

**Joseph B. Swinbank '74 Honored by AFS:
Distinguished Alumnus**

While he was consulting with Alexa Grover (Senior, Agricultural Economics) this past Friday, February 23, during the Donald “Don” G. Kaspar '49 Agribusiness Entrepreneurship Mentoring Forum, Joe Swinbank '74 received a surprise interruption. The Association of Former Students and Texas A&M University jointly presented Swinbank '74 the Distinguished Alumnus Award, the highest honor any Texas A&M University alumnus can receive.

The Distinguished Alumnus Award “recognizes Aggies who have achieved excellence in their chosen professions and made meaningful contributions to Texas A&M University and their local communities.” (AFS website). Since 1962, only 273 alumni have received this prestigious award.

Swinbank’s professional achievements and contributions to his community and to TAMU are noteworthy indeed. They are marked by a series of successes and partnerships with young entrepreneurs. His entrepreneurial pursuits date back to elementary school, continuing through high school, and blossoming during his college years. While pursuing his undergraduate degree in Agricultural Economics, he was already serving as President of the Petroleum Express Company, involved in wholesale and retail petroleum product sales. After graduating from A&M in 1974, Swinbank co-founded Sprint Sand & Gravel to supply ready-mix concrete producers in the Houston area, where he quickly guided the corporation to annual gross revenues of \$5 million and created jobs for more than 100 people. Later, he formed the Sprint Waste Disposal Company. Within six years, the three departments of the company grossed a combined revenue of \$20 million, after beginning with only \$300,000. After selling his company in 1986 to Tricil Environmental Response, Inc., he next co-founded Sprint Industrial Services, which was a combination of several transportation and industrial companies. This venture was followed by investments into roughly eight startups or struggling companies that, through efforts of Swinbank and his partners, have been able to survive and expand within their individual markets.

Today, Swinbank has an investment portfolio consisting of businesses in the Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast area in fields such as transportation, landfills, garbage collection, sand mining, tank leasing, pipeline maintenance, and commercial real estate. These businesses gross in excess of \$150 million annually and employ more than 750 workers. His business acumen is truly extraordinary and entrepreneurial, as his career is marked with a series of more than 25 business ventures, each targeting an unserved/underserved market niche. Fellow agricultural economics alumnus and friend Ed Rister '74 acknowledged in his nomination of Swinbank, “What was amazing to observe about Joe during this time was (and still is) his ability to coalesce and apply the principles of our economic and business education to pragmatic real-world problems. All the while, he was assembling and mentoring a team of experienced and young aspiring entrepreneurs. Simultaneously, he was embracing the extensive paperwork bureaucracy of local-, regional-, and state-regulated environmental agencies, developing a network of life-long contacts in the process.”

Swinbank's community involvement demonstrates an equal commitment to excellence. Examples of his generosity include his support of St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, the Parkinson's Foundation, the Stafford Municipal School District, Oasis International Ministries, March of Dimes, Hearts of Hope, the Marine Corps Scholarship Foundation, and the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation. His leadership in local community organizations includes the Memorial Drive Presbyterian Church, where he is an active participant in Sunday School and Men's Life. During his children's younger years, he was involved in Little League as a volunteer coach. He has served on several bank boards, including being a Founding Director of Vista Bank (from 2006 until its merger with the Community Bank of Texas in August 2013), and he currently serves as a Director. Quoting Johnny Walker '76, "[Swinbank's] civic duty is bar none - he opens his home to numerous politicians and supports them with generous contributions particularly the Aggie ones." In December 2014, he concluded a three-year term on the Ft. Bend County Work Force Commission. He served with the Stafford Independent School District, privately funding and speaking several times each year about technical education at various schools for a program focusing on young students in 8th grade through high school. Following his sincere interest in students at risk, he pledged \$250,000 to Texas State Technical College to challenge others for local commitments to campus and technical education intended to fill gaps in today's technical jobs workforce. To sum up his community service, Joe approaches life humbly without the need to be a "focal" point in touting his name or the committee on which he serves. He makes a real difference, mentoring, teaching, educating, and sharing his life and resources every day of his life.

Swinbank's record of his service and support to Texas A&M University is substantial and broad, involving the Association of Former Students, the 12th Man Foundation, and the Texas A&M Foundation, and includes providing critical leadership in development activities for the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (COALS) and the Department of Agricultural Economics. He and his wife Shirley are key pacesetters across a myriad of university, college, and department initiatives. Examples of his University support activities include:

- Century Club Member of the Association of Former Students, and Diamond Century Club member for five years;
- Member of the Texas A&M Foundation Legacy Society since 2004;
- Donor to the Kyle Field Redevelopment Project with a commitment of more than \$1.2 million to the Texas A&M 12th Man Foundation; and
- Recognition in the September 19, 2015 *Texas A&M Football Game Day Program* as #50 of the Top 1,000 supporters of the 12th Man Foundation.

Swinbank's activities in COALS are evident in his quiet, behind-the-scenes leadership, his generosity in providing beacon gifts, and his ability to entice others to join in funding initiatives. He has served the Vice Chancellor and Dean as a leader in The Texas A&M Gardens & Greenway project since its inception. He has provided leadership for the Gardens Task Force, helping to design an outdoor place of exceptional beauty, where visitors will be able to relax and learn simultaneously. His leadership is evident not only in the design, but in the development and fundraising aspects of the project. Joe and Shirley hosted a successful event in their home, inviting prospective donors in the room to hear about the project. They spearheaded support to bring to fruition this planned project for the West Campus along White Creek.

Swinbank has also served as a decade-long member of COALS Development Council (COADC). This leadership of college alumni and friends serves at the pleasure of the Vice Chancellor and Dean to advise and promote additional philanthropy. With Joe's leadership, COADC has created more than \$3.7 million of endowed scholarships for deserving students in COALS. Personally, Joe's cumulative support to the Texas A&M Foundation in support of academics and COALS exceeds \$650,000.

Swinbank has been the leader and catalyst throughout the formative stages of the Department of Agricultural Economics' Rural Entrepreneurship Program. "Students and I have benefitted greatly from his mentoring, leadership and contributions," explained Rister '74. His personal financial support has been substantial:

- In 2004, he endowed the Agricultural Economics Rural Entrepreneurship Seminar Series;
- In 2006, he established the Shirley and Joe Swinbank Rural Entrepreneurship Graduate Teaching Assistantship fund;
- In 2007, he gave a gift to the Agricultural Headquarters Building Fund to name the Swinbank Rural Entrepreneurship classroom in the new Agriculture and Life Sciences complex; and
- In 2014, he led the charge to establish to establish The M. Edward Rister '74 Chair in Rural Entrepreneurship.
- In 2017, he coordinated the establishment and contributed substantially to the funding of a new position -- the Assistant Director of the Agribusiness Entrepreneurship program.

Swinbank attributes much of his success as a private venture capitalist to the business background he gained as an agricultural economics major at Texas A&M. He has made, and is making, a difference in the lives of former students, current students, and future students. In addition to his generous financial contributions in support of rural entrepreneurship, he shares his time with our young, "wannabe" entrepreneurs throughout each academic year, routinely participating as a "Prof-for-a-Day" in our agribusiness entrepreneurship classes. When endowing the Graduate Teaching Assistantship for our rural entrepreneurship undergraduate program, Joe and Shirley noted that they hope "Aggies receive inspiration to dream, create, research and implement their own ideas and hopefully start their own businesses." Joe routinely volunteers his time to mentor current and former students in their entrepreneurial quests, sharing his experiences and business contacts to encourage their wise and prudent assessment of career opportunities. Following the scheduled February expert-mentoring sessions, a symposium is held each May with our students presenting their individual business plans to an expert panel, consisting of more than 100 real-world entrepreneurs, lenders, venture capitalists, lawyers, faculty, and other former students. Rister, professor and associate department head, acknowledges, "Joe is the catalyst who has drawn others to support this program with their time and financial support through scholarship awards. His personal involvement and financial support in our Agribusiness Entrepreneurship Program have enabled us to develop a quality sequence of capstone courses and related activities."

Other awards of distinction Joe Swinbank '74 has received at Texas A&M University include the following:

- Texas A&M University's College of Agriculture and Life Science Outstanding Alumni, 2010; and
- Induction, Tyrus R. Timm Honor Registry, Department of Agricultural Economics, 2005.

Joe and Shirley Swinbank live in Houston and have three children: Shelly, Will '02, and Reagan '03. Will and Reagan are actively involved in the management of Joe's Sprint Industries network of companies. Shelly graduated from Baylor University in 1998 and also is involved in the family businesses.

Pictured below are (front row) Reveille IX; (middle row) Jacob Mallison ('18 AGEC major), Shirley and Joe '74 Swinbank, Porter Garner III '79, Karsten Lowe ('20, Industrial Distribution major) and Steve Cooper '78 (AGEC graduate and Distinguished Alumnus recipient in 2015); and (back row) Shelby Cooper '13, Ed Rister '74, and Mark Hussey '79. The photo is on the front steps of the historic Kyle House in downtown Bryan, site of the 2018 Donald "Don" G. Kaspar '49 Agribusiness Entrepreneurship Mentoring Forum.



