

THE HISTORY OF THE
SHEPHERD
SCHOLARS
PROGRAM



EMPORIA STATE
UNIVERSITY

Remarkable Scholarship Program

The Shepherd Scholars Program was created in 1994 by a generous gift from local philanthropists R. Hershel and Augusta Shepherd. Shortly after the scholarship was established, Emporia State University awarded the Shepherd Scholarship to its first class of recipients in 1995. To date, over three hundred of ESU's finest students have been granted the title "Shepherd Scholar." Since its creation, the Shepherd Scholarship has become one of the most prestigious scholarships in ESU's history.

It is an honor and a tradition for newly selected Shepherd Scholars to have the opportunity to meet the Shepherd family at a private luncheon and be publicly honored at a ceremony. Typically, a faculty member introduces and presents accolades to the scholars in front of the students' family and friends.

The scholarship provides monetary assistance to students who have proven themselves academically. The honor awarded to the students is testament to their service to their community and to their peers. The myriad of people these students have helped because they have achieved their goals is boundless.

It is difficult to measure the good that has resulted from the decision Hershel and Augusta Shepherd made back in 1994. Their family continues to personally support and strengthen the Shepherd Scholars Program. As the tradition continues, numerous investments from the Shepherd Family have enhanced the scholarship. Past and present contributors include Hershel and Augusta, daughter and son-in-law Joyce and Craig French, son Jim Shepherd, and daughter and son-in-law Judy and David Hawkins.



How it all began

In the fall of 1994, President and CEO of the ESU Foundation, Kimera Maxwell, approached the director of the ESU Honors Program, Gary Wyatt, about convening a group of some of the University's most accomplished professors who had received the distinguished Roe R. Cross award, to solicit from them ideas about a strategy for recognizing ESU's best students. As this effort unfolded, a number of questions emerged: How would these students be selected? Would they receive a certificate? A plaque? Would there be a recognition ceremony? As ideas were considered, several of the Roe R. Cross professors emphasized that if the University and the Foundation were serious about recognizing and rewarding academic excellence, the reward had to be a scholarship, and a significant one at that. Nothing less would do. All agreed. Wyatt shared the convictions of the professors with Maxwell who then approached Hershel and Augusta Shepherd with the idea, and the rest as they say, is history.

The honors director and professors then continued in the effort to design the Shepherd Scholars Program. As they did, a couple of points vital to the Shepherds became apparent: it was critical that scholarship winners demonstrate a strong work ethic and commitment to academic excellence as a prior condition of eligibility, and second, that applications from students in all academic disciplines be eligible for the scholarship. With these points in mind, a minimum grade point average and junior class status were established as qualifiers. Each student application would include a letter of application from the student, two letters of recommendation from faculty members familiar with the student's accomplishments and potential, a sample of each student's best academic work, and an academic transcript. The applications would be judged and scored by a panel of the University's finest, the Roe R. Cross professors. Finally, the program would be organized each year by the University Honors Program, now the University Honors College. The scholarships are awarded each spring in a ceremony organized by the ESU Foundation and the Honors College. As a reflection of their ongoing commitment to the program, members of the Shepherd Family are always in attendance at the ceremony.



Hershel and Augusta

The story of the Shepherd Scholars Program is the story of a family and their perseverance, hard-work, and unshakeable commitment to generosity and the common good. Connecting with other people and building strong relationships with them and working very hard at everything they did were Hershel and Augusta's core values.

As a young child growing up in rural Kansas, Augusta Dickson experienced a life much different from the one that children experience today. Born in 1922 and raised by parents of Welsh descent, she and her sisters attended high school in Eskridge, Kansas, approximately 20 miles north of her parent's rural farm, even though Admire High School was closer. In a situation truly remarkable by today's standards, Augusta's parents purchased a plot of land in Eskridge to attend school there. Graduates of Eskridge High School were qualified to teach school and Augusta's father wanted that option for his daughters so they could support themselves. The "trailer" placed on the land was similar to a box car, with no electricity. The girls used kerosene lamps and a wood stove for warmth and to warm food provided for them by their parents each week. Augusta, who was in third grade at the time this strategy was implemented, lived with her oldest sister, Esther for two years so she could graduate and receive the teaching degree. This tradition of two Dickson girls living in Eskridge during the week, later included Ruth and then Naomi, continued through Augusta's graduation. Growing up fast and learning to take care of one's self, was the order of the day. Their parents and brothers Thomas and Hiram remained on the farm.

Education and music were always prevalent in the Dickson household. When school in Eskridge was not in session, playing the piano and organ were fond memories of the Dickson children. Augusta developed a life-long love of music, a love that years later contributed to her desire to support music education at ESU. Also when home from school, Augusta remembers her father reading the Kansas City Star newspaper every day. Even though they lived miles from town, Augusta's father felt it was vital to have it delivered to their home so they could stay informed and educated on world events.

Augusta continued her education living in Emporia with her sisters and attending the Kansas State Teacher's College, now ESU, where she was a member of Alpha Sigma Tau Sorority and held down a job at the university library. She graduated in 1944 with a Bachelor of Science in Business in Business Administration.

As a young child, Hershel Shepherd and his family lived for a time in Missouri where his father worked for the road department. Eventually the family moved to Admire, but an accident on a bridge construction project left his father severely injured. Hershel's parents returned to Missouri, however, with community support, 10-year-old Hershel remained in the Admire area. During this time, he worked at a service station owned by businessman Bob Brown, a man who would play an important role in Hershel's life.

Eventually, Hershel graduated high school and briefly attended college in both Missouri and Kansas although he was never able to finish his degree, a fact that troubled him throughout his life. Shortly thereafter, Hershel joined the National Guard and subsequently the US Army during World War II. He graduated from Officer Candidate School and found himself in southern Europe fighting the Nazis. He participated in the allied landing at Anzio, Italy and fought in North Africa.

As a young soldier, Hershel Shepherd witnessed first-hand the reality of war. Like other men who experienced combat, Hershel refused to talk about his experiences. While he was awarded the Purple Heart and the Bronze Star for his service and bravery, the death, horror, and destruction he witnessed drove him to silence for many years. As experts on the psychology of combat often find, an indicator separating those who have truly experienced the terror of war from those who have not, is the reluctance of those who experience it to talk about it. It was not until many years later, and only then with a few trusted friends, that Hershel began to talk about the things he had experienced during the war.



Marriage, Family, and Business Success

After returning from Europe at the war's end, Hershel resumed working at the service station owned by Bob Brown in Admire. It was during this time that he first met the love of his life, Augusta Dickson. Hershel and Augusta's children joke that someone asked Augusta, who at the time was working in Admire as a school teacher: "Did you see that cute young man who just returned from the war and is working at the service station?" To which Augusta replied, "Oh, he doesn't look like much to me." However, Augusta, captured Hershel's eye right away, and after working up the nerve to ask her on a date, Augusta consented. Hershel then spent the better part of the day of their date, washing and re-washing his car so as to create the best impression he possibly could. The date involved dinner and a movie in nearby Emporia. Happily, Hershel's efforts were successful, and that first date marked the start of a life-long romance and a relationship that would last a lifetime. On July 20, 1947, Hershel Shepherd and Augusta Dickson were married in the Methodist Church in Emporia.

After their marriage, Hershel continued to work for Bob Brown while nurturing dreams of business ownership. Soon Hershel and Augusta moved to Colorado where Hershel worked as a sales representative for Skelly Oil Company, and gained valuable experience in sales and customer relations. Shortly, he moved back to Admire where he purchased the service station and propane and oil delivery business from Bob Brown, where it was renamed the R. H. Shepherd Oil Company. Hershel nearly worked himself to death with early morning oil and propane deliveries, running the service station during regular business hours, then providing more deliveries late into the night, every evening. His health began to deteriorate. After considerable thought and discussion with Augusta, the business was sold and Hershel returned to work with Skelly Oil Company, first in Minnesota and then Oklahoma.

In late 1958, the family moved back to Kansas, and settled in Emporia where they founded S & S Oil & Propane Company shortly thereafter. This time of their lives was very stressful especially for Augusta, pregnant with Judy, her mother passed away that year. Since Hershel preceded her to Kansas, she was largely responsible for moving the family. She held up well and the family both settled and prospered.

The success of S & S Oil & Propane, and later, Admire State Bank, which the Shepherds bought from Bob Brown in 1964, attest to the family's business savvy, work-ethic, and sense of fairness. Hershel and Augusta instilled in their children and employees business practices that centered on the value of long-term relationships based on fair and courteous service. Hershel always believed that a good business agreement had to be beneficial for both parties.

As the oil and propane business grew, Joyce French recalled that one of the first rules employees were required to live by was to learn the name of each customer. When a customer walked into the business, the first employee who recognized the customer was to call out that customer's name in a friendly greeting so as to make that person feel welcome and remind all of the other employees of that customer's name. Judy commented that growing up in the Shepherd household meant business was often the topic of conversation at the dinner table. As a result of these values and practices, the businesses Hershel and Augusta and later Joyce and Jim owned and operated became some of the most successful businesses in east-central Kansas.

Commitment to the Common Good

The Shepherds have been lifelong supporters of ESU. After establishing the Shepherd Scholars program, Hershel and Augusta made another major gift to Emporia State in 1996 to support the construction of a pavilion at Welsh stadium to include enclosed theatre seating, a president's box, four sky boxes, and a game-day management and media center. The very next year the Shepherds gave again as lead donors in the Beach Music Hall renovations and addition project, and on April 1, 2000, the addition was dedicated as the Shepherd Music Center. ESU honored the couple in 1996 by awarding them with the ESU Presidential Award of Excellence and in 2000 they were awarded the Service Citation Award honoring their life time service to the institution.

An important question about the Shepherds is what prompted such generosity toward Emporia State University. Was it the connections and friendships made with ESU faculty, staff, students, and administrators? Friends and family who attended ESU? Or simply a commitment to the common good? While all of these factors may have been important, Joyce, Jim and Judy, believe that despite his extraordinary accomplishments, Hershel felt a sense of longing because he was not able to graduate from college himself. Consequently, he felt a strong desire to help others, to pay it forward by providing students with the means to complete a college education as long as they were willing to do their part and work hard. The Shepherd Scholar Program is the perfect means to provide that help.

On March 27, 2001, Hershel Shepherd passed away leaving an astounding legacy of success and compassion. The lives of Hershel and Augusta Shepherd and their family represent the best and highest calling of service to others. Whether providing employment for many people through the businesses they have created or educational assistance to promising students through the Shepherd Scholars Program and the Shepherd Music Center, they truly are agents of change for the common good.



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