

AGGIELIFE

THE BATTALION

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Shake your tail feather

Aggies gather for food, fun and pre-game tailgating camaraderie

By Will Knous
THE BATTALION



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Rick Wilkenfeld (left) of Texas City, Class of 1976, watches as former Yell Leader Ron Plackmeier, class of 1975, serves homemade chili at their tailgate next to Kyle Field before the Kansas game. The Plackmeier and Wilkenfeld families have been tailgating next to Kyle Field for more than 15 years.

From the first day students arrive at Texas A&M, they begin the "other" education, and although the Aggie football team might not be winning every game, students and alumni still gather before and after the game to show their support by tailgating.

"I think tailgating at A&M shows the true spirit of Aggie fan... the are true to the team regardless of record," said Hannah Malcolm, a sophomore chemistry major.

Going to Midnight Yell Practice, mugging down and saying "Howdy" are traditions that all students are familiar with, but tailgating is steadily gaining in popularity.

Born in the frigid parking lots of Green Bay and Buffalo, tailgating has been making its way south toward Kyle Field as more students begin to embrace this burgeoning tradition.

"I cooked out once when I was a freshman, but my friends and I have started doing it a lot more," said Chris Norman, a junior industrial distribution major.

Aggie tailgating can consist of a few buddies getting together before the game to grill some burgers or 500 former members of the Corps of Cadets rehashing old times over hot dogs in Duncan.

Just as Aggies are diverse in their background and interests, they like to pass their time at the game in different ways.

Whether it's an outfit reunion, a parents' weekend barbecue for a sorority or fraternity or just a group of students and their parents grilling outside the stadium, Aggies love to have a great time with friends.

Sororities and fraternities sometimes hold special tailgating events on game days.

"We had barbecue before the game at Reed Arena, then pulled tickets and sat with our dads at the game," said Keely Abshier, a senior special education major and a member of Pi Beta Phi sorority. "We had a good turnout and the dads enjoyed it."

Some students graduate from A&M and go on to work or study at other universities and get to experience college life from another perspective.

Lauren Falcon graduated in 2003 and moved to Waco to work at Baylor University. She says she enjoys her job, but still misses A&M and the tailgates.

"While Baylor's tailgates are fun and a way for students to gather together before a game, A&M's tailgates are more about family—where everyone who's an Aggie or just a fan of Aggies can come together, bond over a meal and rally before the game," Falcon said.

Jordan Watson, a transfer student from Stephen F. Austin State University, says he tailgates because he knows so many more people here at A&M.

"I used to go to Lumberjack Alley, sort of a free buffet from local businesses, when I was at SFA. It wasn't really even a tailgate," Watson said. "I went to a camp reunion tailgate at the Baylor game when I got to A&M. I just hung out with friends I hadn't seen in a long time and we had some free burgers."

Even after they graduate, Aggies still come back to Kyle Field and spend time with friends and family, or maybe try and persuade their kids to follow in their footsteps.

One of the most popular tailgates on campus every week is put on by the Association of Former Students. Kelly Hutka, director of campus programs for the Association said more people are coming back and tailgating.

"We have a formal tailgate party—they're open to everyone," Hutka said. "It's just mainly a time for Aggies of all ages to get together and visit before game time."

Hutka said that when she graduated in 1997, tailgating was not a common activity.

"Tailgating was not a big thing when I was here. If I recall correctly, you couldn't have open (alcohol) containers on campus," Hutka said. "Tailgating just wasn't a big thing for students and I still don't think it is."

Hutka said she thinks tailgating at A&M is something that will flourish in the coming years.

For now, The Association tailgate welcomes former, future and current A&M students.

"We have a specific area for kids. Former students bring their children back, and that's been a very popular event," Hutka said.

Even Old Ags travel back to College Station to tailgate; the Class of 1968 was in over the weekend. The Association has been doing reunions and tailgates for years Hutka said, and the attendance varies by game. At the Oklahoma State game they had more than 500 people.

"Class reunions typically have a tailgating element, so whether they tailgate (at the Association) or over at Duncan, they want to formally get together before the game," Hutka said.

Another of the mainstays in A&M tailgating is the J Lot Aggies.

Formed in 1992 by former Yell Leader Brant Ince and David and Kay Cain, about 60 to 100 of the J Lot Aggies meet for every home game on the northside of Olsen Field to eat, drink and cheer on the Aggie football team.

"If you want to sum up the purpose and mission statement in three words you could say 'last ones standing,'" said Mike Ogorchock, Class of 2000 and one of the J Lot faithful.

The J Lot Aggies show their spirit by having different games and activities.

"We have themes every week—Hawaiian shirt week, Fajita Week, Oktoberfest, and last weekend was the chili cook-off," said Ogorchock. "This is just a bunch of friends that graduated together—a lot of the yell leader, Bonfire types of connections."

Aggies choose to show their spirit and support for the Aggie foot-



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Members of the Class of 1955 and their families gather outside Kyle Field before the Kansas game Saturday.

ball team by making the trip out to Kyle Field for some tailgating.

Some come back to meet with old friends and some turn up to spend time with new ones, but either way, tailgating at A&M is something that is only going to get more popular.

"I think tailgating at A&M is new, I think it's growing—It's really just about camaraderie—reliving those old times and getting that enthusiasm up for the games," Hutka said.

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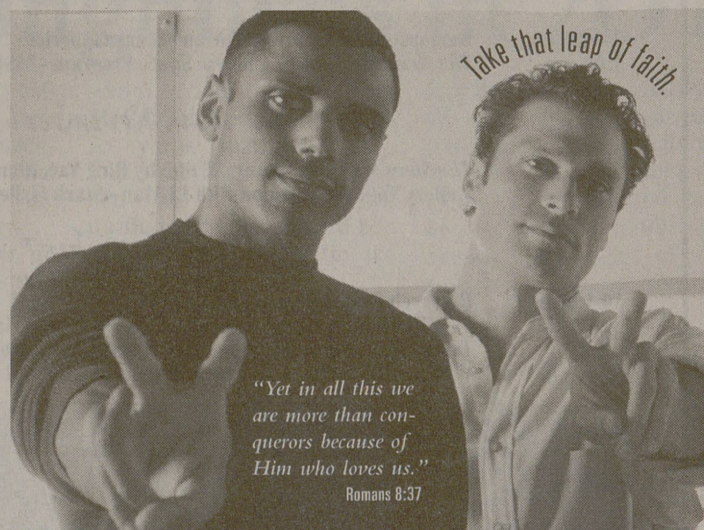
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