



An Iconic Endowment

A gift toward the Department of Agricultural Education and Communications will carry on the name of an iconic departmental figure through the form of a \$100,000 scholarship endowment.

In a room towering above Jones AT&T stadium, excitement filled the air around the unique array of the gathering's attendants. A pair of alumni made conversation with an agricultural education professor, while a photographer gazed out of the floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking the field. The dean of the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources entered the room followed by the guest of honor's husband. She would arrive at any minute, and Mary Lou Flom had no idea what the afternoon had in store for her.

Flom began working at Texas Tech in 1972. She spent four years in the registrar's office, one year in the business office, and settled into her position as the administrative business assistant in the Department of Agricultural Education and Communications in 1978. In her 41 years of service, she was awarded the Top Techsan Award in 1993, the CASNR Staff Award in 2006, and numerous other recognitions.

The idea to honor Flom came about at the Spur Society Gala, an event held to recognize donors who give \$1 million or more to the Texas Tech University System. Associate Professor Scott Burris, Ph.D., attended the event with his wife and happened to strike up a conversation with June Bell. The two

quickly found a common link in the Department of Agricultural Education and Communications. Bell had earned a bachelor's degree in agricultural education and a master's degree in agriculture at Texas Tech University.

"Whenever I meet people and we connect to the department at Texas Tech," Burris said, "usually by the third or fourth question someone asks, 'Is Mary Lou still there?'"

Sure enough, the conversation strayed to this common thread between the two, Flom. Bell then made a suggestion to celebrate all Flom had done for students during her 35-year time period in the department. Burris encouraged the idea, and just a few short weeks later the initial steps in the plan were put into action. Thanks to a fund donated by an anonymous party, the endowment idea became a reality.

"When I came up with the idea, I just thought there was one person that really needed to be honored and always remembered," Bell said later. "I know a lot of us have memories and we will, but I just thought this was an opportunity to honor Mary Lou and for her to always be a part of this department for many, many years to come."

Bell said some of her best memories from her time at Texas Tech have Flom in them. She recalled how the department felt like a big family with Flom as a matriarchal figure. About 20 years later, Bell's niece, Jenna Hightower, found the same kind of home in the department. This shared sentiment between the two furthered the spark of the scholarship idea.

Months later when the endowment was finalized, an esteemed group waited patiently the room above Jones AT&T Stadium. The guest of honor, who was under the impression she would be attending a simple lunch with her colleague, suddenly entered the room. Flom's eyes widened as she confusedly took in the site of the room full of people. Bell quickly stepped forward to embrace her friend, then delivered the

surprise. The department had a new scholarship - a \$100,000 gift in the name of Mary Lou Flom.

"I was totally surprised," Flom said. "Supposedly everybody knew about it, and I truly never had a clue."

The \$100,000 endowment will go a long way toward scholarship availability for students for many years to come. Burris, who actively recruits for the department, said roughly half of the students in the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources are on some type of scholarship, a feat he said would not be possible without the generous financial gifts given to the college.

The Mary Lou Flom Endowment provides an opportunity for alumni to contribute to the scholarship program in the department, especially if, like Bell and so many others, Flom has been a part of a donor's educational experience.

"If you had a similar experience with Mary Lou," Burris said, "you ought to send them a check for whatever fits your budget to add to that endowment. Even if it's just \$25."

Two days following the luncheon, Flom sat back at her desk in her office, gratitude still radiating from her. She said on top of the honor she feels to have the endowment in her name, she is proud to see her name carried on in a way that will help students. After all, her

goal has always been to have a positive impact on the students whose paths she crosses.

"So many students have gone here," Flom said, "and I just hope that I've touched every one of them in one way or another." 🍷

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If you would like to make a donation to the Mary Lou Flom Endowment, checks may be made payable to the TTU Foundation and mailed to the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources, PO Box 42123, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, TX, 79409.

