian Chung
Arthur Clarke
Jackson Cooper
Travis Cummins
Adam Davirshoe
Hayden Diamond
Tanner Erb
Adam Gershime
Griffin Gregory
Christopher Guzman
Jacob Hulvey
Carlos Kaehler
Aidan Kelley
Alexander Kinsel
Sebastian Lanz
Vincent Lee
Francisco Llamosa
Raphael Marinaro
Luke McLean
Dylan Michaels
Noah Mims
Lusangelo Monte
Berito Moreno-Garza
Thomas Murray
Dai Nguyen
Roman Ochoa
Jhosus Paspucin
Patrick Pham
George Rentz
Michael Requenes
Lawson Huff ’22
Grady Jones ’22
Nickolas Karakildis ’22
Brett Kehn ’22
Dylan Lightfoot ’22
Colin Little ’22
Robert Longe ’22
Nico Lopez ’22
Joe Rick Maddon ’22
Sam Мальбиг ’22
Thank-Vinh McColloster ’22
Cameron McCurry ’21
Leonardo Morales ’21
Cooper Murray ’22
Carson Onido ’21
Alex Ostrom ’22
Eli Phillips ’22
Maddox Prejean-VanMeurs ’22
Cameron Price ’22
Nicholas Prioli ’21
Charlie Ramirez ’22
Matias Ramirez de Alva ’21
Diogo Ramos ’22
Joseph Romero ’21
Dylan Sandrock ’22
Mark Scott ’22
Edward Seymour ’22
Sam Tagliabu ’22
David Torres ’22
Ruben Vara ’22
Peyton Woodfield ’22
Andrew Wuterthausen ’22
Alex Yankowsky ’22
Peter Zhong ’22

Involvement in the NHS is both prestigious and an exclusive responsibility, with students expected to continue to reflect the society’s high standards, as well as serve the school and their fellow students as academic leaders, ambassadors, and tutors. Science faculty member Dr. Claire Conboy played a pivotal role in determining the deep St. Thomas NHS participation in her second year as chapter advisor.

“This is significant prestige that demonstrates the depth of the academic achievement thriving within St. Thomas,” Dr. Conboy says. “We are about developing and nurturing our students to reach their potential not only through curriculum but as vibrant contributors to society. And this honor provides a guiding light for all our young men of what is attainable and what should be pursued.”

The NHS estimates that more than one million students have participated in its activities in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and many other U.S. territories with more than $15 million in scholarships awarded since 1946. Two million dollars was gifted in 2021.
Prepare ye! Spellbound by Godspell.

To usher in the spring, St. Thomas Theater rolled out a thoroughly refreshing and relentlessly perky production of the 1971 American-tribal-love-rock-Jesusical. Renowned director Dan Green shaped a beautiful blend of imagery, emotion, soundscape, and music to create an amazingly impactful experience.

His fresh-faced, likable cast embraced the material with the eagerness of new converts. Among the dynamic headliners from a deep, captivating star-studded senior class, Leo Wilson ’21 and Bishop Yokubaitis ’21 appeared in their 11th show-stopping St. Thomas presentations.

Based very loosely on the Gospel According to St. Matthew, Godspell is not so much a linear story but a series of parables transformed into singable teaching moments with updated contemporary language and a breezy, infectious score.

“With the pandemic being such a crushing force for the better part of a year, I wanted something that would lift everyone’s spirit,” Green says. “You can do this play with a smaller group and have enough fun parts to spread around the talent. The world needed all the joy it could muster so we thought we would bring it out.”

THE SHOW MUST GO ON

The entire St. Thomas enterprise had a kum-ba-Yahweh quality - smart, and smartly prepared to perform the 50-year-old gem within the boundaries of COVID-19 sensitivities. St. Thomas Theater presented its first production since the coronavirus lockdown. Historical and social context counts in how a work of art is perceived, and any kind of in-person encounter with flesh-and-blood practitioners was a revival in every sense.

Allelujah!

“I’m always humbled by how the students commit and the quality they deliver,” Green says. “I was particularly moved by this group in these circumstances. There are honestly no words to describe my admiration given the trials of the pandemic and how they overcame the challenges to invest.”

Godspell was touching and illuminating, an exercise in youthful exuberance with actors seemingly bopping, bouncing, and bounding non-stop across the stage.

Given its Biblical base, the show remains strangely irreverent, at times wacky, and most often endearing. This extravaganza shined most through the vocally adept artists bringing great precision to solos and cohesive balance to the chorus. And though technology has advanced beyond imagination in the intervening years since the 1971 breakthrough, the original spirit has remained. Godspell still felt like an evangelical service in which everyone was expected to put their hands in the air and whoop.

Wilson made for a charismatic Christ figure, successfully capturing the boyish enthusiasm of this musical-comedy Messiah. Gus Boettcher ’21 (in his eighth St. Thomas performance) intermittently exuded dramatic intensity in the dual roles of John the Baptist and Judas. The big-voiced, big-hearted cast of savvy kids featuring Yokubaitis, Hunter Cummins ’21 (Socrates), Hayden Diamond ’21 (Herb), and Noah Mims ’21 (Jeffrey) thundered traditional tunes such as “Day by Day,” “Turn Back, O Man,” “Learn Your Lessons Well,” “Prepare Ye the Way Of The Lord,” and “By My Side” with clarity, conviction, and a radiant gratitude for the chance to be there.

“Leo was an immense singer with so much experience in comedic roles,” Green says. “He was asked to play a more human character than the rest of the ensemble and rose to the demands. Gus has incredible natural timing and body control, always aware of how to play off the audience. The juxtaposition of his magnetism against the everyman quality of Wilson was exciting to see unfold.”
Bishop was the workhorse. He always has the right attitude to pair with immense talent and intelligence. I could give him the phone book and by the end I would want to listen to him read.”

“Hayden was vital in building energy within the group and getting them on the same page. (Senior) Benito Moreno-Garza controlled the soundboard for the first time. Avery Garig (Gilmer and Incarnate Word Academy ‘21) and Sara Roldan (Robin and IWA ‘21) could have led any show I selected. Avery Garig (Gilmer and Incarnate Word Academy ‘21) and Sara Roldan (Robin and IWA ‘21) could have led any show I selected. I’m amazed at the immense talent we are going to lose after this year. It’s similar to (Major League Baseball super agent) Scott Boras coming in, raiding the 2017 (World Series Champion) Astros, brokering deals and suddenly they’re all gone.”

The thrilled March audiences in Cemo Auditorium were reminded of the lively simplicity and openness that has made Godspell an ageless show widely performed in schools, summer stock repertory, and regional playhouses for generations.

Yet, Green was determined not to merely churn an alma mater-like rendition. The director’s directive was to be relevant to today’s youth and keep the play ticking along at a fervent pace. Spicy guest appearances included St. Thomas President Fr. James Murphy, CSB and Steve Green ‘68. And once again, Godspell celebrated the idea that the spiritual life is of paramount importance. Among the many parables enacted with pep were several reminding that an obsession with material achievement will land you on the wrong side of the fence come judgment day.

SENSATIONAL SEND-OFFS

Godspell marked the climax of two scintillating St. Thomas acting careers. The multi-faceted Wilson is the first four-time TAPPS all-state choir performer in school history, and the son of St. Thomas Choral Director and faculty member Josh Wilson (2020 Grammy Award-winning member of the Houston Chamber Choir), who was involved in his 18th STH production.

Wilson the younger and Yokubaitis were introduced to the St. Thomas program through family connections while still precocious grade-schoolers. Before enrolling as freshmen, they had each appeared in such classics as Macbeth, Fiddler on the Roof, Much Ado About Nothing, The Mouse That Roared, Oklahoma! and The Three Musketeers. The Yokubaitis family tradition now extends to Bishop’s sister Zoe (Joanne and Incarnate Word Academy ‘23), already with six St. Thomas plays on her resume. “This play was a very emotional experience for me because of how long I’ve known Leo and Bishop, and watching them develop over the years,” Green says. “Early on I recognized their potential and was confident they would put in the effort. There was a scene where six-foot-four Bishop puts a hammer hug on Leo who is all of five-foot-eight and it’s an endearing moment. I couldn’t help but recall their first shows. It was much more than gratifying to see those two young men excel knowing what they represent in their best moments.”

The unrivaled set construction skills of faculty members Phil Gensheimer and Daniel Bryant ‘93 were again in full dazzling display with set crew coordinator Adam Gensheimer ‘21 integral in crafting the final design. He and student construction manager Arthur Clarke ‘21 tag-teamed on their eighth consecutive production and helped devise a wonderfully minimalistic atmosphere that enabled the kaleidoscope lighting to accent the space.

AT THE BEGINNING

Godspell launched as ultra-catchy genre-hopping pop songs by a young Stephen Schwartz and a kind of sort of New Testament story arc conceived as a non-musical master’s thesis by the late John-Michael Tebelak. One of several biblical-themed musicals from the 1970s, Godspell joined Two By Two (think Noah’s Ark), rock opera Jesus Christ Superstar, and Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat in that decade. With a five-year run Off-Broadway before opening at Broadway’s Broadhurst Theatre in June 1976, Godspell was a monster hit a half-century ago, running more than 2,000 performances and later turned into a sickly-sweet sentimental movie.
Francisco Llamosa ‘21 and Roman Ochoa ‘21 are the latest scholar-artists to extend St. Thomas’ distinguished history as a center of ceramic art innovation and education. Both earned recognition this spring for the 24th Annual National K-12 Ceramic Exhibition, and for the fifth consecutive year St. Thomas emerged for significant acclaim within the showcase event.

Llamosa’s *The Cracked Dent* and Ochoa’s *It’s Natural* were selected for the exclusive national show which was presented virtually because of COVID-19 restrictions.

“It’s stunning to have these juried results given the limitations throughout the fall,” faculty member Mike Nebel says. “We were able to complete only a couple of projects given the hybrid learning. But these two pieces Francisco and Roman produced are quite innovative.”

Under Nebel’s celebrated leadership, the St. Thomas program is embedded in an intensive learning community where teaching and mentoring meet critical making and rigorous critique. Llamosa and Ochoa received commendation among nearly 700 national entries. Their vanity and serving trays served as prime examples of contemporary ceramic artwork that is both functional and sculptural while flashing whimsical qualities.

“Francisco incorporated heavy twine on the handles to give the work some unusual texture,” Nebel says. “The white crackle glaze (a network of lines in the fired surface) on top of an already white glaze works surprisingly well. It’s a beautifully, subtle piece.

“Roman’s work really pops. He applied a set of glazes we don’t routinely work with but he used them to great advantage. The clear coat gives the tray that shine, a waxiness that true bamboo would resemble. Same with the handles that he hollowed out. Extensive design and execution sets that piece apart from the field.”

For more than a decade, Nebel has fostered much more than a simple appreciation for the ceramic arts within his curriculum. He’s orchestrated a seismic shift for the program, providing a rigorous yet supportive environment that relies on persistent curiosity and due diligence, exposing students to a wide range of traditional techniques and contemporary concepts while encouraging their signature style.

Nebel’s lab is stimulating and challenging, a fulcrum for artistic and intellectual growth. With the realization that discipline, historical precedents, and freedom go hand in hand with creative activities, he instills a balance between the acquisition of traditional skills and the promotion of independence and innovation. Responsibility is placed on the individual student to find meaningful content and an effective means to express.

Llamosa and Ochoa both reflected a solid foundation of technical and intellectual skills, while developing a strong personal direction with their work.

“I respect them both for their commitment in the face of the interruptions and uncertainty - the essence of St. Thomas scholars,” Nebel says. “Francisco is an Eagle Scout and was vice captain of the rugby team. Ochoa was a two-year member of the National Honor Society, a National Merit Commended and National Merit Hispanic Scholar, a state champion in wrestling, and a significant senior leader keeping the student body united during the pandemic response.”

Next year (2021-22) we are going after the competitions unlike ever before,” Nebel says. “We’re throwing out the previous strategies and will produce pieces that no one has seen before from St. Thomas. But our standard never changes because excellence is the standard, and the students deserve all that credit. They have to bring the curiosity, the desire, and the dedication. I never know what talent is rising until we go to work. That’s when we discover who steps forward and provides the lead for which everyone else aspires.”
EAGLES REACHING WORLDWIDE

Reckling Gymnasium is routinely a buzz of St. Thomas student activity throughout the academic year, from the celebratory salutes to champion scholars, to the latest rim-racking display from Eagle Basketball, to the welcoming of the next exemplary class of St. Thomas student leaders. But few swirls within the friendly confines matched the impact in April which carried from campus and was felt beyond borders. St. Thomas Campus Ministry collaborated with Cross Catholic Outreach to stage a two-day food packing event, involving the student body teaming with faculty and volunteers. Approximately 100,000 meals were packaged and shipped to those in need in Haiti where a single packet of soy-dense Vitafood can feed a family of six.

“It’s amazing to think that in such a short amount of time a relative number of young men can feed so many people,” Dean of Theology Andrew Quittenton says. “When our Eagle community comes together, we can accomplish the extraordinary.”

Eagle Community. Amazing. Extraordinary. The power of goodness, discipline, and knowledge.

Students worked side-by-side, stuffing then sealing air-tight packets with food, and packing boxes with life-saving nutrition for the chronically malnourished.

“With all the restrictions surrounding COVID-19, it was difficult to arrange service opportunities off campus,” Quittenton says. “This was a premium option and an exciting project that involved all our students. Everyone was sanitized. Gloves and hairnets. The supplies were handled carefully. I marveled at how the Eagle brotherhood embraced the cause with a great spirit. And fighting hunger was a particular focus during the fall and spring semesters - homeless packages, a 30-hour fast so that they could relate somewhat to going without a meal. Cross Catholic was the perfect partner to continue this education.”

St. Thomas first connected with the agency in 2016 for the same food-packing initiative, a coordinated effort aligned with the Basilian mission to educate, advocate, and serve those whose lives are afflicted by these poverty-induced conditions. The association parleys perfectly with the school’s long-established relationship with Magnificat House and its Loaves and Fishes program which provides meals for many of Houston’s hungry and homeless. Affecting short-term relief may fuel long-term solutions that address systemic causes.

For generations, St. Thomas has instilled social justice responsibility in nurturing the complete student by creating a culture rooted in service. The emphasis is that the student’s individual formation requires more than achievement in a rigorous college preparatory curriculum. Rooted at the core of the St. Thomas educational model is the commitment to transforming the minds and hearts of the Eagle campus community through advancement and social justice awareness. The prime purpose is laying the foundation for lifelong stewardship for sacrifice and sharing by devoting significant energy and talent for the betterment of communities.

Cross Catholic recognized an opportunity to galvanize Eagle students and Campus Ministry to deliver aid and disaster relief to the poorest of the poor internationally. The 501c3 Catholic relief and development ministry is registered with the Diocese of Palm Beach in South Florida. The organization channels funds through dioceses, parishes, and Catholic missionaries, cost-effectively helping those in need to break the cycle of poverty while advancing the Catholic faith.

According to the Cross Catholic’s website, the organization is committed to providing “food, shelter, medical care, education and emergency relief to the poorest of the poor in dioceses around the world in the name of Christ... housing for the homeless, medicines and health care for the indigent and clean water for communities that have none.”

Cross Catholic Outreach projects include care and education for orphans, sustainable housing, clean water, and other long-term development efforts to deliver food, shelter, and hope.
Some of the best and the brightest among Eagle scholars again proved to have the right stuff in aiming for the stars and outdistancing elite students.

For the third time in five years, St. Thomas occupied an exclusive orbit - advancing one of its four teams to compete in the Team America Rocketry Challenge (TARC) National Final, the world's largest student rocket contest.

Seniors Luis Reyes, Ben Lauckner, Zachary Bryant, Evan Benavides, Al Davis, and junior Joe Anton brought scientific and mathematical principles to life as they designed, built, and launched custom-made model rockets to meet rigorous predetermined demands. They traveled to Rockdale in June for the chance to win a share of $100,000 in scholarships and prizes.

The 2021 National Fly-Off was an extension of last year's COVID-19 interrupted competition with the finals staged at 11 regional sites, rather than the traditional setting in Manassas, Virginia. St. Thomas was one of only two Houston schools and 12 from Texas among the 100 teams from 27 states and the U.S. Virgin Islands competing for the title of National Champion.

“I always hold great pride when our students achieve at these superior levels. But I’m particularly thrilled for this group and everyone involved in our program given the obvious restrictions and burdens during the pandemic,” science faculty member Dr. Pete Nordloh says.

Nordloh collaborated with Dr. Ed Marintsch (emeritus) to ignite passion for rocket engineering, concepts, assembly, and work with real materials. The two inspired, mentored, and navigated the school’s 11th trip to the National Finals.

St. Thomas overcame enormous odds presented by the coronavirus outbreak and the closure of the traditional launch site at Johnson Space Center to again represent Space City in a national forum. “The first challenge once we returned to campus was how to meet safely within the COVID protocols,” Nordloh says. “Then where do we launch. Ed suggested an internal competition. We crafted smaller rocket versions for 200 feet elevation. That introduced our group to software and basic design. We used the neighboring property adjacent to the Joplin Campus to test, and that effort was wildly successful because we had authentic active student participation. We were one of the few clubs that were actually meeting.”

Once the collective mission returned to TARC rocketry, the Eagles had to upgrade their intent to out-thinking and out-flying their fellow competitors - structures, propulsion, avionics, and recovery.

Tripoli Houston, a high-powered rocket club that routinely pushes 17,000 feet in altitude, conducts launches at the Hearne Municipal Airport outside of College Station. Nordloh and Marintsch became interested in Tripoli’s recently debuted second site near Santa Fe as an option to host St. Thomas’s preliminary efforts.

“It’s literally five miles off the paved road in a rice field,” Nordloh says. “They graciously provided space more than a half dozen times and for our qualifying flights. Their generosity was above and beyond what we could have imagined and was invaluable to our being successful.”

The TARQUE contest rules and scoring parameters change every cycle to summon ingenuity and encourage a fresh approach to execution.

This year, teams were required to safely carry a payload of one raw egg to three different altitude and time goals. With their first flight goal and qualification flights done, teams had to fly to 775 feet within 39 to 42 seconds, and then to 825 feet within .41 to .44 seconds at the National Finals.

“While the American Rocketry Challenge looked different this year, it continued to be a bright spark of inspiration for future STEM leaders and the aerospace and defense industry,” says Aerospace Industries Association President and CEO Eric Fanning.

St. Thomas Rocketry has now reached TARC 11 times in 18 years, an event that originally began as a celebration of the 100th anniversary of the Wright Brothers’ first flight and quickly morphed through overwhelming demand into an annual exercise to promote future scientists and engineers.

In 2005, St. Thomas finished 13th at nationals and its fifth-place result in 2009 enabled the team to work on a year-long student initiative with NASA.
Kevin Silva ’21 never should have entertained a senior-only quicksilver stay at St. Thomas. He never should have left his family and friends and life as he knew it for a great unknown 1,700 miles across 10 states away from his home.
He never should have dropped absurdly out of nearly nowhere (well, actually, Long Island, New York) to emphatically impact an Eagle Football season and resurrect his personal performance from a myriad of injuries.

But Silva’s highly anticipated, sensational senior sendoff was about to be short-circuited by the coronavirus creating world-wide havoc and shutting down high school football in New York in the fall.

Silva’s father Rick was working on a long-term professional project in Houston. He offered his son the proposition to relocate and seek a one-and-done roll of the dice with St. Thomas, playing a season on the field, albeit under utterly foreign circumstances.

Silva’s less than subtle response: “No way.” Reluctantly, Kevin continued to weigh the option in his mind.

He gathered intel, researched what St. Thomas was presenting, met with head coach Rich McGuire, and slowly came to a bottom-line realization.

“There was only one question I had to answer,” Silva says. “If I don’t make this move, will I always regret it? It became obvious that I had to try.”

“You must have really wanted to play football.” “Yes.”

“I had no guarantees but I was confident in my abilities,” Silva continues.

But the ultimate reward for Silva’s gamble on himself arrived days before his graduation. He was struck with a stunning development from Trinity University.

From the largest and most competitive applicant pool in the school’s history, Silva was gifted with the $23,000 President’s Scholarship, renewable for four years of undergraduate study for a total value of $92,000. He’ll now continue his scholar-athlete career in the NCAA Division III Southern Athletic Association with a program steep in championship tradition.

Trinity shared the conference title in 2019 with an 8-2 overall record, its 16th crown since 1993.

“Before coming to Houston, I had talked to some colleges but nothing hit,” Silva says. “The visit with the Trinity coaches went well. They want to win, that’s their standard. And it’s always great when someone wants you. Just like at St. Thomas, I wouldn’t have come without coach McGuire making me feel comfortable. You have to push in life but sometimes you need some pull, too.”

And a native New Yorker banging bodies in the Bayou Bowl was simply another flashpoint among the never-ending contradictions and misconceptions that Silva navigates between his two always outsized worlds.

But for now Silva is much more of an urban area than where I lived in Long Island. Midtown Manhattan and Times Square. The reality is St. Thomas.

“Friends back home think I’m living in the wide-open spaces,” Silva says with obvious amusement. “They ask about the cattle and trucks and farms. My friends here think I left Midtown Manhattan and Times Square. The reality is St. Thomas is much more of an urban area than where I lived in Long Island. Houston is the ‘big city.’ I laugh all the time when I hear both sides talk.”

Moving forward, Silva will gladly pledge to a split allegiance, certainly loyal to his New York origins while greatly appreciative for his adoptive state serving yet again as a canvas upon which outsiders project their hopes and dreams, the next Davy Crockett gone to Texas.

“I can’t say enough about the great people who all made this happen for me,” Silva says. “They supported me in ways I’m not sure I understand. And why? They had nothing to gain. That’s why I love St. Thomas.”

It never should have happened. Those words never should have left Kevin Silva’s lips. But they do with a respect that registers off the Richter. Because what shouldn’t have happened, did and will shape Silva tomorrow, and next month, and for years deep into his adult life.
Since 1900, St. Thomas has impacted the rise of Houston as a global force. Our Catholic intellectual tradition has created a diverse community of scholars, united and dedicated to the highest academic standards, rooted in the Basilian values of goodness, discipline, and knowledge.

The dialogue between faith and reason continues to drive the pursuit of wisdom. St. Thomas is committed to nurturing graduates to become ethical leaders who create positive change everywhere life takes them. In Houston, in Texas, and beyond.
The medal haul for Eagle Track and Field was again gallant and collectively golden.

Two-sport all-state dynamo Cameron Bonner ’21 raced to a new state record and a precocious corp of dynamic talents combined strength and sizzle as St. Thomas thoroughly dominated the TAPPS 6A state championship for the program’s third bold bonanza in six years.

The Eagles soared and roared for a commanding first-day lead and then decisively sealed the title with 121 total points, decidedly outpacing Addison Trinity Christian (90.5), Argyle Liberty Christian (80), and fourth-place Dallas Bishop Lynch (56.5).

The deep satisfaction continues for unassuming head coach Nathan Labus who has consistently combined endless perseverance and drive with a steady unwavering influence since joining the St. Thomas faculty and becoming head coach for the 2006 season.

The scorching Saturday results at Midway High School’s Panther Stadium in Waco were capped by a gold medal stomp in the 4x400 relay. With the team title safety secured, Joseph Romero ’22, Heriberto Villegas ’21, and Luke Anigbogu ’23 burned an emphatic final statement with an electric anchor from Bonner in 3:23.90 to detonate the Eagle celebration.

Bonner earlier reset the standard in the 400 meters with a 47.98 clocking and helped the Eagles control the heavily-weighted relay results.

The Baylor receiver signee sprinted the second leg in the second-place 4x100 flash with lethal weapon freshmen Marquis Kiatta and Aaron Blackman along with Anigbogu. The foursome was timed in 42.96. Kiatta’s all-around point-packing parade included the lead portion in the 4x200 followed by Joe Rick Madden ’22, Blackman, and Anigbogu that crossed in fourth with 1:31.15.

Kiatta began his jaw-dropping big stage debut with a silver medal in the triple jump (43-03.5) after capturing the bronze with a personal best in the long jump (20-07.75).
The Eagles ruled the Day 1 field events for 51 points and forged seamless and they ran to their potential. “The baton exchanges were not mature enough to handle the responsibilities. But Marquis and Aaron were awesome. The baton exchanges were done with heart. There’s so much pride in this group.”

Malouf prescribes to adage that “most championships are won before you reach the track. The theme was to finish with a purpose. We said going in that we didn’t come this far to only come this far. Everyone was accountable to each other. They ran for each other, threw for each other, jumped for each other. We were the defending champs (from 2019 before the pandemic eliminated an encore effort in 2020) with the target on our backs. It was a matter of respect, of the team.”

After that sterling start in the field events, Malouf sought the second-day performers and delivered an aggressive message. “I need you to look inside yourselves, seize the best-possible version of yourselves, and bring that to the track (on Saturday). Envision the race, what is required to execute. Push the nervousness aside. Focus. And they bought in. They ran with heart. There’s so much pride in this group.”

The achievement is the 17th state crown for St. Thomas since Mike Netzel was named athletic director in 2008, including four each in baseball (2010, 2011, 2014 and 2017) and rugby (2009, 2011-13), three in wrestling (2011-13), two in basketball (2008 and 2011), and one in golf (2012). Labus remains the one constant as the senior member within the Eagle Athletics coaching ranks.

The Eagles had earlier stormed through the South Regional meet with superior swagger, sweeping the three relays, including four each in baseball (2010, 2011, 2014 and 2017) and rugby (2009, 2011-13), three in wrestling (2011-13), two in basketball (2008 and 2011), and one in golf (2012). Labus remains the one constant as the senior member within the Eagle Athletics coaching ranks.

The latest conquest for Eagle Track and Field was in unmistakable contrast to its previous masterwork when St. Thomas unleashed a fast and furious surge to the finish after trailing Dallas Bishop Dunne by a presumed insurmountable 89-29 deficit (yes, 89-29). Peyton Malocha ’19 dramatically closed his superior two-sport scholar-athlete career by high jumping 6-6 - the highest jumper in TAPPS history - in the final, championship-deciding event to push St. Thomas into command position.

In 2016, four individual champions and a depth of contribution from throughout the roster produced the program’s first state triumph since 2005. Uber-talented Landon Malouf ’16 paired power and grace to re-establish one state standard he had already owned while continuing his dynamo swirl of results. Malouf first tied for third in the high jump (6-02), then blistered the 110 high hurdles in 14.17 seconds while lowering the state record he established in 2015 (14.30). He had enough octane to burn the 300 meter hurdles in 39.80 for his second individual gold to help stamp the historic 100th state title on Saturday. “I was a bit concerned after the regional with so many personal bests that maybe we had peaked too early,” Labus says. “That wasn’t the case obviously. They maintained many of those same levels two weeks when they were most tested.”

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WILD RIDE
TWO WINS SHORT

In the first TAPPS baseball fandango of the COVID-19 era, St. Thomas was pressed into a righteous ballgame, an emotional vise, squeezing tighter and tighter until the whole thing was too much and burst in spectacular fashion. Defying rational cause-and-effect, the relentless Eagles rescued revelry from the jaws of elimination. They charged into the state tournament for the 10th time in 11 competitive seasons (last year’s pandemic cancelation notwithstanding) and second in two tries with head coach Adam Massiatte. An illogical bounce back for the ages erased 3-0 and 6-4 deficits for a 7-6 outcome over San Antonio Antonian at Riverside Park in Victoria that kept alive the drive for the program’s 25th state championship crown.

St. Thomas, low on offensive octane but rich in will and resolve for the second straight playoff encounter, survived despite trailing by three runs five batters into the game. Despite a disputed no-catch ruling on right fielder Peter Corbett ’21 in the fifth inning that resulted in a two-out, three-run inside-the-park home run. Despite no Eagle hits until Will Rizzo ’21 (Texas A&M) lasered a double into the left field corner to lead off the sixth and ignite the game-deciding rally. Even with a four-run resurrection in the fourth - minus the benefit of a single, solitary hit - providing only a temporary reprieve.

Third baseman Drew Tolson ’21 (Beloit College) followed Rizzo’s momentum jolt with an RBI double to close the count to 6-5. Shortstop Eddie Villegas ’21 lifted a sacrifice fly to bring home left fielder Braylan Salinas ’23, on the base paths courtesy one of 10 walks (yes, 10) the Eagle order coerced from Antonian arms, to tie the contest 6-6. One out and one base on balls later, Salinas raced home on a misguided Antonian throw and the King Kong comeback was complete.

Much of which paled in comparison to the see-and-still-not-believe bizarre fourth inning when the Eagles capitalize on four walks in six at-bats to force in a run, a wild pitch to shrink the score to 3-2, and a two-run error in left field with two out for a mystifying 4-3 advantage.

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Sheer evidence that the Baseball gods may provide a favorable nod to perseverance, calm, and composure through adversity, even when an outfit can manage but four total hits in consecutive one-game knockout affairs.

While Antonian pitching was melting down, starter Colin D’Elia ’21 kept St. Thomas within striking distance with five essential innings, all toil and tenacity, allowing five hits and racking seven strikeouts. He retired nine straight batters over one stretch and notched his sixth strikeout to leave a runner stranded at second to finish the fourth.

Corbett provided a Mookie Betts-like break, charge, and diving grab to end the second after he gunned down an Antonian runner at third base to limit the damage in the first frame with St. Thomas already in recovery mode.
Grant Springer ’21 moved from first base to relieve D’Elia in the sixth and delivered in one of the highest-leverage moments of the season. He locked Antonian down with 41 pitches but needed a next-level web gem from Villegas to erase Antonian’s most dangerous swinger with a runner on base to ensure the escape.

And for the fourth postseason since 2011, Eagle Baseball had wielded Antonian a death blow from contention.

In 2011 and 2017, St. Thomas advanced to capture state crowns. In 2019, the Eagles reached the championship final against Argyle Liberty Christian.

Eagle Baseball moved forward to face district mate Tomball Concordia Lutheran at Waco ISD Stadium in the second state semifinal. The Eagles had dropped the regular-season best-of-three series 1-2, their lone knock coming courtesy a ninth-inning RBI single from Villegas for a dramatic 3-2 road verdict. Rizzo set the stage with his breathtaking brilliance (87 pitches, 55 strikes). He struck out 12 in five and 2/3s shutout innings while allowing only three hits and three walks. The game was stopped due to threatening weather and concluded the next day.

The two familiar foes were returning to the same venue offering similar stakes as 2014. Then, clutch slugging deluxe Ben Condara ’14 channeled his inner Kirk Gibson and teamed with left-handed starter Matthew Ashbaugh ’16 to seize a thunderous last-strike, last-at-bat 2-1 state championship clincher. The following year in the regional playoffs, six mandatory shutdown innings from Ashbaugh didn’t suffice in a 2-0 defeat that denied the reigning kingspins a sixth straight state shindig.

But if baseball shares any daily lesson, it’s that the sport cares not for who deserves what. Rizzo deserved a large dose of coup-de-grâce glory to stamp his signature senior season, a domineering, dominating, legacy-defining victory. Baseball chuckled. Deserve didn’t matter.

The competitiveness and attitude and the raw intent with which Rizzo delivers every single pitch would not be enough in his farewell appearance. He surrendered three earned runs and six hits, striking out eight and retiring seven straight batters to end a 5-0 verdict. The Eagles had maximized the roster to finish the campaign 20-12-1.

The abrupt about-face served as stark contrast from Rizzo opening the postseason as a relentless one-man rescue outfit, reserving his best for his last start at Fr. Wilson Field. His tight-fisted, one-hit complete game with eight strikeouts stymied Beaumont Kelly Catholic. Eagle Baseball required every last dramatic drop of Rizzo’s raucous mastery for a 3-1 decision after the district champions had curb-stomped Kelly in sweeping three straight during the race by a combined score of 30-8.

But that sledgehammer run support was not in evidence in the most critical head-to-head match-up. The Eagles cashed in a pair of unearned runs in the fourth inning to snatch a 2-1 lead. In their next swings, Corbett singled, then moved to third on consecutive wild pitches, and added the all-important insurance run on a sacrifice fly to right by D’Elia for the final margin.

Rizzo (89 pitches, 57 strikes) made the most of the meager support, establishing his signature command from the first pitch, torching the strike zone with high velocity to punch out five of the first nine batters he faced. It reached the point where the Kelly lineup was hoping for dropped third strikes.

Rizzo handcuffed and held them hitless the final four innings after allowing an unearned run in the third. He roared through a 1-2-3 sixth, notched his final strikeout to begin the seventh, and ended the game with a 6-3 double play.

The robust outburst from Rizzo was simply a continuation of his scintillating send-off after signing his National Letter of Intent with Texas A&M. But suddenly his career was unsuitably silenced and sealed. And his underclassman teammates were emphatically slapped with see ya next year, the harshest reminder of baseball’s cruelty which would be too much if only the glory of winning weren’t so sweet.
St. Thomas Athletic Director Mike Netzel was searching for a creative and appropriate final stamp to Eagle Swimming’s unprecedented success achieved during the previous four years. The answer came with personal and emphatic updates to the program’s record board displayed in Reckling Gymnasium. Head coach VanArthur Jones and team members gathered as Dylan Michaels ’21 and Josh McLean ’22 officially and proudly posted their newly minted St. Thomas marks after leading the Eagles to a strong second-place finish at the TAPPS Division I state swimming championships in San Antonio.

Michaels was named the East Region swimmer of the meet with a versatile performance that included a blazing 1:44.06 in the 200 freestyle which was good for second place. McLean sizzled to a 2:00.49 for third in the 200 individual medley.

Both scholar-athletes were essential performers during the four-year surge that saw the 2019 Aqua Eagles claim its first-ever state title, successfully retain the crown in 2020, and then add the recent runner-up result to match the 2018 finish. In that championship repeat, the M&M boys teamed with Sebastian Ortiz ’20 for three top-two individual results while igniting valuable relay finishes, including a second (1:30.92) in the 200 free.

Netzel credits former head coach Bob Perkins for establishing an identity for Eagle Swimming that was largely anonymous before his arrival. Through day-to-day due diligence, he plotted and piloted the program to five top-four state finishes in eight years. Donna Skorupinski maintained the surging momentum as the first woman varsity coach in the history of Eagle Athletics. She assumed the lead position in 2018 after four years as an assistant teaming with Perkins and guided the historic championship before Jones’ ascent in 2020.

Netzel had heard the roars, seen the excitement, and felt the energy generated by every team triumph. “This is more than swimming for St. Thomas and for our athletic program. This past season in particular personified resilience and toughness. Dylan and Josh were the dynamic senior leaders in that effort. The way that they performed, and how this team responded, you can draw comparisons to the challenges dealing with the pandemic. We all needed to experience something positive and it galvanized much of our campus community.

“It wasn’t just an athletics wave, it was a school wave.”

There were high-water marks both in the pool and beyond. The 1:29.31 at the state meet in 2019, the school-record 3:17.07 in the 400 free relay, and the second-place state title, the first for St. Thomas since 2004. “We were on the cutting edge of the sport,” Netzel said.

Michaels was a critical cog as a sophomore in two scorching results that secured the breakthrough 2019 state title. In the first of two tight-tick-rely wins, he joined Ortiz, Gabriel Lenz ’19, and Phelpsian-anchor Shane Williams ’19 to out-touch perennial powerhouse El Paso Cathedral at the wall by the slimmest of sub-second margins - a school-record 1:29.31. The fab foursome then claimed the 400 free by less than two seconds in another Eagle record of 3:17.07. For the victory. In the closing event. And the team title.

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“Dylan and Josh now join the elite company,” Netzel says. “These names represent the trailblazers who set the standards our future student-athletes must aspire to. I’m so appreciative of their commitment to excellence. Prospective students see St. Thomas enjoying this kind of success and that there are only a finite number of schools that make those same claims. VanArthur is the perfect person to lead us as we continue to build the next chapter of Eagle Swimming.”
ACCLAIMED SCHOLAR-ATHLETE ROME OCHOA ’21 SEIZED THE 195-POUND TITLE AS EAGLE WRESTLING LEVERAGED SUPERIOR DEPTH TO CAPTURE THE RUNNER-UP POSITION AT THE 2021 TAPPS STATE CHAMPIONSHIPS AT ARGYLE LIBERTY CHRISTIAN SCHOOL.

Ochoa continued his stellar senior year with yet another broad stroke of achievement. He defeated Charles Holub from Dallas Bishop Lynch with a sudden victory in the first overtime, 8-6, one year after earning the silver medal in the same weight class.

THE EAGLES CASHED FIVE SECOND-PLACE FINISHES AND THREE THIRD-PLACE RESULTS TO RACK 165 TEAM POINTS. EAGLE WRESTLING TRAILLED THE STATE CHAMPION HOST (208.0) AND OUTPACED BISHOP LYNCH (159.0), TEXAS SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF (113.0), AND FORT WORTH ALL SAINTS (55.5).

A REMARKABLE SEASON WITH HEAD COACH MICHAEL LEHOLM AND AN INEXPERIENCED LINEUP INCLUDED THE PROGRAM’S SECOND RUNNER-UP IN THREE YEARS AFTER A STRONG THIRD-PLACE FINISH IN 2020.

OTHER NOTABLE EAGLE RESULTS INCLUDE:

- Mario Morales ’22 - second - 285-pound class
- Harrison Heard ’21 - second - 170-pound class
- Colton Ritchey ’23 - second - 113-pound class
- Ben Brown ’23 - third - 152-pound class
- Luke Malvaux ’23 - second - 182-pound class
- Dominic Considine ’23 - second - 132-pound class
- Sam Cordova ’23 - third - 145-pound class
- Dominic Ori ’24 - third - 220-pound class
- Jackson Knower ’23 - fourth - 138-pound class

Gold medalist Ochoa, silver medalists Considine and Malvaux, and bronze medalists Brown and Cordova represented Eagle Wrestling with competitive showings at the prestigious 85th National Prep Championships at historic Lehigh University.
Eagle Athletics captured the 2021 TAPPS All-Sports Trophy—earning the prestigious distinction for the 9th time in the previous 11 years that the honor was awarded.

Included in the triumph was Eagle Track and Field claiming its third state title in six years... Eagle Baseball staking its 10th state tournament in 11 competitive seasons... Eagle Wrestling securing its second state runner-up in three years... Eagle Swimming seizing the state runner-up after consecutive state championships... Eagle Cross Country Cross racing to its third straight state runner-up finish... Eagle Soccer advancing to the regional final after four consecutive state tournaments... and Eagle Football and Eagle Basketball reaching the TAPPS playoffs.

The culminating exclamation point arrived with the 2021 VYPE Awards presented by Houston Methodist Orthopedics & Sports Medicine. Among the St. Thomas acclaim—state champion Eagle Track and Field, Eagle Swimming, and Eagle Wrestling recognized as private teams of the year with Michael LaHolm named wrestling coach of the year, quarterback Maddox Kopp ’21 the private player of the year, and Pablo Tager ’21 the private soccer player of the year.

The realization is the embodiment of hard work, dedication, and an enduring commitment to superiority.

Entwined in the collective and individual accolades are consistent examples, large and small, of the Basilian values of teaching goodness, discipline, and knowledge.

Within the journey, relentless St. Thomas scholar-athletes continue to capitalize on the invaluable opportunity to continue their careers at the university level. Since 2012, nearly 150 Eagles have discovered their lifetime sporting dreams morphing into reality.

Eagle Athletics is a culture where overall excellence is the expectation, not the exception, rooted in the values-focused ethic instilled since 2008 by Athletic Director Mike Netzel with the full support of the St. Thomas Board of Directors and the school’s administration.

And the best is yet to come.
So many of our students could not have the St. Thomas experience without the faithful giving of others. If St. Thomas opened doors for you, consider how you can now open doors for others. Join the 1900 Society by including St. Thomas in your will or estate plans and help provide affordable tuition, exemplary instruction and spiritual growth for generations of students to come.

If you remember all the goodness, discipline and knowledge that St. Thomas gave you, then please: Remember St. Thomas.

Remembering St. Thomas in your will or estate plans costs nothing during your lifetime, but will transform the lives of STH men down the road.

**Contact**
Mark deTranolt’s ’83, P ’10
advancement@sths.org • 713.341.5557

RemembeR. stav.thes.org

Like us, follow us, keep up with us! @sthcatholic #mySTH
For 121 years, St. Thomas has embraced its goal, its passion, its obligation to provide a supportive academic environment for Eagle scholars to thrive, empowering them to create positive change everywhere life takes them.

Prominent and central to that Basilian mission is furnishing need-based financial assistance and merit-based scholarships to ensure that St. Thomas can continue to recruit, retain, and graduate a talented and diverse learning community.

The 14th Annual Scholarship Breakfast hosted by Vice President for Advancement Mark deTramontes ’83 honored both donors and current recipients, and the tradition of benevolence that remains vital to the school’s cherished Basilian heritage. The St. Thomas Foundation Board oversees a $24 million endowment made possible by the vision of Basilian heritage. The St. Thomas Board oversees a $24 million endowment made possible by the vision of St. Thomas Foundation Board oversees a $24 million endowment made possible by the vision of donors since 1969, with more than half established since 2000. The gifts ensure that financial accessibility and equitable opportunity continue to be a focus.

The sponsored awards include the Basilian Fathers and a number of endowed scholarships that are in honor of specific donors. The awardees are selected on the basis of financial need and academic potential.

President Fr. James Murphy, CJSB and Principal Dr. Aaron Dominguez ’96 both understand the most meaningful and lasting measure of the St. Thomas experience is being proud of their alma mater and the tradition of excellence that remains vital to the school’s cherished Basilian legacy. In many ways, Cameron Bonner ’21 exemplifies the totality of the St. Thomas journey even though he enrolled as a transfer student after his sophomore year.

Nonetheless, he achieved measurable success through diverse academic disciplines and as a dynamic two-sport all-state performer in football and on the track.

On the same day he gave an emphatic testimony at the Scholarship Breakfast, Bonner led Eagle Track and Field to a commanding win in the TAPPS South Regional championships. He set a personal best in placing second in the 400 meters and was a key cog in two convincing gold medal relay wins.

One of the many rewards for his wide array of rich involvement was signing his National Letter of Intent to continue his football career at Baylor University. But when asked to reflect on what he most valued from his years at St. Thomas, Bonner seized on what otherwise might not have been within his reach.

“My brother and I come from a single-parent home,” Bonner says. “Maybe I knew two people when I arrived at St. Thomas. But so many of my teachers were such an influence in such a short period of time. And if not for (head football coach Rich McGuire) I would not be where I am today.

St. Thomas has given me the courage to welcome my manhood as a confident and determined young man — to work hard for the things I love and to work even harder for the things I don’t. I have gained brothers for life. All of that was only possible because of the many donors who believe in St. Thomas education. They have brought endless joy for me and my peers who are here today.”

Greg Kroencke represented the Board at the April gathering in Cemo Auditorium knowing the full measure of the St. Thomas scholar experience. His son Zach ‘20 is studying in the Mayo Business Honors Program at Texas A&M with a double major in Business Administration and Finance and a minor in computer science. His stellar student-athlete career at St. Thomas included crushing the second-largest raffle ticket sales total in Round Up history - $35,060 in 2020.

“These years at St. Thomas are the foundation that will propel you forward,” Mr. Kroencke advised the student group. “And when you are further down that road of excellence, I strongly encourage you to remember to give back to this St. Thomas community and help your future Eagle brothers in many of the same ways you have been supported.”

A significant percentage of the St. Thomas student body participates in financial assistance, honoring the tradition of philanthropy that remains vital to the school’s cherished Basilian legacy. In many ways, Cameron Bonner ’21 exemplifies the totality of the St. Thomas journey even though he enrolled as a transfer student after his sophomore year.

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Caleb Davis ’23 was also center stage providing an inspiring personal story. He entered St. Thomas as a freshman from St. Vincent de Paul Catholic School, thoroughly exposed to the faith’s rich traditions “because my parents believe that it’s essential to build a strong foundation of faith from an early age.”

But the older brother of triplets also held a savvy understanding that his parents were concerned that “they would be unable to afford college preparatory tuition for four sons (during a three-year period). By God’s grace, I was offered an academic scholarship” to attend St. Thomas.”

As Davis navigated the recent adjustments in response to the pandemic, the trials through zoom school and hybrid models to the return to campus instruction, he came to realize that “that while some students like myself were not giving their full effort (online), every teacher found it in themselves to give their full effort every single day (and) the lessons I’m learning (from St. Thomas) will benefit me in college and beyond. I never would have gotten to experience the fun, rigor, and excitement of these past two years had it not been for (the) generous donations which have allowed me and so many of these other hard-working students to attend St. Thomas.”

Therein lies the commitment of St. Thomas to enroll students from different social, economic, and educational backgrounds, and to devote its resources to help make a Basilian education a profound reality.
Patrons, sponsors, and contributors united to make the 30th Annual St. Thomas Golf Tournament a roaring, revitalizing success at Wildcat Golf Club. Cherished alumni, friends, and supporters totaled nearly 250 for the event’s largest participation in nearly a decade. High times, low scores, hot fairways, cold beverages were in the offering. Well, an occasional somewhat low score. Bogey, in fact, served as the day’s best friend before the 19th hole featured a feast from Ragin Cajun.

But the quality of ball striking in the cranked-up Houston heat was a mere afterthought. The Red & White returned to full force and the Monday in May proved a welcome relief from the rancor of the previous year when so many occasions for Basilian brotherhood were shuttered due to the pandemic. "We know how much our alumni look forward to celebrating with their classmates every year, and we shared in the disappointment when so many of our activities were affected by the concerns and uncertainty surrounding the coronavirus," Vice President for Advancement Mark deTranaltex ’83 says. We were blessed to preserve the spirit and fun of our golf gathering. The response was amazing and the passion should carry into the summer and our next academic year."

Recounting the past and embracing the present is an unshakable St. Thomas sentimentality, no matter how long ago the graduation date and no matter the destination life has led. It’s a calling, perhaps. A calling to come back home. And while 2020 was forever stamped by the most unexpectant, unruly, and unsettling of challenges, the enthusiasm and comradery that resurfaced at Wildcat signaled that hope is on the near horizon. Normalcy beckons with an invigorated St. Thomas soul.

An awesome day to be an Eagle!
The River Oaks Country Club again provided the perfect spring setting for a sensational afternoon celebrating the 50th Annual Mothers’ Club Style Show & Luncheon honoring the Class of 2021 while benefiting the current and future Men of St. Thomas.

Great appreciation goes to the invaluable contributions from the host of Eagle mothers who empower the Basilian Fathers to teach goodness, discipline, and knowledge, and to our generous underwriters and sponsors in returning to the original venue for the inaugural event in 1971 ...

**Mothers’ Club President Holly Schlosser with event chairs Meryl Gregory and Gwen McKeen collaborating with Catherine Chandler, our Director of Special Events & Volunteer Coordinator**

**Dillard’s for providing exquisite women’s and men’s fashions**

**Event producer par excellence Lenny Matuszewski teaming with senior stylist Tamara Klooz Bonar**

**Casablanca Productions**

**Visible Changes and The Phoenix Design Group**

**The accomplished St. Thomas Jazz Ensemble**

In grand Style Show custom, there was no splendor to match the sartorial struts of St. Thomas President Fr. James Murphy, CSB and his fellow bastion of bespoke, Principal Dr. Aaron Dominguez ’96.

Dressed for success, one and all.
In February, St. Thomas was awarded a significant grant from the Charity Guild of Catholic Women which will directly upgrade the school’s digital network and coverage on the expanding campus. President Fr. James Murphy, CSB graciously accepted the generous gift during a celebratory awards ceremony and reception. “This recognition from the Charity Guild measures beyond the altruistic efforts of a renowned organization. This tells St. Thomas that the continued excellence of its scholars resonates within the wider Houston community, and the Charity Guild in particular respects our academic and spiritual calling. That’s a huge vote of confidence and reinforces our Basilian ideals.”

St. Thomas has repeatedly benefited from the philanthropy of the Charity Guild, notably in 2015 when a substantial grant funded APEX Learning, an innovative interactive tutorial program that accelerates student success with a digital curriculum and supports in-class, hybrid, and virtual learning. The Charity Guild is a long-standing Houston affiliation committed to serving extensive non-profit efforts that champion child welfare and achievement. Relying almost exclusively on volunteers, it has donated more than $6.6 million since 1996 to more than 160 agencies and schools.

The vast majority of those dollars were generated through the organization’s extensive on-site consignment shop. Recipients fulfill the Charity Guild’s mission of “rendering assistance to children in need in the Greater Houston Area, regardless of race or creed...” providing enhanced academic opportunities, healthcare, restorative and mental health assistance, food, clothing, and art enrichment to the most vulnerable in our community - children.” Due to the coronavirus pandemic, the reseller was forced to close for five months, re-opening in August 2020 with a limited schedule and personal protection protocols in place. Led by president Peggy Idstein, the relentless dedication from the resilient staff during the most challenging of times resulted in the Charity Guild extending more than $200,000 to 27 well-deserving beneficiaries. Along with St. Thomas, the recipients in 2021 included the Cardinal’s Circle, Casa de Esperanza, Duchesne Academy of the Sacred Heart, Second Servings of Houston, St. John Paul Catholic School, and St. Ambrose Catholic School.

St. Thomas is proud to partner with designer KH Studio in accepting elite recognition from the prestigious National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA) for the Eagles’ Nest Spring 2020 publication. The school’s first-ever Excellence award was among only eight honorees and two private institutions in the Magazine category. The NSPRA program annually considers hundreds of entries nationally and St. Thomas has now earned four preeminent honors in the previous four years, the only such accolades in school history.

The Eagles’ Nest Fall 2019 earned Merit consideration in Magazine, as did the compelling cover story from Eagles’ Nest Winter 2019 for Excellence in Writing featuring Arturo Chavez ’85 – Grand Designs Inspired by Goodness, Discipline, and Knowledge. The Eagles’ Nest Winter 2017 received Honorable Mention distinction. Rescue Recover Rebuild - Eagle Strong In The Year Of Hurricane Harvey recounted the compelling personal trials and accounts from the St. Thomas community during the shattering developments and aftermath of the most severe rainfall event in recorded United States history. This latest commendation from NSPRA continues a seven-year media surge where St. Thomas has witnessed significant advances in its digital content and publications. Showcasing the authentic Eagle scholar and alumni experience through personal profiles and culture-focused topics has established real-time rapport with an ever-expanding audience. The exponential growth for the school’s social platforms includes extraordinary results in reach, impressions, and engagement measured on multiple channels.
Legacy graduate and 2015 Principal’s Service and Leadership Award co-recipient Jeremy Gregory ’15 married Georgiana Andrews in a January celebration at St. Cecilia Catholic Church and Lakeside Country Club. Gregory earned his Bachelor of Science in Mechanical Engineering at the University of Arkansas and has accepted an inside sales position with HTS Houston.

2015 valedictorian William Krizait is an associate with Ernst & Young in Houston after earning his Bachelor of Science in Chemical Engineering from Mississippi State University. Carson Storie ’15 is an analyst for Main Street Capital Corporation after earning his Bachelor of Arts in Finance from the Mays School of Business at TAMU University. Storie also received his Certificate of Studies, Petroleum Engineering.

Christopher Winter ’15 is an analyst for energy restructuring and turnaround division with Conrey Mackenzie, Inc. after serving as an associate with CAZ Investments. Winter completed his scholar-athlete baseball career at Rhodes College, earning his Bachelor of Arts in International Business and studying with the London School of Economics and Political Science in 2017.

Matthew Ashbaugh ’16 is a financial institution specialist at the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) in Dallas. Ashbaugh completed his scholar-athlete baseball career at Washington University in St. Louis in 2020, earning his Bachelor of Science in Business Administration Finance and Marketing from the Olin Business School. He was a three-time Academic All-Division University Athletic Association pitcher and also studied with the London School of Economics and Political Science in 2018.

Henry Fisher ’16 is the art director at Trillionaire Digital Media, Inc while studying in the master’s program for Fashion Design at the Parsons School of Design in New York City. Fisher completed his scholar-athlete golf career at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, earning his Bachelor of Arts in Marketing. He competed in 30 tournaments during his four years and won the individual championship at the 2020 Gulf Coast Collegiate.

Pete Higgins ’16 is a sales development associate with Alteryx, an intelligent data extraction application for the financial services industry. Higgins is based in New York City after earning his Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy from Middlebury College where he was named co-captain and second team All-NESCAC in 2016 as a linebacker, leading the team in tackles and tackles for loss.

Legacy graduate David Jones ’16 completed his scholar-athlete career with a bachelor’s degree from the Charles H. Dyson School of Applied Economics and Management at Cornell University. The recipient of the 2016 Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., Award for Excellence in Academics was a two-time second-team all Ivy League selection as a defensive back and tied for the conference lead in interceptions in 2017. 2016 salutatorian Jason Lawrence is a graduate scholar at Princeton University where he is a Ph.D. candidate in chemistry and a President’s Graduate Fellowship recipient. Lawrence earned his Bachelor of Science Intensive with Honors in Chemistry from Yale University.

Lorenzo Neal ’16 signed as a rookie free agent with the Denver Broncos after completing his scholar-athlete career at Purdue University, earning his Bachelor of Science in Building Construction Management Technology. Neal was a co-captain and was twice selected as honorable mention All-Big 12 as a defensive lineman despite suffering a torn ACL injury in 2018. He continues his family’s NFL legacy established by his namesake and fullback father who played six seasons with four Pro Bowl appearances.

Lorenzo Neal Sr. was recognized on the NFL 2000s All-Decade team after serving as a sledghammer lead blocker for 11 straight 1,000-yard rushers.

Zach Blice ’18 started 11 games for Jacksonville University soccer and played a pivotal role in the Dolphins capturing the Atlantic Sun championship for a bid to the NCAA tournament. Superior St. Thomas scholars were recognized for the Presidential Volunteer Service Award, benefiting communities above and beyond school requirements and all in partnership with the Points of Light program. From the Class of 2021 - Dan Francis, Kyle Biggs, Patrick Pham, and Zachary Voltz; from the Class of 2022 - Joseph Anton, Matthew Campbell, Mark Cheek, Carson Ondo, and Jordan Allen.

Legacy graduate Stephen Smith ’21 will continue his student-athlete career with Southwestern University basketball. Eagle Baseball is proud that Bradley Batterson ’21 is extending his student-athlete career at Coastal Bend College; Adam Rescaves ’21 at Rice University; and Drew Tolson ’21 at Beloit College.
PILLAR OF BASILIAN IDEALS & STEWARDSHIP

Thomas Matthew Braniff ’63 (1945-2021)

THE ST. THOMAS COMMUNITY CELEBRATES THE PRESTIGIOUS LIFE OF TOM BRANIFF ’63, A PILLAR OF CATHOLIC IDEALS AND STEWARDSHIP WHO IMPACTED A LEGION OF EAGLE SCHOLARS FOR DECADES THROUGH HIS GENEROSITY AND GUIDANCE.

Throughout his acclaimed professional ascent through the elite tiers of insurance brokering and legal services, Braniff embraced mentoring as a core component of his devoted commitment to goodness, discipline, and knowledge. The most vivid example of his living the Basilian standard was a collaboration with 2021 St. Thomas Hall of Honor inductee, the Most Rev. George Sheltz, Pat Tamborello, and fellow classmates to establish and fund the Class of ’63 scholarship. The philanthropy was inspired to assist St. Thomas recruit, retain, and graduate a talented and diverse learning community.

Among the innumerable recipients who were provided access to the depth and width of the St. Thomas experience who otherwise would not have afforded the opportunity were Brandon Carraway ’96 and Wendell Champion ’15. Both advanced to significant baseball careers at the University of Houston and Braniff was often seated at Cougar home games to share in their extended relationship.

Braniff was a familiar and dynamic presence at the annual St. Thomas Scholarship Breakfast and was particularly proud in 2016 when Carraway was honored as the youngest member inducted into the St. Thomas Sports Hall of Fame. Carraway primarily attended public schools growing up and was zoned to enroll at HISD Waltrip High School before a recruiting visit to St. Thomas during his eighth grade academic year produced an option that proved to carry life-altering consequences.

“I just had a sense, a feeling this would be the right place for me moving forward,” Carraway said of his induction. “I was my decision to come here but that didn’t mean it was going to be easy. I talked with my father and he was completely honest with me on what it would take for me to meet the academic and financial demands.”

Carraway committed to a summer work program on campus while also tapping into a broad tuition assistance program and benefitting directly from the annual Scholarship of ’63.

“I wouldn’t be here tonight and have had the St. Thomas experience without that support,” Carraway said with gratitude and respect. “I can’t say enough about Tom Braniff. He remains a strong influence today. I thank him every day for all that he’s done.”

Braniff marveled that “Brandon’s athletic ability was always obvious. But his character is what separated him then and what defines him most today. We were introduced before he enrolled as a freshman. He was emphatic that he wanted to be at St. Thomas and later that he wanted to become Catholic. Our scholarship group has never been involved with a better individual.”

The Braniff legacy at St. Thomas was embedded by his father James Braniff Jr. ’28 and includes brothers James III ’57, John ’59, and Danny ’67, who passed away in 2009; Grandson Finnian Charnquist ’23 is extending the heritage into the second century.

Tom Braniff earned his undergraduate and law degrees from St. Mary’s University in San Antonio. He then joined James III and John as a major stockholder in Braniff & Braniff, Inc., one of the largest privately-owned independent insurance agencies in the Southwest.

In 1989, Mr. Braniff formed Texas Insurance Consulting, a professional firm that provided technical and operational advice, as well as licensing and regulatory consulting services to insurance companies, insurance agents, and other individuals and entities within the industry. The firm specialized in mergers and acquisitions between insurance entities, and other financial services institutions.

In the mid-1990s, Braniff teamed with his wife Wendy, son Rhett, and son-in-law Steven Charnquist to form Braniff Attorneys | Counselors, a law firm offering legal services including insurance, real estate, and administrative law and consulting services.

During his emphatic career, Braniff earned the Chartered Property Casualty Underwriter professional designation, the industry’s most esteemed credential in property/casualty insurance. He was a member of the Independent Insurance Agents of Texas (IIAT), performing an instrumental role in the creation of its legislative committee and involved in its political action committee IMPACT. For this and numerous other contributions to the state association, Braniff received the organization’s coveted Paige II and Political Action Award for political involvement benefitting independent insurance agents.

Braniff was also actively involved in the leadership of the local Independent Insurance Agents of Houston (IIAH). He served on the board of directors, numerous committees, and was elected to a term as its president. In a concerted effort with IIAH members and other Houston insurance professionals, Braniff created an undergraduate degree program at the University of Houston-Downtown to develop industry talent with the ultimate goal of advising young professionals into leadership roles within the Houston property/casualty insurance industry. Wendy served as director of the program and the two partnered with an advisory council of Houston’s insurance leadership to develop a property/casualty curriculum uniquely designed to simultaneously provide graduates with academic as well as professional insurance credentials.

Braniff was an esteemed member of the American Association of Insurance Management Consultants (AAIMCo), an exclusive cadre of insurance experts who provided consulting and expert witness services to the insurance industry throughout the United States. The association led to his service as the association’s president for seven terms and recognition within the organization as “Mr. AAIMCo.”

Thomas Matthew Braniff passed away peacefully on February 12 at the age of 75.
ANDREAS GIANNITSOPULOS ‘18

The esteemed St. Thomas scholar-athlete perished during the tragic collapse of the Champlain Towers South, a 12-story oceanfront condominium tower just north of Miami Beach.

Giannitsopoulos was an undergraduate student at Vanderbilt University studying business strategy and international markets.

He is among the permanent members of the St. Thomas Club - preeminent scholars with a minimum 4.0-grade point average for seven consecutive semesters. Giannitsopoulos also excelled as a prominent performer for Eagle Track and Field.

As a sophomore, his second-place result in the shot put and fourth place in the discus were valuable contributions for the breakthrough 2016 TAPPS 6A state champions.

He then finished fifth in the discus and seventh in the shot at the 2017 state meet.
in memoriam

J. Frederick Welling ’42, February 23, 2021
Brother of Albert L. Welling ’41; Father of Judston F. Welling ’80, Shawn S. Welling ’83, and Derek D. Welling ’90.
Ten-year member of the St. Thomas Board of Directors and vastly successful insurance executive who acquired a multitude of properties along Memorial Drive from Allen Parkway to Memorial Park. Welling’s signature nature resort was the legendary Rainbow Lodge on the edge of Buffalo Bayou, now known as Tilman Fertitta’s Brenner’s on the Bayou.

James Zenner ’44, June 3, 2020
Brother-in-law of Lewis C. Cernosek ’53.

Dr. Donald M. Carlton ’46, March 29, 2021
Ten-year member of the St. Thomas Board of Directors and vastly successful insurance executive who acquired a multitude of properties along Memorial Drive from Allen Parkway to Memorial Park. Welling’s signature nature resort was the legendary Rainbow Lodge on the edge of Buffalo Bayou, now known as Tilman Fertitta’s Brenner’s on the Bayou.

Anthony S. Rumfola ’45, January 15, 2021

Ronald V. Glauser ’84, William W. Glauser ’90; Uncle of John R. Glauser ’66, Jack W. Glauser ’40, Ronnie V. Glauser ’54; Brother of Theodore J. Osterhaus ’44 and Harold J. Osterhaus ’52, Grandfather of Duane G. Osterhaus ’98 and John E. Osterhaus ’00.

Vincent D’Amico ’48, January 31, 2021
Cousin of James J. D’Amico ’00 and John J. Falco ’00
Robert Frost Scholar and lifelong proponent of education who graduated from the University of St. Thomas in 1948. D’Amico donated more than $1 million to the school, funding endowed scholarships in various programs, including music, education, communications, environmental studies, creative writing, and nursing.

Edward L. Rose Jr. ’48, March 19, 2021
Brother of George H. Rose ’56, Father of Kevin L. Rose and Kyle E. Rose ’86, Uncle of Brian G. Rose ’86.

Leland A. Dolan ’50, February 27, 2021
Brother of George D. Dolan ’55.

Joseph L. Kelly ’50, April 26, 2021

John A. Saur ’51, May 4, 2021

Anthony D. Liveris ’53, February 5, 2021
Brother of Nicholas Liveris ’50.

Paul Nugent ’55, March 6, 2021

Vincent S. Rinando ’55, April 5, 2021

A.J Garney ’56, January 1, 2021

Eric V. Moody ’56, November 19, 2021
Brother of Ken R. Moody ’66.

Fred S. Consta ’58, February 19, 2021
Brother of Frank J. Consta ’55.

Frank J. Fruiya ’58, January 27, 2021
Son of Johnnie Fruiya ’37, Brother of Joseph Fruiya ’62, Uncle of Michael P. Fruiya ’92, Cousin of Vincent T. Mattaola ’58.

Benny G. Prause ’59, April 5, 2021
Brother of Calvin D. Prause ’72.

Ned J. Locario Jr. ’59, March 22, 2021
Father of Draco Locario ’90.

Nicholas J. Snow ’61, January 23, 2021

Charles L. Fitzgerald III ’63, April 21, 2021

David H. Willgus ’63, April 19, 2021

Ronald Jack Laurenzo ’68, March 20, 2021
Brother of Roland D. Laurenzo ’65, Henry T. Laurenzo ’75, and Gino Laurenzo ’81; Uncle of Domenic T. Laurenzo ’89, Aldo D. Laurenzo ’82, and Carlo T. Laurenzo ’82; Close relative and friend to loved ones of the Laurenzo, Rodriguez, Mandola, Santos, and Castaneda families. Inducted in 2019 into the St. Thomas Sports Hall of Fame as a nine-time varsity letterman and multiple state champion while a permanent member of the St. Thomas Club - scholars who maintained a minimum 4.0 grade point average for seven consecutive semesters. Laurenzo collaborated with his mother, Ninfa Laurenzo, Roland, and sister Phyllis Mandola in establishing the iconic Ninfa’s restaurants brand.

Gregory B. Contraseras ’69, February 2, 2021
Brother of Ciprian Contraseras ’67 and Fred Contraseras ’68.

Richard A. Holt ’69, February 2, 2021

Ernest H. Herman Jr. ’70, March 20, 2021

Joseph C. Partin ’76, January 17, 2021
Son of Charles B. Partin ’38; Brother of Charles D. Partin ’72; Uncle of Joseph M. Partin ’19 and Benjamin L. Lauckner ’22; Nephew of Edward F. Zagst ’37 and Frank C. Partin ’46; Cousin of John E. Zagst ’66 and Michael S. Zagst ’68.

Edwin J. Sustala ’77, February 15, 2021
Brother of Albert C. Sustala ’67 and Raymond A. Sustala ’71.

Richard Epherson ’78, March 18, 2021

Benjamin L. Hall ’78, January 23, 2021
Son of St. Thomas Sports Hall of Fame member Greg L. Hall ’69, Brother of David P. Hall ’00, Nephew of Steven L. Hall ’66, Cousin of Andrew T. Green ’96.

Rebecca A. Frazier, November 27, 2020

Charles J. Gurrola, April 21, 2021
Father of Grant M. Gurrola ’08 and Kyle J. Gurrola ’10.

Lisa K. Osborn, April 17, 2021
Mother of Kevin J. Osborn ’00 and Justin G. Osborn ’06.

Hugo Sindelar, January 15, 2021
Grandfather of R.J. Sindelar ’04.

Virginia S. Wood March 1, 2021
Mother of Troy Wood ’82. 
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