

SMU LIBRARIES

SPRING 2026 NEWSLETTER

Beyond *the* Boulevard

Discovering Dallas through SMU Libraries

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future landmark

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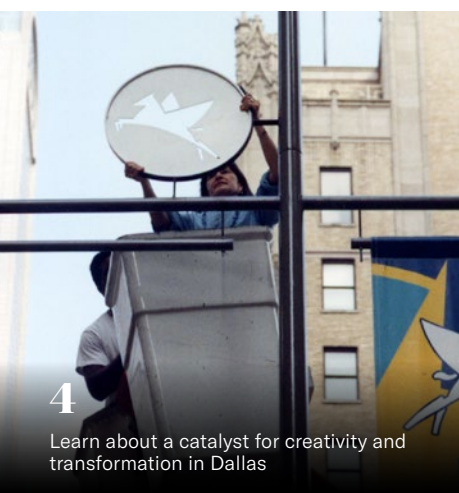
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ON THE COVER

It's an exciting time for SMU Libraries and the entire campus community as a new Dallas landmark takes shape on the Hilltop! Staff are now preparing for the opening of the new Rees-Jones Library of the American West next spring.

SMU Libraries Newsletter is published twice a year by the SMU Libraries, which retains the right to determine editorial content and manner of presentation. The opinions expressed in this newsletter do not necessarily reflect official University policy. Letters and comments welcome. Send to: SMU Libraries, PO Box 750135, Dallas, TX 75275-0135. **Dean of SMU Libraries**, Holly E. Jeffcoat; **Editor**, Amy Carver '94; **Contributors**, Cindy Boeke, Jolene de Verges, Cynthia Franco, Ben Jenkins, Scott Martin, Isabella Popo '26, Brynn Price '23, Sarah Haight Sanabria, Luisa Tilhe '28, Rob Walker, Christina Wood; **Copy editor**, Ellen Rossetti; **Photographers**, Kevin Gaddis, Lana Deck '13; **Graphic design**, Brooke Carlock Design. To support SMU Libraries visit smu.edu/libraries/giving or contact Brynn Price at 214-768-7034 or brynnp@smu.edu.

Defining Dallas, story by story

Cities are often defined by skylines and institutions. But their true legacy is built by people who create, question, record and imagine what comes next.

Dallas is no exception.

Its story is written every day by journalists capturing the moment (see Page 9), artists and filmmakers interpreting it (see Page 5), scholars examining it, and leaders shaping what the city becomes (see Page 4). Just as importantly, it is preserved by those who recognize that these moments matter, who collect, document and safeguard the evidence of a life in motion (see Page 6).

In this issue, you will see that cycle at work.



*Dallas inspires creation.
Creation generates record. Those records
– preserved, activated and shared –
fuel the next generation of ideas.”*

What is created across Dallas and the region does not simply remain in the moment. It becomes record in the form of photographs, films, art, articles, data and personal papers (see Page 7), traces of a city continually defining itself. Those records, in turn, become the foundation for new discovery. They invite students and scholars to ask: *What happened here? Who shaped it? What does it tell us about who we are?*

At SMU Libraries, we are part of that exchange.

We do not simply collect the story of Dallas. We help bring it together. As conveners, collaborators and partners across the city (see Pages 14–15), we bring creators, scholars and communities into conversation. We center the work of students and researchers by connecting them directly with the materials and the people who shape their inquiry. In doing so, we are not only preserving knowledge, but expanding how it is created, shared and understood.

What emerges is something larger than any one collection or initiative.

It is a living cycle. Dallas inspires creation. Creation generates record. Those records – preserved, activated and shared – fuel the next generation of ideas.

This is the work you will encounter in these pages, a reflection of the creativity, ambition and determination that define this city and the many ways those qualities endure.

Because, in the end, a city lives on not only through what it dreams and builds, but through what it remembers and through those who ensure its stories continue to be told.

Holly E. Jeffcoat
Dean of SMU Libraries

Above The 2026 Literati Award recipient Robert Wilonsky, shown with Dean Holly Jeffcoat (left) and SMU Executive Vice President and Provost Rachel Davis Mersey at Tables of Content, has been chronicling city life for three decades as a journalist.



“It will be a great place for people to come and learn about the American West or just to find a quiet nook to study.”

Rob Walker



Counting down to spring 2027

A new Dallas landmark, the Rees-Jones Library of the American West, remains on track for occupancy in spring 2027.

Although that target date is still months away, staff across SMU Libraries stay busy behind the scenes to ensure a smooth transition from the construction phase to the opening.

Teams are coordinating a complex sequence of moves, installations and final preparations. Materials will be relocated, systems brought online and spaces finalized in a carefully timed progression, according to Rob Walker, director of the Norwick Center for Digital Solutions and SMU Libraries’ construction liaison. “It’s like a complicated dance,” he says. “Things have to move out in the right order, before things can move back in.”

That choreography is already underway. Russell L. Martin, III ’78, ’86, director of DeGolyer Library, and his team are organizing the move of special collections housed in Fondren Library to the new library. At the same time, Sarah Haight Sanabria, associate dean of collections and discovery, is guiding staff as they plan the rehoming of Fondren Library materials that have been stored at Iron

Mountain, a secure, off-site storage facility.

Attention is also turning to the building’s interior. Dean Holly Jeffcoat and her leadership team are working closely with architects and vendors to finalize finishes, surfaces, furniture and shelving, details that will shape both the look and function of library spaces.

From the beginning of the planning process, collections accessibility has been a major consideration. A key priority is making the Rees-Jones Collection widely available through high-quality digital imaging. Walker says a new digitization station the Norwick Center plans to acquire will deliver “the highest resolution captures in Texas, if not the country.”

“The higher resolution helps bring to life minuscule details often not resolved by the naked eye. It also means we can capture large items, like maps, with exquisite detail,” he says. “As a result, items will only need to be digitized once in their lifetime, reducing the chances of damage from handling and lights, etc. Each image file will have sufficient resolution for all uses – print, video, posters,

billboards, etc. – for the foreseeable future.”

Walker is working with Redha Gheraba, a senior project manager with the Office of Facilities Planning and Management assigned to the project, on wrapping up final details on the audiovisual and security systems, classroom furniture, and the specification of a decontamination freezer, which is used to treat incoming archival materials to prevent pest infestations.

With less than a year to go, momentum continues to build. Staff on the programming team are now brainstorming events and academic programming to ensure a strong and engaging launch.

After a recent tour of the construction site with Dean Holly Jeffcoat, Iron Mountain staff and members of the SMU Libraries administration, Walker was impressed.

“I was left with a very positive opinion on the progress of the building, as well as the proportions and layout. It will be a great place for people to come and learn about the American West or just to find a quiet nook to study,” he says. “It is going to be a magical place.” ■

Donning hard hats and safety vests for a recent tour of the Rees-Jones Library construction site were (from left) Jeff Cravens and Ken Grimes, Iron Mountain; Dean Holly Jeffcoat, Rob Walker, Russell L. Martin, III and Elizabeth Killingsworth, SMU Libraries leadership team; Anna Lamphear, Iron Mountain; and Redha Gheraba, SMU Office of Facilities Planning and Management.

Appreciating the natural beauty of pre-statehood Texas

Many details of Amelia Arnold Smith Comes' story have been lost in the winds of time. But in two small books – a sketchbook and an herbarium – she captured pastoral scenes and samples of native flora, compiling a distinctive record of pre-statehood Texas. Comes' sketches, watercolors and botanical samples, along with two daguerreotype images, are now part of the Rees-Jones Collection.

Comes' work offers a rare glimpse at the human-made environment and natural surroundings experienced by those living in early Independence, Texas. Now a blip on the map in Washington County, the town was only 5 years old when Comes started sketching it in 1840.

"The Amelia Arnold Smith Comes collection offers such a rare perspective of 19th century Texas," says archivist Christina Wood. "Any researchers who are interested in understanding life in the Republic of Texas outside traditional narratives will appreciate the unique view Amelia's artwork provides. Her pastoral views and images of homestead life, through the gaze of a New Yorker, offer a uniquely peaceful view of Texas at a time when the young nation was still defined by hostility and turmoil."

An all-leather book, measuring 3-by-4 inches, contains 35 full-page pencil drawings and five draft sketches. The drawings of Comes, a gifted artist, include detailed landscapes, a log house with brick chimney and a partial view of Independence showing 13 buildings. One of the most intriguing drawings

depicts a moonlit scene of a boy asleep in tall grasses with an equine grazing nearby.

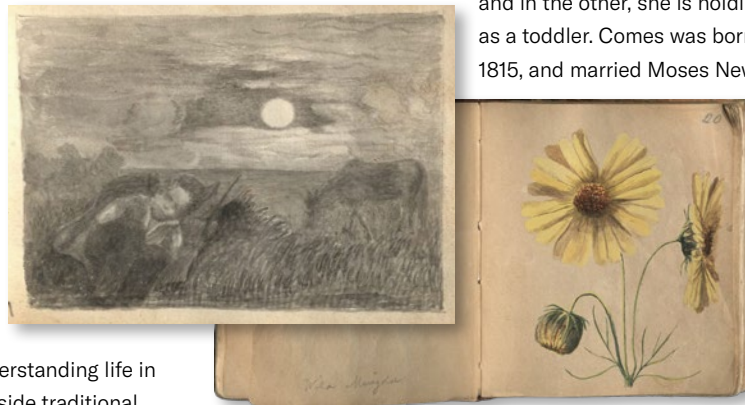
The other book, quarter leather over marbled boards measuring 4.5-by-3.75 inches, holds 14 watercolors of flowers and 12 flower samples. Only a few of the samples are identified, but many of the paintings are captioned and show familiar wildflowers, including lupins, or as they are more popularly known, bluebonnets, the official state flower.

Rounding out the collection is a pair of daguerreotype images framed in a charming period case. One shows Comes alone, and in the other, she is holding one of her three sons as a toddler. Comes was born in Brooklyn, New York, in 1815, and married Moses Newell Comes around 1835.

It's not known when they moved to Independence, but records show Moses died there in 1845. According to the 1850 census, Comes and her children were living in a New York City boardinghouse.

When viewed through a modern lens, the collection can be seen as a testament to an artist's indomitable creative spirit. It is a marvel that a young wife and mother, transplanted from her bustling East Coast home to a tiny town in a nascent republic, carved out time to explore the beauty around her, opening a window to her world for digital age explorers.

Explore highlights from the Rees-Jones Collection: smu.edu/rees-jones-collection



Above Among the works by Amelia Arnold Smith Comes in the Rees-Jones Collection are an intriguing moonlight pencil sketch and a colorful watercolor depiction of a wild marigold. **Left** Comes sometimes supplemented her wildflower sketches with botanical samples like this "prairie pansie."

SMU Archives welcomes another unique part of the Dallas mosaic

The Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture provides a forum for intellectual explorations that leverage the wisdom and imagination of the humanities in practical ways to shape civic progress. While its major programs focus on teacher training and urban planning, the institute also encourages public engagement through a wide range of events, from book discussions and poetry readings to short courses on such emerging topics as artificial intelligence. But just as important as the conversations themselves are the records they leave behind – a vital part of city history entrusted to SMU Libraries.

When the institute joined Dedman College of Humanities and Sciences in 2024, 141 boxes of materials became part of the SMU Archives in DeGolyer Library. The collection comprises correspondence, financial records, event programs, publications, photographs,



and a substantial cache of audio and video recordings in formats spanning decades. Among the collection's most striking elements is a photographic journal from a 1983 trip to the Soviet Union. Together, these resources paint a textured portrait of a city in conversation with itself and the wider world.

University Archivist Ben Jenkins led the preservation effort in 2025. The materials arrived with all the richness – and challenges – of a 40-year legacy, he says.

“When collections come to the SMU Archives, they are often disorganized or damaged,” Jenkins notes. “I generally inventory our new collections, determining

the best ways to organize them and deciding what preservation activities to take. This can be as simple as removing rusty paper clips or more time-consuming, such as identifying materials for digitization by the Norwick Center for Digital Solutions.”

Central to the institute's story is Gail Thomas '58, retired CEO of the Trinity Trust Foundation and a catalyst for creativity and transformation in Dallas. She and her late husband celebrated deep roots on the Hilltop. Robert Hyer Thomas '53, '57, the grandson of Robert S. Hyer, the University's first president, passed away in 2020. He's remembered for his service to his alma mater, most notably as a member of the SMU Board of Trustees and as a longtime member of the SMU Libraries Executive Board.

A distinguished alumna of SMU and the University of Dallas, Gail Thomas carved out successful careers in academia and



civic leadership. In 1980, Thomas and like-minded colleagues founded the Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture as a nonprofit educational organization. Through initiatives like the annual “What Makes a City” conference, the institute provides a platform for experts across disciplines to examine the deeper meanings of urban life.

Thomas' scholarly contributions spanning urban studies, psychology and philosophy reflect a lifelong commitment to understanding the human experience in a growing city. Her papers, shedding new

light on the ideas and leadership that helped define modern Dallas, are also now part of the SMU Archives.

In processing the Dallas Institute collection, Jenkins collaborated with key stakeholders, including Thomas and Seemee Ali, director and inaugural president of the institute. Ali's scholarship in the humanities has earned numerous accolades, and she has lectured across this country and abroad on topics as varied as Toni Morrison and Aeschylus. As guest speaker at the Friends of SMU Libraries annual dinner and meeting last spring, she shared insights about the institute's vital work.

The University archivist also relied on Jody Keahey '26 and Kori Nelson '27, student workers for the institute, to move materials and conduct research.

Making the Dallas Institute materials accessible opens up their potential for researchers, students and community members to trace the evolution of cultural development and civic thought, and to relive conversations that continue to resonate today. To do so, Jenkins wrote a finding aid, an easy-to-use online guide that covers the scope, content and arrangement of the collection, as well as historical background. ■



Above left Gail Thomas '58 (far right) was the guiding force behind The Trinity Trust until her retirement in 2016. **Above right** “What Makes a City” conference group gathered in 1994. **Right** Gail Thomas (left) and Seemee Ali.

A collection that captures life – and the arts – in the city

Quin Mathews has been telling the stories of Dallas for decades, exploring the arts, culture and history of the city with a journalist's instinct and a filmmaker's eye.

Born, raised and still based here, Mathews spent more than 20 years in television news and even longer behind the microphone as a radio host.

Now, his oeuvre has found a fitting home in Hamon Arts Library, where it has become part of the G. William Jones Film and Video Collection.



"The Jones Collection's recent focus has been on the preservation of Dallas-Fort Worth's moving image records, conserving the area's history and its storytelling and the people behind it all," says Scott Martin, moving image curator for the Jones Collection. "This mission would always be incomplete without the inclusion of Mr. Mathews' collection. His passion for the city and the people in it

permeates every aspect of his work."

Over the years, Mathews has made hundreds of films, videos and television broadcasts, many of which are now archived in the Jones Collection. Guests were treated to a taste of his take on Dallas storytelling when he served as a table host at the recent Tables of Content dinner (see Page 8).

Although his films vary widely, they often focus on Dallas as both subject and setting. For example,

his documentary *City of Hate: Dallas and the Assassination*, broadcast on KERA-TV and PBS stations nationwide, examines the city's complex relationship with President John F. Kennedy and the fallout from his assassination in downtown Dallas in 1963.

Many locals know Mathews for his 25 years as host of *Art Matters* on

WRR-FM radio. Along with his co-creator Sharon Bengé, Mathews interviewed nearly 2,500 artists ranging from local creatives to internationally famous figures.

His contributions have been recognized with such honors as the Legends Award from the Dallas Contemporary art museum and a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Business Council for the Arts.



Mathews donated his materials to the Jones Collection in August 2025. They encompass over 30 years of documentary and commercial film work, featuring both his final edits and raw camera tapes. The audio tapes and digital files include a selection of his radio recordings, as well as unedited interviews.

"These elements not only provide a comprehensive overview of his work," Martin explains, "but they also serve as an invaluable teaching tool showing how an artist like Mr. Mathews constructs his work."

Mathews' ties to SMU run deep, even if he never formally enrolled. He studied piano privately at Meadows School of the Arts, later taught in the Journalism Division and counts multiple family ties to the University. Now his connection comes full circle as his work will be available to students and researchers for years to come.

And he's not finished yet.

Currently in production are new projects ranging from a documentary marking 125 years of *The Daily Texan* student newspaper at the University of Texas at Austin – he wrote for the publication as an undergraduate – to films on artists Karen Gunderson and James Magee.

Back at Hamon, processing of his materials is already underway. Plans are to make them available to researchers by the end of the year, Martin says. When they are, students and scholars will have the opportunity to access a unique portrait of Dallas crafted by an artist who has spent a lifetime listening carefully and looking closely. ■

Left While reviewing footage of his documentary *City of Hate: Dallas and the Assassination*, Quin Mathews recognized himself in the crowd watching President John F. Kennedy's arrival.

Honoring transformative leadership and enduring impact

Sandy Miller (center), former director of the Duda Family Business Library, was honored for 22 years of incredible leadership at a retirement celebration co-hosted by SMU Libraries and Cox School of Business. SMU Libraries Dean Holly Jeffcoat (left) and Cox's Dean and Tolleson Chair in Business Leadership Todd Millbourn were among those gathered to applaud her many achievements and recognize her unwavering dedication and advocacy for the student experience. Over the years, Miller led her team in the transformation of Duda into one of the nation's top business libraries. While it's difficult to imagine SMU Libraries without her, staff remain deeply grateful for her enduring impact and lasting friendship.



An oil pioneer's library legacy

Everette Lee DeGolyer, Sr. lived up to his reputation as a Renaissance man with a Texas twist. He made his mark during the oil boom that helped define Dallas as a commercial dynamo. At the same time, he assembled a collection of historical resources that formed the nucleus of SMU's DeGolyer Library.

Among the library's prized holdings are DeGolyer's personal and business papers. The wealth of biographical materials and photographs reveals his extraordinary trajectory. When he moved to Dallas in the early 1930s, he landed in an environment that was tailor-made for his civic and business leadership, philanthropy, and taste for the finer things in life.

Although DeGolyer may have seemed born to the boardrooms and ballrooms of Dallas' powerbrokers, he launched his career in the rough-and-tumble race for black gold. From his early discoveries in Mexico through a series of oil-related ventures, DeGolyer gained an international reputation as a geophysics innovator and entrepreneurial oilman. Industry leaders and government agencies alike sought his expertise, and honors followed throughout his career.

Yet DeGolyer was never all business. Known

familiarly as "Mr. De," he read widely, wrote extensively and collected astutely.

DeGolyer Library's early home was the iconic Rancho Encinal – now part of the Dallas Arboretum and Botanical Garden – placing it at the center of the city's cultural life. A 1939 album in the DeGolyer archive features interior and exterior photographs of the spectacular residence built by DeGolyer and his wife, Nell Goodrich DeGolyer. The heart of this home may well have been the room where handsome wooden bookcases stretched from floor to ceiling, filled to capacity with volumes he collected. It is still remembered as the setting for many memorable social events.

DeGolyer extended his influence far beyond the oil industry, shaping the civic and cultural life of the city with the same energy he brought to exploration. He served on the boards of the Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas Public Library and other key institutions, helping guide them at a moment when the city was defining itself as a modern cultural center.

After his death in 1956, the DeGolyer

Foundation took stewardship of the collection. His son, Everett L. DeGolyer, Jr., served as the library's first director from 1958 to 1977 and transformed a private collection into a public research library. In 1973, the foundation gave the library to SMU.

Today, DeGolyer Library serves researchers from around the world, preserves essential stories of the American West and beyond, and anchors SMU Libraries' role as a hub for discovery and collaboration. As a living legacy to two generations of visionary collectors, the

library continues to evolve, expand and likely inspire future collectors. ■

Explore the DeGolyer papers:
smu.edu/degolyer-papers



Above Everette Lee DeGolyer, Sr. (left) entertained Bennett Cerf, a founder of Random House, and his wife, Phyllis Cerf. **Below left** Celebrity photographer Maynard L. Parker captured images of the library at Rancho Encinal (*photo permission courtesy of the Huntington Library, San Marino, California*). **Below right** DeGolyer's first major oil discoveries were in Veracruz, Mexico.



Discovering ‘hidden’ gems of Dallas history

From an address celebrating the city’s generous funding by inaugural SMU President Robert S. Hyer, to the papers of pioneering leaders across the community, to the teachings of scholars whose influence spans the globe, the materials preserved by SMU Libraries reveal a strong bond between the city and the University from its beginning. Here we explore a sampling of the collections that reinforce that lasting relationship.

Listen to the rabbi

Bridwell Library is home to Hyer’s handwritten speech and countless other materials that provide insight about the University’s early years and its Methodist roots. Other lesser-known gems among the library’s trove of digitized theological treasures are the sermons and papers of the late Levi A. Olan. Remembered as one of Dallas’ great preachers, he served as rabbi at Temple Emanu-El in Dallas and lectured at Perkins School of Theology from 1952 to 1978.

His activism for civil rights and other causes earned him the moniker “the conscience of the city.” Legend has it that his favorite campus haunt was Bridwell Library, which digitized 211 of his Temple Emanu-El Program radio broadcasts recorded between 1961 and 1970.

Delve into the Olan collection:
smu.edu/olan

Overcoming barriers and honoring a legacy

Underwood Law Library maintains distinctive, law-related special collections, including the massive DISD Desegregation Litigation Archives that contains materials related to the decades-long landmark case.

Another collection, the papers of J.L. Turner, Sr., document a heroic milestone in the city’s racial history. Turner was among Dallas’ earliest African American attorneys. Raised on a farm in Dallas County, he left the state to earn his LL.B. at Kent College of Law in Chicago, where he practiced for two years. Upon returning to Dallas, he overcame racial barriers and became known for his expertise in the fields of probate and real estate law. He maintained a successful law practice for over 50 years, until his death in 1951. In 1952, a time when membership in the American Bar Association and its affiliates was restricted to whites only, a group of the city’s African American attorneys founded the J.L. Turner Legal Association in his honor. Today the

organization honors his legacy through education, service and scholarships.

Discover the Turner collection:
smu.edu/jlturner

‘SMU West’

SMU-in-Taos’ **Wendorf Library** forever ties SMU’s “far west” campus to Dallas through the work of a world-renowned archaeologist. Fred Wendorf, who was recruited to establish the Department of Anthropology in 1964, bridged local and global scholarship through his discoveries, leaving Dallas with a lasting academic footprint far beyond its city limits.

SMU Libraries houses a multitude of resources related to Wendorf, including SMU-in-Taos materials at DeGolyer Library.

View an oral history interview with Wendorf, part of the SMU Video Archive Series:
smu.edu/wendorf

Artful Dallas

Hamon Arts Library holds significant resources documenting 20th century art in North Texas, particularly materials related to the “Dallas Nine.” Active in the 1930s and 1940s, the Dallas Nine were a group of painters, printmakers and sculptors who drew on the landscapes, people and culture of the area to create a distinctive “Regionalist” style, helping establish Dallas as a center for the arts.

Particular strengths at Hamon include extensive holdings on Jerry Bywaters, whose work as an artist, critic and leader of the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts helped define the movement and establish Dallas as a center for the arts. The Bywaters Special Collections at Hamon document his influence on the Dallas art community, and additional collections preserve the work and papers of fellow Dallas



Nine artists William Lester, Otis Dozier and wife Velma Davis Dozier, as well as the work of artist Octavio Medellín.

Experience the Bywaters Special Collections:
smu.edu/bywaters

Big D before satellite imagery

To see Dallas from a bird’s-eye view, start at the **Fondren Library** (and not just the fourth floor). As part of the Foscue Map Collection, the photographs of Lloyd M. Long capture the evolution of the city’s skyline and surrounding communities. Described by *The Dallas Morning News* as “a pioneer in the field of aerial photography,” Long shot hundreds of photos in the 1930s and 1940s, capturing iconic Dallas landmarks, the areas around SMU (Highland Park and University Park), White Rock Lake and more. In a dedicated effort to preserve Dallas history, SMU Libraries collaborated with regional historian George Cearley to identify key features in the photos, such as major roads, railways and landmarks, ensuring that each image documents a city in transformation.

Explore the aerial photos:
smu.edu/dallasviews



Celebrating a journalist and his 'dream-chasing city'

Year after year, Tables of Content is an event like no other, a festive evening made to measure for a city that thrives on bold conversations and audacious aspirations. As SMU Libraries' signature fundraiser unfolded March 28, small talk grew into thoughtful exchanges exploring the big ideas and shared experiences that connect us as a community.

This year, the evening honored one of Dallas' most recognizable chroniclers. Anyone who has read a local newspaper over the past 30 years likely knows the name Robert

Wilonsky (right photo). He was a timely choice for the 2026 Literati Award, an honor that recognizes an individual's creativity and mastery of the written word while leveraging its ability to inspire and uplift.

Following the award presentation, the lively discourse that gives Tables of Content its distinctive energy echoed throughout the Gene and Jerry Jones Grand Atrium in Meadows School of the Arts. Table hosts included past Literati Award recipients Darwin Payne '68 (2016), Bonnie Wheeler (2025) and Laura Wilson (2021), as well as

SMU faculty members and a wide-ranging group of creators, innovators and thinkers. Proceeds from the evening support the Friends of SMU Libraries' annual grants program, directly impacting student success by enhancing learning environments and funding ongoing improvements to student spaces in Fondren Library. Each new wave of Mustangs illustrates the enduring power of this support as they test ideas and expand perspectives in meaningful conversations that never truly end. ■



Robert Wilonsky: In his own words

A Dallas native – and son of an SMU Mustang – 2026 Literati Award recipient Robert Wilonsky has spent three decades as a journalist with the *Dallas Times Herald*, the *Dallas Observer* and *The Dallas Morning News*, where he serves as an editorial columnist. Known for his sharp wit and keen insight, Wilonsky captures the people, places and politics that define our city.

His work has also extended beyond traditional journalism. In his previous role as vice president of public relations and communications at Heritage Auctions, he played a key part in developing the company’s storytelling and public engagement.

Wilonsky is not only a great journalist, but he’s also a good sport. He let SMU Libraries turn the tables on him and ask the questions for a change. Here’s what he had to say:

Why do you find Dallas so fascinating?

This could take a lifetime to answer – and, I guess, it has.

But the short answer is this: My grandfather came to Dallas more than a century ago, shortly after his brothers Jake and Eli, who helped build Deep Ellum. My father, too, was born and raised here. None of them ever left. So I know, from my father and his, what Dallas had been, what it aspired to become, and what it actually turned into – a shape-shifting, dream-chasing city with little regard for its past and, often, its people. And I am obsessed with documenting that struggle, whether it comes from city hall or my next-door neighbors.

What’s a little-known fact or story about Dallas that you think everyone should know?

I am always amazed how few people know Ray Charles lived in South Dallas for three years, assembling the band with musicians who helped make him a legend. His house still stands, too – though, just barely. It’s always a stop on my tour of Dallas, along with the Woodmen hall down the street, where those jazzers, many of them Lincoln High School students, workshopped the sound that changed 20th century American R&B.

Of the many stories you’ve written about Dallas over the years, which is your favorite, and why?

I would hate to call it a “favorite,” as that suggests something approaching happiness, but the story of Shingle Mountain is one that meant the most to me. In large part, that’s because it highlighted everything wrong with Dallas: environmental racism, city hall’s inaction and a justice system slow to act even when confronted with a literal mountain of evidence. That one story led to hundreds, a couple of documentaries, and it made Marsha Jackson, the woman who lived with Shingle Mountain in her backyard, an icon in a community in need of a bright light.

What is your favorite fictional depiction of Dallas (film, television, book, etc.), and what makes it stand out to you?

The best book ever written about Dallas is Bud Shrake’s *Strange Peaches* – a surreal, angry, bleary-eyed, bemused look at the greed, racism and hate that defined this city for a very, very long time. I read it once every couple of years. To be inspired. And, occasionally, infuriated. Mostly because I will never, ever, EVER write something a fraction of a fraction of a fraction as good as that novel.

Also, you can never go wrong with the Jimmie Dale Gilmore song *Dallas*, which contains the lyrics: “Well, Dallas is a rich man with a death wish in his eye/A steel and concrete soul with a warm hearted love disguise/A rich man who tends to believe in his own lies.”

Just like my dad taught me.



Opposite page Scenes from Tables of Content: (top row, from left) Shilo Brooks, president and CEO of the George W. Bush Presidential Center; Chris and Diana Blackman '93, '95, '14, Friends of SMU Libraries president; 2026 Literati Award recipient Robert Wilonsky; and Dean Holly Jeffcoat and guests; (center row, from left) centerpieces; Executive Vice President and Provost Rachel Davis Mersey and husband Jason (center); dynamic discussions abound; R. Gerald Turner, president emeritus of SMU with Wilonsky; and former First Lady Laura Bush '68 in attendance; (bottom row, from left) table hosts Isabella Popo '26 (far left) and Simone Melvin '23 (far right) with guests; table hosts mingle; Dean Jeffcoat with guests; and Bonnie Wheeler with Friends members.

Laughter. Tears. Triumph. It all happens at Fondren.

The fourth floor of Fondren Library has seen me cry more times than I'd like to admit. It has heard me laugh for hours with friends on the second floor when we all know we're supposed to be quiet. It's smelled my iced vanilla latte with sweet cream cold foam and caramel drizzle from the Starbucks on the first floor. But most of all, it has quietly witnessed my four years at SMU.

SMU's libraries have always been the places I go when I need somewhere to be. When I needed to escape my dorm. When I had an awkward hour between classes and felt far too lazy to walk home. When I was stressed, tired, motivated or simply in need of caffeine.

Fondren, specifically, has been the epicenter of my journey here at SMU. Over the past four years, it has seen me in every stage of every semester. During midterms, it

watched me fill the whiteboard with messy notes in Lobby 2J. During finals, it hosted my late-night cram sessions fueled almost entirely by coffee and panic. Other days, it has simply been a place to sit with friends, pretending to study while catching up on everything except the assignment in front of us.

Beyond the physical space, SMU Libraries staff support students throughout their academic careers. During the first semester of my

senior year, I enrolled in Professor Joe Kobylka's Law, Politics and the Supreme Court class – yes, it was as hard as it sounds. For our final paper, we had to write a prospectus on a Supreme Court justice of our choosing, develop a research question and locate academic sources that supported our thesis. It was a battle I couldn't fight alone.

Luckily, Megan Heuer, director of educational initiatives and a research guide expert, helped me craft a well-developed outline and pointed me toward the

resources that would best support my argument. Without the SMU Libraries staff, from the people who track down books to the experts who guide students through the research process, I might not be graduating.

Throughout my time at SMU, I have had a complicated relationship with Fondren. There were nights when I loved it so much I didn't want to leave, and others when I couldn't wait to escape its bright lights. But looking back now as a senior, I realize how much of my college life happened within those walls.

From the quiet corners filled with ancient books to the bustling first floor filled with coffee cups and conversation, Fondren has been far more than a place to study. It has been a constant presence throughout my time at SMU.

And that's something I'm truly going to miss. ■

Isabella Popo '26

Hometown: Scottsdale, Arizona

Class year: Senior

Majors: Journalism and fashion media

Minor: Law and legal reasoning

SMU activities: Member of SMU Libraries Student Advisory Board and Pi Beta Phi sorority, general assignment reporter for *The Daily Campus*



Isabella Popo '26 and Luke Holani '26 enjoy Tables of Content, where she served as a table host.

Exciting changes ahead for Bridwell Library

A \$2.5 million grant from the Lilly Endowment sets the stage for major updates to Bridwell Library that will expand access to collections and provide multiple improvements, including a new museum to showcase antiquities linked to an early Dallas civic leader and SMU donor.

Awarded through the philanthropic foundation's Religion and Cultural Institutions Initiative, the grant will support the enhancement of exhibition spaces and preservation of special collections, as well as enable accessibility initiatives and hands-on academic and research experiences, according to Anthony Elia, director of Bridwell Library and J.S. Bridwell Foundation Endowed Librarian.

At the heart of the project is a reimagining of the library's physical spaces. Plans include renovation of the Elizabeth Perkins Prothro Galleries and a partial reconfiguration of the Blue Room study area to house the World Methodist Museum collections on the first floor. There also will be new construction to accommodate a state-of-the-art lab dedicated to historic printing and papermaking on the lower level of the library and an antiquities museum on the second floor (rendering above).

"The Lilly grant will enable Bridwell Library to enhance its legacy of printing history, as well as expand more deeply into the global development of papermaking, which we'll now be able to teach in these new spaces," says Elia.

Years of planning underpin the project.



An initial \$100,000 Lilly Endowment grant supported extensive research into museum design and conservation practices. To inform the vision, Elia visited more than 100 museums, libraries, cultural institutions, printing shops and papermaking studios in the United States and abroad, including the Danish Royal Museum, the Gutenberg Museum, Museo del Prado and the Nobel Prize Museum.

The intensive inquiry encompassed historical papermaking, the history and development of printing presses and print technology, and various auxiliary book and paper arts. Also studied were exhibition design, lighting, projection and interactive technologies for visitors.

"This research proved important, as the renovations will include upgrades to lighting and audiovisual technology to improve accessibility and exhibitions at the library," Elia says.

Those findings helped shape plans for the antiquities museum to showcase rare objects from Bridwell's special collections, including the Collection of Antiquities. That collection traces back to Alvin Valentine Lane, a Dallas banker, scholar and civic

leader whose fascination with early Egyptian and Babylonian cultures inspired him to assemble hundreds of archaeological and ethnological objects. Beginning in 1917, Lane donated materials to SMU, laying the foundation for what would become a lasting academic resource. By 1926, the University had opened the Lane Museum in what is now Florence Hall.

The collection grew under J.H. Hicks, who led the museum for nearly two decades while teaching archaeology and Old Testament studies at Perkins School of Theology. Over time, the antiquities became part of Bridwell Library's Special Collections, where they have maintained a quiet presence.

In the years to come, those artifacts will have a new, modern home. It will be among the thoughtfully designed library spaces bridging the past with an eye toward the future.

"Along with the changes to the spaces of Bridwell, we hope that the level of engagement with both the SMU community and the broader public will increase, and that the pedagogical role of the antiquities museum and the new labs will increase interest and participation from all ages and walks of life," Elia says. ■



Bridwell Press paves the way for Chinggis Khan release

Anthony Elia (left), director of Bridwell Library and J.S. Bridwell Foundation Endowed Librarian, presents a copy of Bridwell Press' latest book, *Time: Sojourns in Stone and Light*, to Batbayar Ulziidelger, ambassador of Mongolia to the United States, at a reception held at the Mongolian embassy in February. Elia was in Washington, D.C., to attend the 18th annual Mongolian Studies Conference at the Library of Congress and celebrate the forthcoming Bridwell Press publication of *The Campaigns of Chinggis Khan*, translated by Christopher Atwood. Atwood, who served as chair of the University of Pennsylvania's East Asian Languages and Civilizations Department and is an acclaimed scholar of Mongolian and Chinese history, delivered the conference keynote address. The professor has spent years translating the seminal text on Genghis Khan, which dates from around 1320. The original tome runs nearly 2,000 pages and has never before been translated fully, and never in English, according to Elia. The first-of-its-kind bilingual classical Chinese-English edition will be released by Bridwell Press later this year.

Adventure awaits: Treasure hunting in the archives

SMU has multiple libraries spread across campus, each with its own unique atmosphere. As a history graduate student, I find that the libraries hold some of the University's most interesting and important valuables: historical archives.

The libraries' special collections are treasure troves waiting to be discovered. A case in point is the Andy Hanson Photographs and Papers at DeGolyer Library, which contains over 300,000 photographs of noteworthy Dallas visitors and residents between 1955 and 2008. The collection includes photos of Johnny Cash, Muhammad Ali, Gloria Steinem and many other celebrities.

I'm also fascinated by Bridwell Library's Fifteenth-Century Printed Books collection, available in both physical and digital formats, where you can see several works, including the Gutenberg Bible, in their original bindings.

SMU Libraries' myriad collections complement academic programs across the University. For example, after attending a Center for Presidential History lecture, you can dive deeper into political history by examining the Hervey A. Priddy Collection of American Presidential and Political Memorabilia online. The DeGolyer Library special collection includes inaugural medals, textiles, ceramics, numismatics, buttons, printed works and other campaign commemoratives from the early 19th century to the early 21st century.

If you're a newspaper junkie like me, SMU offers a vast selection of historical newspaper articles. Picture this: You are researching the Clinton presidency, and you wonder what the average voter was reading about in the paper on a random date, say March 15, 1999. All you need to do is search the library catalog for instant access to that day's *New York Times*, where you would find a story about how the use of computers in schools "risks tide of injuries," since children lack the "proper training in posture and keyboard technique."

Scrolling through other old newspapers brings up topics that still resonate today, whether it's a

report on the downfall of paperbacks or the claim that movies are being made for profit rather than artistic express. And if you're curious about viral celebrity news before the days of TikTok, then look no further than the complete media coverage of the wedding of Princess Diana and current King Charles of England, starting with her refusal to include the word "obey" in her vows, breaking with a tradition that not even Queen Elizabeth II had dared to do.

Regardless of which historical period captivates you the most, SMU Libraries provides doorways to a fascinating past waiting to be discovered. Its vast collections are an invitation to anyone who is eager to explore American history, visual arts, theology and much, much more. ■

Luisa Tilhe '28

Hometown: Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

Academics: Third-year Ph.D. student in the William P. Clements Department of History with a research focus on media history in the late 20th century

SMU activities: SMU Libraries Student Advisory Board member, Dallas Literary Festival volunteer, Voices of SMU Oral History Project contributor



“

SMU Libraries provides doorways to a fascinating past waiting to be discovered.”

Collaboration brings overlooked films back to the big screen

Vault Access, a film series created by the Texas Theatre in collaboration with the G. William Jones Film and Video Collection, brings something for almost every cinephile out of storage and back to the big screen.

The partnership launched in 2018–19 and gained momentum in 2021 after a major expansion of the Texas Theatre added a second screen. Barak Epstein and Jason Reimer founded Aviation Cinemas, and they own, operate and curate programming at the landmark theater in Dallas’ Oak Cliff neighborhood. Ben Jousan, who has long been associated with the storied venue, serves as a lead curator for the series.

“We’re impressed with the range of content available, so one of our primary goals is to showcase the breadth of the collection over time,” Jousan says.

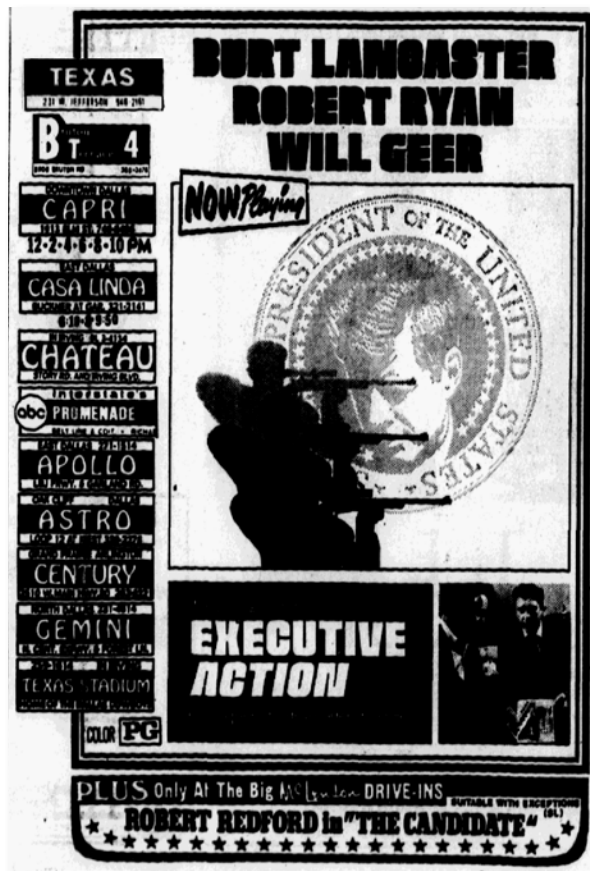
Many of the films in the Jones Collection were shown at the Texas Theatre when it was a United Artists location in the 1970s and ’80s, Jousan explains, “so we give those special consideration. One such example is *Executive Action* (1973), a fictionalized account of the JFK assassination. The film was screened in the very same dark theater where Lee Harvey

Oswald was detained by Dallas police after allegedly shooting President John F. Kennedy and Officer J.D. Tippit. Such a unique opportunity would not have been possible without the archival efforts of G. William Jones and SMU Libraries.”

The Vault Access collaboration enables the Texas Theatre to connect Dallas audiences with film history in a very local, personal way. Jousan describes the Jones Collection as “a cross section of Texas history,” noting the Lone Star locations – including the SMU campus – and the constellation of actors and filmmakers from the state featured in its holdings.

Vault Access movies are usually shown on a weeknight, toward the end of the month, and have been drawing a growing audience. Jousan encourages moviegoers to purchase tickets in advance. ■

Find more information online at TheTexasTheatre.com



Above The Texas Theatre ran this ad for *Executive Action* in *The Dallas Morning News* in 1974. The fictionalized account of the JFK assassination was screened in the same theater where police detained Lee Harvey Oswald in 1963.

Heather Barrett honored with Outstanding Staff Award

At the 2025 Faculty Senate Outstanding Staff Awards celebration, Heather Barrett, SMU Libraries director of acquisitions, had her own cheering squad. On hand to applaud her recognition were members of the Collections and Discovery team. Pictured from left are Synae Yoon, Wenchao Jia, Barrett, Associate Dean of Collections and Discovery Sarah Haight Sanabria, Janet Allmon (currently retired) and Maryam Salehezadeh. In nominating Barrett, faculty in the Department of World Languages and Literatures in Dedman College of Humanities and Scientists extolled her contributions to its annual film festival. Citing the festival’s importance to their teaching of languages and cultures in the classroom, the nominators praised Barrett’s patience, efficiency, professionalism and reliability. “Heather is like our department’s film fairy – quietly working magic behind the scenes so our screens light up with stories from around the world.”



MUSTANGS ON THE MOVE



A Photographer Laura Wilson (left) and Dean Holly Jeffcoat tour *The Writers* exhibit. **B** Former Underwood Law interim Director Cassie Walker shares archival material with the SMU Libraries Student Advisory Board. **C** Peruna ignites Mustang spirit during basketball season. **D** President Jay C. Hartzell delivers a campus update to the SMU Libraries Executive Board. **E** Poetry professor and author Jahan Ramazani interviews keynote speaker Ada Limón, former U.S. poet laureate, at a poetry symposium at Bridwell Library. **F** Poet Patience Agbabi speaks at Project Poética. **G** DeGoyler Library Director Russell L. Martin, III addresses a meeting of the Grolier Club bibliophilic society. **H** Celebrating at Tables of Content are (from left) Friends board member Jo Goyne '87, '90, Jessie Shelburne '68, '74, Rob Adair, SMU Libraries Executive Board member Becky Bright '64 and Joe Goyne. **I** Table hosts lead an evening of sparkling conversation. **J** Longtime library champion Caren Prothro chats with Arianna Villarreal '26.



A big career question, asked and answered

While rotating through the SMU Libraries system, intern Raegan Benda learned more than she anticipated. With each new assignment – everything from answering late-night research questions to assisting with daily operations at the Duda Family Business Library – she knew she was in the right place and where her career was headed.

“I want to help create meaningful resources and enhance students’ academic journeys in every way I can,” Benda says. “I’m not sure I would have discovered this passion without my experiences here.”

Her internship began in August 2025 and will conclude in June. Although her primary responsibility is working with Ask Us, SMU Libraries’ online reference service, Benda also contributes to the Online Learning Team and the

constantly evaluating services and finding ways to make resources more accessible. Being part of those discussions and seeing ideas come to life in real time has been incredibly eye-opening.”

Benda, who earned her bachelor’s degree in public relations with a minor in digital marketing from the University of Oklahoma, didn’t always know she would end up in librarianship. But she always recognized the power of a good book.

“Books have been a constant in my life, offering peace during moments when I needed it most,” she says. “There is something truly special about the freedom that comes with reading and the learning that happens between the pages.”

Her mother, an English teacher, encouraged reading from the start, while her younger sister’s dream of becoming a librarian stuck with her. “After finishing my bachelor’s degree, I found myself inspired by her passion,” Benda says.



“

Books have been a constant in my life, offering peace during moments when I needed it most. There is something truly special about the freedom that comes with reading and the learning that happens between the pages.”

Student Success and Outreach Team and has supported marketing efforts by writing and editing blog posts. In addition, she developed practical supervisory skills in the business library where she helped manage student workers.

“I also had the opportunity to shadow one of our incredible law librarians, Donna Wolff (interim director of Underwood Law Library), as she taught Advanced Legal Research. Attending her class and analyzing her instructional techniques has allowed me to learn from her expertise and begin shaping my own teaching style for the future,” Benda says.

Along the way, she gained a deeper appreciation for the mission that drives SMU Libraries. “One thing that truly stands out is how deeply committed SMU’s librarians are to serving their community,” she says. “The team is

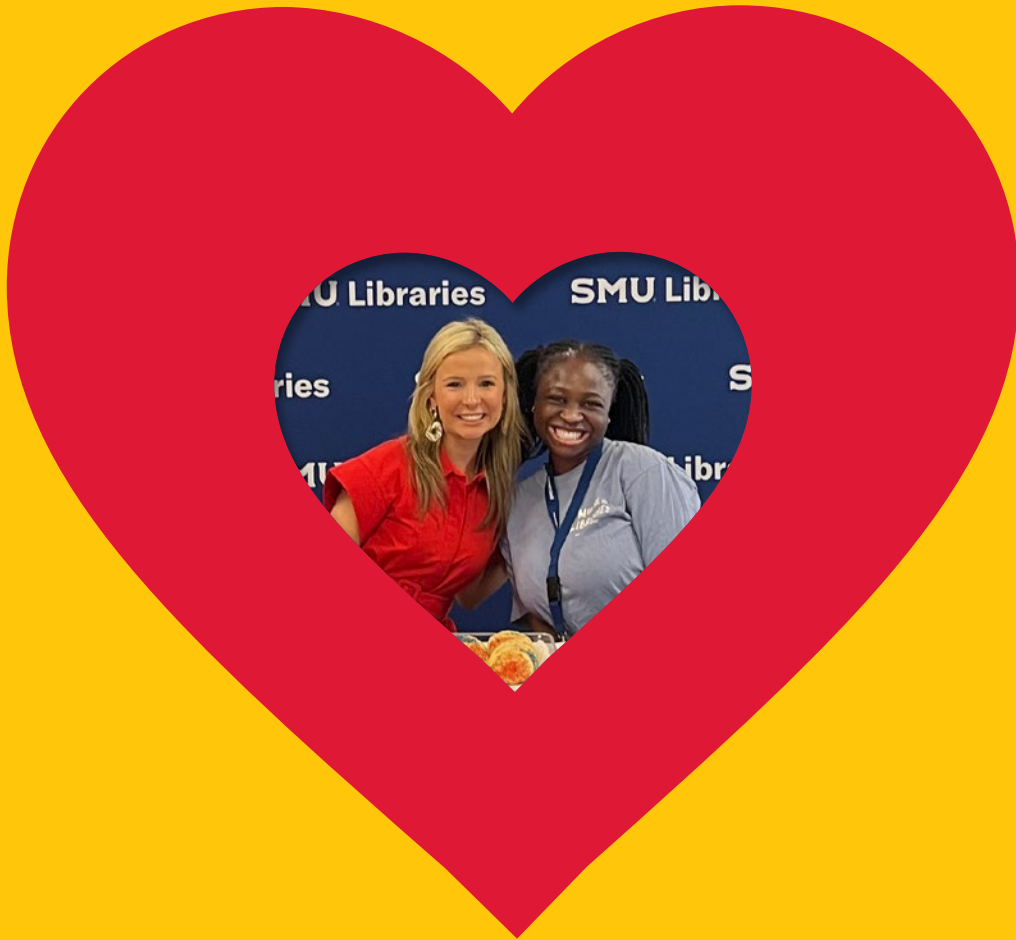
Now pursuing a master’s degree in library science with a concentration in law librarianship and legal informatics at the University of North Texas, Benda will graduate in May. Her work with SMU Libraries sealed her decision to pursue employment in an academic or law firm library.

“What I have enjoyed most is the variety of experiences that have allowed me to develop my skills in different areas of academic librarianship,” she says. “I’ve had to learn quickly, adjust often, and adapt to new challenges, and those very challenges are what have made the experience so rewarding.”

Benda admits to feeling “both happy and nostalgic” as her internship nears its end.

“There are many memories I will carry with me, but helping with Pastries with Peruna is one that will always stand out,” she says. “Engaging with the community in such a joyful way was heartwarming, and I felt so grateful to be part of it. Seeing firsthand how much people love and value their libraries reminded me why librarianship is so special.” ■

#SMUGIVINGDAY2026



So much for SMU Libraries!

Record-breaking generosity propelled SMU Libraries initiatives – student spaces in Fondren Library, Friends of SMU Libraries and the Voices of SMU Oral History Project – past their Giving Day goals. Our gratitude to all who contributed to these success stories:

Incredible impact

- Enhanced spaces spark student success.
- Friends grant program expands.
- More SMU stories find their Voice.

Powerful hour

Two SMU Libraries projects earned extra funding as Top 10 performers during Giving Day Happy Hour.

Voices champion

Thanks to Philip J. Wise '78, '81, donations to Voices of SMU Oral History Project were matched up to \$1,000.

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