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Aggies to gather for Muster, first woman SBP to speak

By: **Cherie Lim and Chelsea Lankes**

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It is a Texas A&M tradition that Shel Winkley values more than any others, one that is observed only once a year and brings people together all around the world. Come Saturday, Winkley will be standing in the flickering shadows of Reed Arena along with thousands of other Aggies to observe the tradition of Aggie Muster - a solemn occasion honoring and remembering Aggies of all walks of life who have passed away throughout the year.

"It's one of the reasons that I fell in love with A&M so much - you get to connect with Aggies from the 1950s and the past," said Winkley, a senior meteorology major and service bonfire sub-chair for the Traditions Council. "It's a feeling that you know that when you die your name will be called out at Aggie Muster."

Aggie Muster is a unique tradition because it is one of the few that Aggies still continue to actively participate in even after their time at A&M, said Liesl Quick, Aggie Muster Committee Chair.

"It is difficult to pinpoint exactly what Muster means to Aggies because the significance of Muster is unique to each individual Aggie," the senior finance major said. "Muster embodies the values and ideals that Aggies cherish most, and Muster is one of the purest examples of the Aggie Spirit that you will find."

Quick said the roots of the Muster tradition date all the way back to April 21, 1836 when Texas won its independence from Mexico at San Jacinto. Beginning in 1883, a "Roll Call for the Absent" was started.

"Perhaps the most famous April 21 gathering was the one held in 1942 on the island Corregidor, which was under intense shelling by the Japanese army," Quick said. "Twenty-five Aggies were reported to have been a part of that meeting, and only 12 of these Aggies returned home."

During World War II, Aggies held a Muster on Corregidor Island by speaking for the fallen Aggies, said Laura Krauss, public relations sub-chair for the Traditions Council. That's when Muster gained publicity and evolved into what it is today.

"I think Muster is so important because it connects all the Aggies that are here today and those that came before that," said Krauss, a junior marketing major. "It's special to know that one day my name will be called and someone will be answering for me. It really shows our connection and our spirit."

Brad Smith, Aggie Muster roll call coordinator and geotechnical engineering graduate student, said current students, immediate family of currently enrolled students, members of the Brazos County A&M Club and their family members, members of the 50 year reunion club, former students killed in military action and faculty or staff of long tenure are honored at the College Station Muster, but there are more than 400 local Aggie Musters worldwide.

Brooke Rollins, Class of 1994, is history in the making once again. Not only was she the first woman elected to be student body president, she will also be the first woman to speak at Muster.

Rollins, president of the Texas Public Policy Foundation, will honor the Aggies who have died in the past year speaking at the largest of Muster ceremonies held around the world.

"I think whether being a woman or man, the opportunity to return to campus and be a part of, in my opinion, A&M's highest and most important tradition, is an honor for anyone," Rollins said.

This year's speaker selection committee was the first to choose a woman to speak at the Muster ceremony.

"It's something that our committee felt like was long overdue," said Thomas Conner, junior speaker selection sub-chair on the Muster committee. "It was something we knew, but it didn't play a factor in the decision because she was the best candidate, man or woman, for the position."

Conner said he supports the speaker selection committee's decision in selecting Rollins.

"The biggest thing that we looked for was, we wanted someone who was a really good speaker that could portray the tradition of Muster and Aggie Spirit to the audience," Conner said. "The committee decided that Brooke was the best person that met the criteria."

According to a Texas A&M News Archives article, Rollins previously served as deputy general council, ethics adviser and policy director for Gov. Rick Perry. She grew up in Glen Rose, Texas, and graduated cum laude with a bachelor's of science degree in agriculture development from A&M.

Rollins was acknowledged as the top graduate based on academics, leadership and service. After graduation, she served as Student Senate speaker pro tem, Judicial Board chair, Fish Camp counselor and Cotton Bowl Queen. Today, Rollins keeps herself busy as she juggles family life, along with her membership in the Texas Lyceum, the Texas Women's Alliance and the Texas A&M Former Student Association. She is on the board of advisers for Hispanic CREO.

Kim Davis, junior member of the Muster Committee, said Rollins is a strong and talented speaker.

"Everyone has been so floored by her ability to wow a crowd," the industrial engineering major said.

When Rollins addresses the Muster audience, she plans to emphasize A&M's place in the world. She said she wants to remind the Aggie family what great heritage A&M has, and how important it is to honor the Aggies that made such tremendous sacrifices for future generations.

"I feel like this is an opportunity to remind Aggies what our responsibilities in the world are," Rollins said. "A&M graduates have defended their freedom, their country and many have given their lives for that battle. I don't think our generation today realizes the extraordinary sacrifice many Aggies have made. I want to focus on A&M's place in the world, which is a defender of freedom and what is right. I think even in the darkest of times, A&M has been a beacon of light for the rest of the world."

Schedule of Events

FRIDAY:

10 a.m. - 4 p.m. Reflections Display in the Flag Room

SATURDAY:

9 a.m. - 3 p.m. Reflections Display in the Flag Room

1 - 3 p.m. Camaraderie Barbecue in Sbisa dining hall

5 p.m. Reed Arena doors open to the public

7 p.m. Muster Ceremony in Reed Arena

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