

# I Serve Because...

The Class of 1980 E. King Gill Selfless Service Award's recipients share why they stand for selfless service.

By Torie Noellsch

Lead photo provided by Texas A&M Marketing & Communications



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**B**uzzing through Rudder Plaza, students are greeted by the bronze likeness of an Aggie legend: Dr. E. King Gill '24. While only a statue, Gill represents selfless service for *all* Aggies—an idea the Class of 1980 hoped to elevate when their statue, a gift to the university, was relocated from Kyle Field to its central location in Rudder Plaza in 2014.

By 2018, its members brought this idea to life by endowing the Class of 1980 E. King Gill Selfless Service Award, the university's first core value award. This prestigious accolade honors and celebrates graduating seniors who demonstrate exemplary service during their undergraduate career through a \$5,000 award.

“Texas A&M advertises selfless service as a key component in the university’s DNA,” said William “Bill” Jentsch Jr. ’80, co-class agent. “We developed this award to showcase students living out this core value. By holding up these outstanding Aggies, we hope not only to inspire others to make similar impacts in their communities and beyond in the name of selfless service, but also to encourage former students to consider establishing awards for the other core values.”



Lauren Breazeale '20 | 2020 Recipient. Photo by Dylan Cole.

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### **I'm Thankful for My Blessings.**

As the award’s inaugural recipient, Lauren Breazeale’s journey with the special needs community began at age 16 through ManeGait, a nonprofit that uses equine therapy to help children and adults with disabilities.

Once in Aggieland, she volunteered with Aggie Emeralds after learning its priority was serving people with special needs. Breazeale '20 jumped into leadership roles and helped establish a connection with the Brazos

Employment Enterprises (BEE) Community, a workplace where adults with special needs create artisan products. “I’d only worked with kids who had disabilities, so touring the BEE Community opened my eyes to the large population of underserved adults who have special needs,” she recalled.

Today, as a second-year medical school student at Texas Tech University, Breazeale continues serving the population she has grown to love by volunteering with High Point Village, an organization similar to the BEE Community. “People with special needs are challenged by things I don’t even have to think about, yet they are so optimistic. Serving them inspires and reminds me to be thankful for my blessings.”



Alexandra “Alex” Ramos ’21 | 2021 Recipient. Photo by Rob Greer.

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### **There’s a Lot To Learn From Others.**

While her peers enjoyed junk food without worry, 14-year-old Alexandra “Alex” Ramos ’21 focused on a well-balanced diet because she had just been diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes. Ramos armed herself with

nutritional knowledge, improved her quality of life and began volunteering with the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation to help others.

Years later, she chose the university's Hunger Consortium as her service capstone project, which evolved into the bright beginnings of TAMU Urban Farm United (TUFU), a student-run farm that grows and supplies fresh produce to the Bryan-College Station community through on-campus food pantries. Ramos worked at TUFU and used her life experiences—including a study abroad trip to Rwanda—to educate shoppers on nutrition. “Rwandan citizens always ate fresh vegetables, and freshly butchered meat was an understatement,” she laughed. “I realized how different our culture is and learned that Americans want to eat this way if it’s available.”

Now pursuing an engineering master’s degree and medical doctorate through the university’s EnMed program, Ramos enjoys rallying her fellow classmates to volunteer at a local community clinic where they engage with a variety of patients. “Engaging with people on different life paths allows me to learn from them and keeps me grounded when school is tough. It reminds me of what I’m working toward: helping people improve their health.”

### **...We're All in This Thing Together.**

Chris Thompson '04 practiced selfless service well before donning his Aggie ring. During his time as a Green Beret in the War on Terror, selfless service meant survival. “Everything is about the greater good on a special forces team,” he said.

After seven deployments and 10 years serving his country, Thompson re-entered civilian life with two missions: completing the Texas A&M education that he started before 9/11 and helping veterans acclimate to their new lives through Team Red, White and Blue, a national nonprofit that connects former servicemembers to their local community through physical and social activities.

“Social connection is important for veterans, including myself, who wonder if they even ‘fit in’ anymore,” he shared. “Physical activity also relieves stress, anxiety and depression as veterans and their families navigate a

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Chris Thompson '04 | 2022 Recipient. Photo by Josh Huskin.

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tough transition.” Seeing the organization’s value, Thompson was instrumental in building its Bryan-College Station chapter.

Today, the Aggie plays a vital role in supporting veterans through organizations like Veterans Exploring Treatment Solutions, which assists those suffering from conditions like PTSD and traumatic brain injury, a task he considers challenging yet rewarding. “My parents taught me that serving others is not easy or convenient; it’s the opposite. Seeing the need and helping those who are really struggling is the right thing to do, and it can create a lasting ripple effect.”

*Do you know an Ag who is selflessly serving? Let our editor know by clicking the button below or sending a message at the bottom of this page.*

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