

Flag shows old Ag's spirit

By Gaye Denley

Battalion Reporter

Aggies who visit downtown Midland are greeted by a 7-by-9-foot maroon and white flag which flies atop the 14-story Gulf Building nine months a year, flashing the familiar block ATM.

Beneath the flag are the old offices of Clayton W. Williams Jr., a 1954 animal husbandry graduate of Texas A&M College and owner of the Gulf building, one of the tallest structures in the West Texas oil capital.

An independent oil and gas operator, Williams said he started flying the Aggie flag from his offices several years ago in Fort Stockton, Tex., when his secretaries presented him with an Aggie flag as a gift. They

began flying the flag on a regular basis when Williams was in his office to let friends and associates know he was in town.

For the last six years, the maroon and white flag has flown over Midland almost every day, no longer an indication that Williams is home but a symbol of his pride in and loyalty to his alma mater.

"What finer star to hitch your wagon to than the A&M flag," Williams said.

The Texas A&M flag will not fly from the Williams Company's new offices in outer Midland, since the space is leased, not owned by Williams. Still, it is not difficult to identify his office or his manner as that of an old Aggie.

Williams proudly displayed

one of his company caps, white with a maroon "Williams Company" embroidered around a maroon hand clenched in the "Gig 'Em" sign.

"All over the world, thumbs up is upbeat," Williams said, explaining why, outside of sheer loyalty, he chose the "Gig 'em" sign as his company emblem.

A member of the Corps of Cadets his first three years at Texas A&M, Williams left the Corps as a senior because of a depth perception problem which could have barred him from flying in the Air Force after being commissioned. Instead, Williams joined the Army after his graduation.

He left the service in 1956 and drifted from waiting tables in Mineral Wells, Tex., to selling insurance to, finally, brokering oil leases.

Over the years, Williams has expanded his company from a one-man, one-secretary venture which earned him only \$50 the first six months into a successful independent oil business which employs, either monthly or on contract, over 1,400 people.

Williams Company has operations in Fort Stockton and Jackson, Miss., as well as in Midland, and Williams has drilled for oil all over the country.

"I've flown Aggie flags from Wyoming to Florida on wells I've drilled — most of them dry holes," Williams said.

"It's been tremendous the way that the whole school has been able to go to the future with the five-fold growth it's had and still retain the spirit," Williams said.

"Even more, in my opinion, than the improvement in the quality of education and the variety of training that you can get at A&M, the real core — the real down-deep secret to A&M's growth and what it is, is that it stands for doing the right thing," Williams said.

Over the years, Williams has demonstrated his loyalty to and his appreciation of Texas A&M in many ways other than flying the Aggie flag.

Five of his company planes read "Gig 'em" on one side and carry a picture of "Old Sarge" on the other. At his ranch, beside a senior-boot-shaped pool, lies the old astroturf from the 50-yard line at Kyle Field.

Most impressive, though, are his donations to the University, which have ranged from sponsoring a President's Endowed Scholarship to giving Texas A&M the overriding royalty interest in some oil properties valued at \$3 million. That particular gift, Williams said, should

bring the University over \$10 million.

"It's a source of pride to be able to give," Williams said. "But it's just something I want to do. I feel like that's right."

With the same pride, Williams defends the oil industry and the independent operator.

"Everything I do — or 99 percent — is productive," Williams said. "Every step along the way, I have done good for lots of people."

Oil is not his only business, however. Williams' farming background has settled in his blood he said, and he runs a successful ranch in West Texas.

"I have a dang good economic farm, and my cattle ventures are economic — in other words, I'm not playing with them," Williams said. "I'm a cow man, and I'm a fair one. And I love it."

One of the keys to Williams' success on all fronts is his attitude towards his employees. After finishing a drilling or a pipeline job, Williams likes to throw a party for all the people who worked on the job.

"I work my people hard and I work myself hard" Williams said. "When we get through working, there's a time to play, and I like to do them both very intensely."

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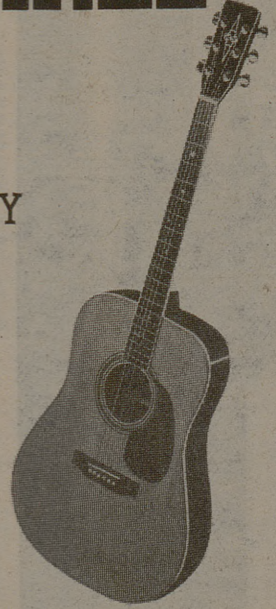
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