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[Front Page](#) [AggieLife](#) [Sports](#) [Opinion](#) [Comics](#) [Music](#) [Movies](#) [Feature](#) [Photos](#) [Archives](#) [Get Shocked!](#)

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Longhorns, Aggies unite on UT campus

BRADY CREEL

Staff writer

Unwilling to walk away from the place where an unprecedented event had just taken place, Longhorns and



CODY WAGES
The Battalion

Aggies stood together at the bell tower at the University of Texas with candles to honor the 12 A&M students who died in the Bonfire collapse.

Unity Gathering on the University of Texas campus last night. They were distinguishable only by an extended Gig 'em thumb or Hook 'em horns.

"Tonight we stand unified--unified in our grief, unified in our love of tradition, unified in our commitment to restore light to a darkened Texas," Milam Newby said.

As Newby, president of the student chapter of the Texas Exes Association and a UT senior government major, spoke these words to thousands upon thousands of students, friends and alumni of Texas A&M and UT, a new friendship and appreciation was formed between the two schools who have a deep rivalry such a deep love of a "spirit that can ne'er be told."

The mourners stood, not as Longhorns or Aggies, but together as Texans to memorialize the fallen Aggies in the Nov.18 Bonfire tragedy, and to celebrate the new relationship between the two schools.

Newby, said the schools came together last night in mutual respect and understanding.

"What began as our desire to join with Texas A&M in the lighting of one candle has grown into an evening of lighting thousands," he said. "What began as a desire for Longhorns to show love and support for Aggies has grown into an outpouring of love and support from all Texans."

Don Evans, chair of the University of Texas Board of Regents, said the Aggies are not alone in their sorrow.

"The eyes of Texas are upon you, and our hearts are with you," Evans said. "God bless the family of Texas A&M University."

UT President Dr. Larry Faulkner said during the past five days both universities have realized their common ground.

"We have recalled that we are drawn from and serve the same larger community," he said. "We have learned that we are both of the people and for the people of Texas."

Texas Lt. Gov. Rick Perry, Class of '72, said when the 12 Aggies died last week the Longhorns and Aggies were called to unity.

"Those 12 young men and women have left life on earth for life eternally, and we, as one family, as Aggies and Longhorns, are compelled to remember," he said. "This tragic event of four days ago reminds us of the Twelfth Man. Twelve brave Texans have been taken off the field where they will never set foot again."

U.S. Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchinson (R-Texas), a UT graduate, said the bond between the two schools was shared last night.

"We all shared in the overwhelming grief felt by the Aggie family," she said. "We are all Texans, and Texans stand together in difficult times."

Student Body President Will Hurd, a senior computer science major, said the Bonfire tragedy is one of the darkest times in A&M's history, but also has been a proud moment to be an Aggie.

"The relationship between Texas A&M University and the University of Texas is forever changed," he said.

Tracey Kulpa, a sophomore economics major at UT, said the night's events were unbelievable.

"It is great that we can finally come together as people," she said.

Susie Carpenter, a psychology major at UT, said she was able to connect with the tragedy because she was raised in College Station, and it is what inspired her to attend the Unity Gathering.

"We just want to show our support," she said. "We know what it is like to lose a loved one, and we want the Aggies to know we support them and feel their pain."

Ashley Paclik, a freshman animal science major at A&M, said she was impressed with how both schools came together for one common cause.

"It was amazing that all rivalry was forgotten," Paclik said.

As the sound of the A&M War Hymn finished echoing from the tower's bells, 12 tolls rang once for each of the fallen Aggies. The Longhorns then sang their school song as the bells tolled its tune, followed by "Taps" played by the UT ROTC.

Hurd and Newby each lighted candles and spread the flame of friendship amongst the crowd.

As the Longhorns and Aggies passed the flame from candle to candle, the faint humming of Amazing Grace spread through the congregation. It was sung numerous times before the first person departed.

While workers disassembled the podium and loudspeaker system, a large number of Longhorns and Aggies remained standing together, singing hymns hand-in-hand and remembering the 12 fallen Aggies.

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