

Mary Jane Buerkle, #4
TALL XIII
Session 1 – College Station, TX
July 10-13, 2012

Tuesday, July 10, 2012

I cannot remember the last time I was awake (voluntarily) at 3:30 a.m. But when my head hit the pillow the night before I left for College Station for our first TALL session, memories of being five years old and waiting for Santa on Christmas Eve flooded back. Yes, I was that excited. I was jumpy. I think I may have gotten three hours of sleep. I set three different alarms so I'd be sure to wake up.

For the past several years, I've watched many people I know go through the TALL program. They all are people I held in very high regard before and even more so now. It is such a blessing and a privilege to have achieved this goal and I am grateful for the opportunity.

After an infusion of coffee, fellow class member Lindsay Kennedy and I left Lubbock at 4:45 a.m. to take on the Texas roads to College Station (with the help of our GPS!). I hadn't been to College Station since I was in high school; this would be Lindsay's first time. We talked and shared stories the entire way there, and even stopped on a few backroads to take some pictures of crops. With both of us working in communications for our respective organizations, we don't miss a chance for a good photograph!

Almost eight hours later, I was sitting among my classmates who would join me on this incredible two-year adventure that I'd been anticipating for quite some time. I remember walking into the room and pausing to take everything in for a second. This was my very first accomplishment – I was on time! And even early! We'd already packed a lot into the day, so I have to say I was pretty proud.

Welcome/Opening Remarks/Orientation/Introductions

I'd already heard such great things about Dr. Jim from TALL alumni and others who knew him, and his commitment to and love for the program was obvious from the first moment. Hearing the statistics of applicants and interviewees was humbling as I sat there in my seat and thought not only of others who were before me, but also those who have not yet had this incredible opportunity.

First impressions to me are crucial, and our individual introductions certainly did not disappoint. I enjoyed hearing from each classmate, and picked up on a few neat connections. For example, Sally Oglesby-Harris' daughter was one of the interns I'd hired while I was working at the Lubbock Chamber of Commerce! This world truly is small and you never know where people are going to resurface in your life; TALL is no exception.

Texas Department of Criminal Justice Agriculture Today – Mr. Todd Swick

What a neat way to start off this session! I honestly didn't even know that TDCJ had an agriculture component – and so diversified at that! It's amazing what all they manage and produce on their 139,000-plus acres (cotton, vegetables, cattle, poultry, grain, hay and much more) and that they even have a textile mill and a canning operation! I really liked how Mr. Swick wrapped in the question of "are we windmills?" That made me ponder my resistance to change. I don't ever want to get "set in my ways" because this world is constantly changing and we must keep up.

Texas Forest Service – Mr. Tom Boggus, Mr. Mark Stanford, Mr. Don Hannemann, Mr. Curt Stripling

Unfortunately, it the devastating Texas wildfire season in 2011 that introduced me to the scope of the Texas Forest Service. However, I learned in this presentation just how extensive that scope truly is. The agency recently was awarded the Pulaski Award, a huge national honor for outstanding service in wildland firefighting presented each year by the National Interagency Fire Center.

One of the most interesting things to me was the Texas Wildfire Risk Assessment Portal (TxWRAP; www.texaswildfirerisk.com), where you can put in an address and it will, as it says, tell you about the wildfire risk around that certain point. When I put in my home address, my result was minimal direct impact. However, when I clicked a point just three miles south of my home, the result was “High,” meaning, “significant potential for harm or damage to life and property.” Scary!

I also did not realize that more than 80% of fires in Texas begin within two miles of a town. These men and women truly are on the front lines working alongside our firefighters and other public safety officials to protect as many people and as much property as they can. I pray that we never see another year like 2011, and I know they are, too.

Etiquette Training and Meal – Dr. Susan Quiring

It was a good thing this was one of the very first events in our session because I found myself using it later in the week! Dr. Quiring went over basic dining and other etiquette as we enjoyed a delicious meal. Some of the tips I’d forgotten, some I already knew and use regularly, and some were brand-new! I especially appreciated her going over etiquette in Brazil; that will be extremely useful on our international trip.

One of the things I noticed about Dr. Quiring is how graceful she is. Given that she also is a ballroom dance instructor, that is to be expected, but the way she carried herself won her instant credibility.

To me, this is an essential part of our leadership program because, as was discussed, a ton of business gets done at the table over a meal or simply a drink. A right or wrong move can make or break a relationship.

Wednesday, July 11, 2012

After a few hours of sleep, 7:35 a.m. came pretty early! But I was really excited about our first session especially, and of course the rest of the day.

Ag Media Training – Ag Leadership, Education and Communication Department, Texas A&M University

For me, to be completely honest, this was a pretty good test of having an open mind. Having worked on both sides (as a reporter and an industry representative), I’ve had several media trainings and even conducted a couple. But there’s always something new to learn, and I realized quickly that this particular session was going to address a situation in which I’m not quite as comfortable – being put on the spot in a news conference.

Our class divided up into teams and drew for various issues in the agricultural industry. We had two minutes to prepare before going out to face flashbulbs and a whole host of “reporters” (Texas A&M students and faculty) ready to ask every question in the book.

My team did as best we could addressing a situation regarding e.coli found in cantaloupes. I was trying to remember every little rule and keep control of the news conference. But let me tell you, the reporters were tough! They asked about every little piece of information we might have left out. I tried to maintain composure as I answered questions and everyone else on my team did as well. By the time we were done, I was exhausted! Those reporters did a great job!

After that, Mr. Tobin Redwine talked to us about nonverbal communication, even using pictures from our “news conferences” as illustration! I didn’t even think that they’d be using those pictures for that! Turns out we were all pretty open with our information and no one got angry or frustrated.

The biggest takeaway for me from this session was the nonverbal communication. It’s so easy to forget and I get so wrapped up in what I’m saying that sometimes I don’t think about how I appear to someone. That’s so important in leadership because people do notice! It’s also imperative that we as leaders know how to address the media, because often we’re the first ones who are called upon to speak on behalf of an issue or an organization. I also enjoyed having the opportunity to learn from my fellow classmates – this actually was a great way to get to know people indirectly!

Strategy Trajectory of American Security – Dr. Dave McIntyre

Dr. McIntyre talked to us about what strategy really is and the trajectory of our nation with regard to national security. He talked about DIIME-D, which stands for Diplomacy, Information, Intelligence, Military, Economics, and Domestic Aspects. He defined a state, nation, nation/state and empire which set the parameters for what we discussed. He talked about different perspectives of man and natural inclinations toward both war and peace.

One interesting thing he mentioned is that wars involve force. We always hear about “war on poverty” or other things. War is at the nation/state level, and there are rules in achieving victory, so to say we’re “waging a war on poverty” is incorrect.

Presentations such as Dr. McIntyre’s are extremely useful because they teach us to think in a “big-picture” fashion, a necessary skill for a leader. We must employ strategy, defined by Dr. McIntyre as a concept of cause and effect to achieve victory against a thinking enemy over time.

Lunch and Tour – ABC Equipment, John & Connie Giesenschlag, John Smith (Citizens State Bank), Scott Taylor (Monsanto)

After those two presentations, I think we were all definitely ready for lunch! While the food was excellent, what was even better was seeing the passion for the TALL program that the Giesenschlags have. I had the privilege of sitting with Connie Giesenschlag and I enjoyed getting to know her and more about their family.

Jody Wiggins and Family – Wiggins LLP-Watermelon Warehouse, Inc.

We never turn down a rain, but unfortunately that kept us from seeing the full scope of this family-owned operation. But we did learn about the process of getting watermelons to the huge boxes in stores! One thing that’s unique about this operation is their marketing – they go all out on their shipping boxes, showcasing their business through artwork on the box. It definitely makes them stand out!

Blue Bell Creameries – Mr. Paul Kruse, CEO and President

As an avid Blue Bell fan, I was officially in ice cream heaven! We split up into tour groups and Mr. Kruse was my tour group leader. We got a “behind the scenes” tour that certainly is not offered to the general public. Mr. Kruse even gave us a little Blue Bell cup of ice cream before it goes to the freezer that sets it, and it’s a completely different consistency than what you might expect! It’s softer (obviously) and you can taste more of the milk product, in my opinion.

Blue Bell obviously is committed to quality and their distribution area is pretty small compared to other brands. However, that’s what sets them apart. In fact, Mr. Kruse talked about recently launching in Colorado and becoming the #1 ice cream in just 13 weeks!

This entire tour was absolutely incredible and to me, one of the highlights of the week. Not only did we get to see a first-class quality facility, Mr. Kruse was an excellent guide and presenter. His down-to-earth demeanor and willingness to talk to all of us was refreshing in a world where the CEO sometimes seems more removed. As we were walking through during our tour, he spoke to everyone and everyone knew who he was. It’s so obvious that he has their respect just by being himself. That’s the kind of leader I want to be, and while I enjoyed this special treat (no pun intended), it was the example set by Mr. Kruse that spoke to me the most.

Oh, and by the way, I chose Peaches and Homemade Vanilla ice cream! Yum!

Ellison’s Greenhouses, Inc. – Ms. PJ Ellison-Kalil

You haven’t seen anyone grow poinsettias until you come to Ellison’s Greenhouses! It was so neat to hear about the care that goes into each plant in preparation for the Christmas season. My only regret is that I don’t plan to be back in the area to pick several up this winter. My husband’s and my wedding was just before Christmas and our flowers were mostly poinsettias, so I am a bit partial there!

But aside from that, I enjoyed hearing Ms. Ellison-Kalil’s reflections on her time in the TALL program and just business and life in general. She’s had to make some tough choices in her business to allow it to continue to thrive. Her passion for what she does is unmistakable.

Brazos Valley Recycling – Ms. Amanda Mancuso

Our tour of this locally-owned recycling and composting facility was fascinating. They can recycle cardboard, plastic, metal, wood, paper, yard waste, aluminum, concrete, brick/block, glass, and food and liquid waste. They even have a food waste recycling program where the waste is transformed into beneficial compost. They truly are a tremendous partner in preserving and protecting our environment. I have to admit that I’m not the best at recycling, but touring Brazos Valley Recycling has made me consider what I’m doing as my part. Lubbock offers opportunities for recycling and I already have taken advantage of those since I’ve completed this session!

Dinner at Charlie and Cindy Mancuso’s

I think that if there were a red carpet actually available, the Mancusos would have rolled it out for us! It was so kind of them to share their evening, their beautiful home, and their family with us. We all had such a great time just talking and getting to know each other even better.

Thursday, July 12, 2012

ChallengeWorks – Mr. Bob Gantt

Well, here it was – the ropes course that all of the TALL alumni I knew had told me about! I was looking forward to an incredible experience and this definitely did not disappoint.

We began with a few “getting to know you” exercises before dividing up into two teams. Art was our leader and thus began a day of thinking, learning, working together, and discovering things about ourselves and each other. Our group immediately seemed to have a healthy amount of trust for each other, so we dove right into everything. There were tests of our creativity, wit, and skill and we rose to the challenge every time.

As for the log suspended 30 feet above the ground, I surprisingly scaled right up the pole and across with no problem whatsoever. When I was in Leadership Lubbock, I did not do the high exercise on our ropes course. I let my fear get the best of me, I suppose. This time around, I didn’t even bat an eye. As I reflect on why, I’m not sure whether I’ve just grown up a little or what, but it wasn’t even as big of a challenge for me. That was a neat victory and certainly an encouragement!

Texas Engineering Extension Service – Emergency Services Training Institute – Mr. Mike Wisby

Again, no one was complaining about the rain, but unfortunately it prevented us from getting the full tour of the fire training facility. I had no idea that firefighters from around the world come to College Station to train at this amazing facility! That certainly explained all the firefighters staying at our hotel.

TALL Reception and Evening Dinner with Mr. David Carrabba

Let me first say that the new AgriLife Center is a fantastic facility. That, coupled with the opportunity to meet and mingle with some of the finest people in the agriculture industry, made for a memorable evening. This was another “red-carpet” moment! Everyone I spoke to was very kind and engaging, and enthusiastic about the TALL program and willing to embrace us as a new part of this prestigious group.

Dr. Jim welcomed everyone before introducing Dr. Mark Hussey, Vice Chancellor and Dean of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Texas A&M. Dr. Hussey is very supportive of TALL and talked about the impact and the true value of the program.

The keynote speaker was Dr. Brett Giroir, Vice Chancellor for Strategic Initiatives for the Texas A&M System. Dr. Giroir, who was a pediatrician, now has led biotechnology initiatives and most recently played a large role in securing the Center for Innovation in Advanced Development and Manufacturing for Texas A&M. This center, part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, will work to develop vaccines and medicines that will aid in addressing biological and pandemic threats. This is huge for Texas A&M and for the whole area economically.

After Dr. Giroir’s address, each member of TALL XIII introduced themselves to the entire group before the reception ended and each class member left for dinner with a sponsor, a TALL alumni, or someone otherwise associated with Texas A&M or the program. Brant Mettler and I went to dinner with Mr. David Carrabba with Gooseneck Trailer Manufacturing. Mr. Carrabba also has several other business interests, so we all had plenty to share and learn about each other! This evening was another highlight of the week.

Friday, July 13, 2012

Friday already? It seemed like we'd just gotten to College Station! The week absolutely flew. Lindsay and I packed our stuff back into the truck and headed to the Bush School of Government and Public Service.

Bioenergy Research – Mr. Bob Avant

With the demand for energy possibly doubling by 2050, our nation and world will continue to look to agriculture for opportunities. We have so many challenges facing us, from tensions in the Middle East to environmental restrictions to an inconsistent energy policy. Wind and solar energy are expected to become a larger part of the grid (up to 20%) but transmission remains an issue for wind. All of these factors and others make it imperative that Texas AgriLife Research continue to explore alternatives and how agriculture will be involved.

Texas Veterinary Medical Diagnostic Laboratory – Dr. Roger Parker

I was not familiar with the Texas Veterinary Medical Diagnostic Laboratory before this session. They must play a central role in disease identification to aid in our national security efforts, not to mention their role in general veterinary medicine and ensuring the health of our animals.

Leadership, National Securities and International Affairs – Dr. Joseph Cerami

Dr. Cerami discussed the nature of national security pre- and post-September 11 and our place internationally. As did Dr. McIntyre, he talked about world views, and we named recent and current leaders who were Realists, Idealists, Pragmatists and Constructivists. For me that was important because although I enjoy history, I like tying things to current events as well. This was yet another opportunity for me to think on a world scale. So often we get caught up in our day-to-day, but as leaders, we have to have a bigger picture. Dr. Cerami illustrated this perfectly and because of his presentation, I have found myself consuming news differently.

“Behind the Scenes” Tour of the George Bush Presidential Archives – Mr. Douglas Campbell

What an extraordinary way to finish our first TALL session! I just thought my office was organized. What seems like every minute of George Bush's presidency is chronicled in what must be thousands upon thousands of files and boxes, all organized meticulously. Mr. Campbell and everyone working with the Archives love what they do and they are so willing to share and answer questions. Having this opportunity was yet another chance to reflect on the enormity of the TALL program and how blessed I am to be in this class.

Overall Impressions

At every turn I was reminded of the magnitude of being a part of this program. Not that I ever questioned it, but I believe you have to actually experience it to truly understand. I just thought I had an idea of what I was in for. The best thing is, this is only the beginning. As one TALL alumnus told me at the reception, “If you think this first week has been good, you better get ready, because you're in for the ride of your life!” So true! This is indeed an honor and I plan to seize every precious minute of it. I look forward to seeing everyone in West Texas in October!

Sally Oglesby Harris #9
TALL XIII
Session 1 - "Extension, Education, Expectations"
College Station, Texas
July 10-13, 2012

NARRATIVES

Day 1: (Tuesday, July 10, 2012)

Welcome and Opening Remarks

Dr. Jim Mazurkiewicz greeted the new TALL XIII participants. Holding my breath for what seemed days, I felt somewhat at ease and humbled to be included among such a diverse group of agriculturalists. We gave a short introduction of ourselves after which time Dr. Jim explained what was to be expected of us over the next two years. TALL XIII will be a great adventure.

"Texas Department of Criminal Justice Agriculture Today"

"Are We Windmills?" Dr. Todd Swick has certainly proved that sound management skills, good work ethics, knowing how not to lose your "head" works to keep this program viable in Texas agriculture today. Dr. Swick, Program Specialist-V, for the TDCJ was outstanding. By all accounts, no one should be going hungry in the state or for that matter the country. The number of livestock managed and crops that are produced on the 140,000 acres of land holdings combined with the planning to continue making quotas during drought condition is admirable. TDCJ facilities', being self-sustaining, is a testament to any business model. Not one thing wasted! I found it interesting that TDCJ does not receive even a percentage of the mineral interest generated off the land, which could help in the financial picture. But then "starvation is motivation", and they are doing a superb job without assistance.

Presentations at the Texas Forest Service- "Conserve, Protect and Lead"

The Texas Forest Service is a vital part of Texas agriculture. Director Tom Boggus, along with Mark Stanford, Don Hannemann & Curt Stripling gave us a great inside look. Their purpose is to "conserve, protect & lead" through training and use of technologies. TFS was recently awarded the Ed Palasky Award, which usually goes to western states in the USA. This talk was very informative and supplied me with great resources to manage my underbrush and old growth during the drought times that we are facing in West Texas, specifically, Crockett County. I was given tools to create my own project area (ranch) to assess the fire risk at any given time of year. This will help plan for fire emergency or hopefully help prevent run- away burns. The technology has made fighting fires, as well as other types of disasters, such as the Space Shuttle, possible from a central Command Post, working with other state or local government agencies during emergency situations. The TFS tries to make order out of chaos. What makes the TFS different is that they have a servant's heart and bias for action. Human life is priority. I am looking forward to researching our local government to see if they utilize this service and stay abreast of information that is readily available to the public.

Etiquette Training and Meal

After a busy afternoon we had a chance to freshen up for a nice dinner at the Hilton Hotel dining room. Our assignment for the evening was to learn proper etiquette and conversation for dining out in a business setting. Many deals or made or lost in this arena. The room was appointed with round tables that had every imaginable piece of silverware, glassware and plating. No assigned seating, so everyone migrated to a chair. Dr. Susan Quiring was our instructor for the evening. She was the cutest lady. You could tell that she was very passionate about what she was teaching us from the moment we began. I so appreciated the refresher course in basic manners and manipulation of the setting. Many times we get too busy to slow down and acknowledge the time and efforts put into preparing a beautiful meal and table. Enjoyable and informative lesson.

Day 2: (Wednesday, July 11, 2012)

AG Media Training

What exactly is "Nonverbal Communication"? I thought it was just being really quiet and not talking unless you knew what you were talking about. Wrong! Well Dr. Deb Dunsford and Ms Holli Leggette gave us a really good lesson in verbal and nonverbal communication first this morning. This was nerve wracking, but one of the most eye-opening events I have ever encountered. We have barely gotten to know one another and suddenly we are given a team of 4 persons, a topic and two minutes to present points of concern to a mob (actually a class of upper level students). There were lights, cameras and some serious actions. There was not a dry palm in the house! The 7 topics were current issues in agriculture and we had to keep our wits about us while answering skewed questions. In summary, *"We had fed wild hogs pink slime from a mad cow laced with E-coli that came off a farm taken by eminent domain that had a hydrofrac job not covered in the 2012 Farm Bill."* Sometimes you cannot fix stupid, but you must control ignorance with knowledge. Getting the right information to the masses is critical. This was one of the best exercises in self-control I have ever participated in.

"Strategy Trajectory of American Security"

This topic was definitely the attention grabber. Just when you thought it was safe to get back into the water, Dr. Dave McIntyre, *Former Supreme Court Justice of US (Stolen Valor Act)*, filled us in on the "real deal". McIntyre is actually the VP for Homeland Security, National Graduate School. He holds nothing back in his explanation of American security or the lack there of. Key parts for an acronym DIME which stands for Diplomacy, Intelligence, Military and Economics has now grown to include Information and Domestic, thus DIIMED. There is substantial material in this presentation for lengthy communication, but what I surmised was that the "whole" is no longer working. *Diplomacy* is failing, *Intelligence* issues are more complex than ever, *Information* is as broad as the internet, *Military* is only as strong and equipped as the roughest gangs, American trained Zetas, the *Economics* fall way short and 50% less than break even, and *Domestic* security can no longer be kept in check. America depends upon Americans to maintain her strength. Holding on to our values and not allowing the internal overthrow is going to be our only saving grace. Pay attention to the liberties being threatened, and do not take freedom for granted. Be aware of policies and exercise your God given right to vote.

Lunch and Tour ABC Equipment Company

Loaded the bus and headed to Snook, TX with a very serious group of individuals still reeling from the prior presentation. Casey Cook and I were to preside at our next stop and I was a little uneasy about trying to pronounce one of our hosts' names! GIESENSCHLAG! Not a very common name in West Texas. I had no problem announcing Jody Wiggins, Wiggins Watermelons Warehouse, and John Smith with Citizens State Bank or Scott Taylor with Monsanto Company. Dr Jim gives me a quick lesson in pronunciations: *Geezer-in-slaw!* Got it! We arrived at the ABC Equipment Co. and John R. Giesenschlag Farm in time for lunch in one of the huge barns. We proceeded to find our hosts and get a bit of bio for their introductions. Mr. Giesenschlag (John) is one of the most gracious people I have ever met, as was his wife, Connie. Their top priority was to meet the new TALL class and feed us some good food. The hosts arranged for the local Livestock Judging Team to serve, all the tables had colorful settings with produce that we were going to see. Weather was not going to allow us to take the usual tour of the farm, but the much needed rains didn't dampen the event. Those barn floors were clean enough to eat off and contained every piece of equipment known to farming or for repairs. As for the food, well that was the BEST sauerkraut I've ever put in my mouth! Still wishing I had gone back for thirds.

We had a delightful meal and wonderful conversation with good people, several who are TALL alumni. Each host spoke briefly on their expertise and welcomed questions from the floor. These groups have a great partnership of working together to supply the needs of agriculture in many areas. All are strong supporters of the TALL program and encourage growth, experience and community leadership. The bar was set very high at this first productions gathering.

Wiggins Watermelon Warehouse, Inc.

Just around the corner we traveled to Jody Wiggins Watermelon Warehouses. This was to be an eventful tour of the harvesting process for his local operation. Rain had made it impossible to enter the fields, so there were no machines in operation. We talked in depth about the history of growing watermelons in the Brazos river bottom, sandy soils of Seminole and Rio Grande Valley, and also how unlike a lot of farming operations, they are still a very much a "hands on" procedure. It takes manpower to keep the flow going. Combined with a great set up of conveyor belts, scales and sorters this shed runs like a well oiled machine that it is from field to truck to you. Good managerial skill and leadership is necessary to keep labor and product running cohesively. The huge cartons that the produce is packed and shipped directly to the stores were so perfect. I will be looking in my area for those unique Wiggins' Watermelon containers and will know immediately that the product is outstanding. Oh, did I mention watermelon was placed on our tables at lunch not only as centerpiece but for our tasty dessert. Yum!

Tour Bus with Dr. Jim:

Between the lunch stop and our next adventure, we were treated to a bus tour with Dr. Jim on the microphone. He could get a job anywhere in the world with his great ability to tell the masses all the sights on the left and right. Passing through the little town of Independence, TX, we could see the

gravesite of Sam Houston's wife just across the highway from a beautiful little church. We were shown the blue bell flower, which was what our next venue, Blue Bell was named after. And all this time I thought the name came from a milk cow!

Tour of Blue Bell Creameries

The moment we stepped off the bus were greeted with teasing by Mr. Paul Kruse tapping his watch. Dr. Jim prides himself on punctuality, and we were a couple of minutes behind schedule. There is such a great undercurrent between all our hosts and Dr. Jim and the TALL groups. We entered the beautiful old red brick creamery in business for 105 years and still privately owned and operated. We were immediately stripped of all our loose items, asked to don a hairnet and proceed in groups of 4-5 to the realm of ice cream makers! My group had the most informative woman who had worked at the creamery for 15 years. All the employees were laughing, smiling and just downright happy! I noticed that Mr. Kruse called them by name & even hugged several of them as our groups' paths crisscrossed the plant. Now that's a sign of good management.

We viewed each part of the process beginning with the milk coming into the plant already cleaned, pasteurized and ready to blend. Next it traveled through miles of pipes to the chosen destination to mix in ingredients, flavorings, nuts, candies or both and semi frozen just prior to being squeezed into the containers on the assembly lines. Lids secure, boxed and off to the flash freezer (which by the way was a comfortable 25 degrees! Burrrrr!). And after traveling in and out the levels end up in the loading area where refrigerated trucks are loaded and off to the distributors. There are 3 creameries scattered across the US and 1000 trucks in the Blue Bell fleet.

After our whirlwind tour we were treated to any flavor of ice cream and escorted to the boardroom where Mr. Kruse and his senior staff gave us a brief overview of the business. Issues in agriculture are foremost on their minds due to the cause and effect of the Farm Bill and price fluctuations on ingredients that are produced in-house or purchased. TALL is very important to Blue Bell and Mr. Kruse is a great supporter in many areas and his enthusiasm and work ethic is one to be copied. "One Product, One Price – THE BEST". The harder we work the better the end result. The TALL XIII class should take a great lesson from this visit and I personally appreciate the candidness we experienced in conversation with this group of leaders.

Loading up the bus was like herding cats. We all had a chance to go through the gift shop before leaving Blue Bell. To our surprise upon check out there was "no charge" for the items we had chosen! How special was that!

Bus ride with Dr. Jim

Traveling down the road we were once again entertained by Dr. Jim. He talked to us about the vegetation of the area, the Bermuda grass farms and way of life growing up in this part of Texas. It all fit right in with our next stop.

Tour of Ellison's Greenhouses, Inc.

We arrived at the Ellison's Greenhouse in Brenham right on time, 4:15pm. We were greeted at the front doors by two lovely ladies and some very friendly dogs. My kind of place! Dr. Jim introduced us to PJ Ellison-Kalil, owner & operator. She was with a darling little woman that we were introduced to, Mrs. Ellison, her mother. Mrs. Ellison was the first woman to ever operate a greenhouse distribution facility. She did so due to health problems occurring with Mr. Ellison. This made me think of all the situations in which women find themselves face-to-face with a "sink or swim" scenario. I somehow could relate to this story and found myself listening with intensity to everything Ms. Ellison-Kalil had to say. Most people are not motivated by money, but love for each other. We need to be prepared to keep our head and deal with life, people and our business.

PJ led us into the greenhouse area where she gave us a quick history of just how Ellison's came to be. During her talk, her father, Jim Ellison, stopped by to add a little flavor and to encourage our TALL XIII class experience. He left us with one thought, "Never assume anything! That'll get you in trouble." Good advice.

Our walk began with a trip to the sprigging room. PJ answered any and all questions as we weaved our way through the rows of potting tables, explaining watering methods, light and absence of light for certain plants. We got to the poinsettias' area, the ornamental flower they are best known for, Texas-size, growing 5-6 feet tall. Hard work goes into this business and seeing how it is a \$9 Billion industry, with Texas being the third largest producer, PJ wants to keep it a thriving agribusiness. She promotes her greenhouses every chance she can and caters to the public's wants and desires. What more could the consumer want? Staying at the top of her game, PJ remains an active in TALL alumnus and TALL supporter. She has truly become a force in her agricultural arena. What an exceptional lady!

Tour of Brazos Valley Recycling

Back on the edge of College Station we unloaded yet one more time on our day of adventures. The BVR- "THINK Globally ACT Locally" was the logo on the trucks and then on trash haulers was "bigDUMP" trucks. So clever! The Mancuso family owns and operates this facility for the purpose of gathering recyclable materials and magically turning them into some of the coolest things. One man's waste is truly another man's treasure. Amanda Mancuso, daughter of Charlie & Cindy Mancuso gave us a great overview. Huge dumping bins filled with trash were transformed into lawn mulch, roadbed, shavings, land stabilizer, fertilizer, wood chips and compost products. There were large bales of plastics and cardboard readied for shipment to recycling plants in Alabama. No stone left unturned and still more thoughts on how to use other things that have not to this point been reborn. Very cool!

Dinner at home with the Mancuso Family

TALL XIII loaded in various vehicles and caravanned to the home of Charlie and Cindy Mancuso for dinner. Charlie loves to cook and entertain and especially for the TALL participants. Dr. Jim said we were in for a treat and he was so right. First of all, the home is absolutely amazing with the manicured lawns and gorgeous natural stone pool. I really liked the "chicken coop". Really?! Best idea ever for that 4-H barn that no longer houses project animals. Plans are in the works at Oglesby Ranch!

The group took some time to mingle and socialize, while meeting others that the Mancusos had invited to join us. Most everyone was immediate family. Family is what I realized is the lifeline of this operation. They all work together at the BVR and on their family deer ranch. Everyone plays a very, yet unique part in this orchestra. Charlie gave much of the praise to his raising and on that note introduced his father, who spoke about his cattle operation. What really genuine Godly people!

The food was oh so good! Dessert was unbelievable.... Upside down German chocolate cake! Now, really, who does that?! God blessed that recipe! This was a wonderful evening with people that are strong believers in agriculture, the TALL program and the preservation of the values of our rural way of life. Cheers!

Day 3: (Thursday, July 12, 2012)**"Challenges Works"**

Well, my expectations coming into this session were one of skepticism. I couldn't quite figure out how playing games in the heat and humidity was going to solve the problems of the AgriWorld or any other world for that matter. Best case scenario was that I would lose all the calories that I had put on since my arrival 72 hours ago. Dr. Bob Gantt put us in a circle and the show began. Not knowing my counterparts all that well, kind of felt a little vulnerable, but I figured so did they, until the 1st question asked left me standing all by myself with 50 pairs of eyes on me wondering "why I like my toilet paper roll coming from the bottom side instead of the top!" Awkward..... 2nd question shuffled the deck, and I was once more involved with a group. Whew! Teams were formed and challenges began.

Art was our fearless leader and guide. First order of business was a team name. Did not take long and our brainstorming result was the "13 Highflying Jackasses". (TALL XIII class, ropes & Ag) Art knew he was in for an interesting day. The dynamics of this team were amazing. We watched barriers fall quickly with each challenge using *a plan + solutions = goals achieved*. We were GOOD!!! My own personal challenge came with the 60ft climbing wall. It was not the team manning the rope that scared me, but my own fear of not being strong enough to rise even a few feet. Once on my way, the voices of encouragement from my fellow TALL classmates spurred me on and I felt energized and determined. This old gal made it all the way to the TOP! Great lesson in team work. Of course, I am still sore after a week! Ha!

Challenge Works is a vital part of the TALL orientation process. I am much more comfortable with my TALL XIII group as a result. It was like having a window seat. You got to observe the “fight or flight” a person demonstrates during a given situation. Thinking processes are enhanced and you fed off the positive attitudes of one another. This was a super experience! The staff that planned these activities is a master of human nature and deserves the highest praise. 4-H Motto - “To make the Best, Better!”, and they did! Bravo! Oh, and the box lunches really hit the spot! Thanks to all the wonderful TALL supporters!

Overview of the Texas Engineering Extension Service (TEEK)

Once again the weather played a role in the tour of the complete facility at the Texas Engineering Extension Service. We were greeted by two very nice young ladies that help coordinate tours and classes at TEEK. They updated us on the lightning danger. We could not be around the fuel loaded areas in bad weather. It was very hectic in the main lobby of the TEEK. Training personnel from over 15 South American countries were there getting certified and they were being brought inside for safety precautions. During the overview talk an older gentleman came in and sat beside me on the bench. I later learned that he was 92 yrs. old and the oldest Mexican Fire Chief. How cool is that! Should have used my ranch Spanish and struck up a conversation.

The TEEK is a highly intensive training area that has every obstacle imaginable to teach firefighters how to do their job, save lives and stay alive. The fuels they use to imitate a burn are less toxic than typical burn materials, but all the same FIRE! My nephew wants to be a firefighter and I think this is the perfect place for him to come after high school graduation. They gave me plenty of information to get him started. In conclusion, I was totally impressed with what TEEK does and is doing to help keep us all safe.

Social and Reception at the AgriLife Center

Dr. Jim allowed the ladies an extra 15 minutes “drying time” for the reception. After a day of working out, those were precious minutes. Arriving at the new AgriLife Center was truly awesome. A room filled with accomplished people in various fields coming together for one cause. TALL was definitely represented from all areas. After catching my breath, I realized they were specifically there to meet us, the TALL XIII class, to meet me! We took our individual photos and then headed to the floor to “mingle”. I was out of my element, but somehow everyone in the room had a smile that invited your introduction. It was amazing!

Greetings were given by Dr. Mark Hussey, Vice Chancellor and Dean of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences. His remarks touted the TALL program and the vision he has for the program. Dr. Hussey also praised the TALL XIII class on being selected.

Keynote Address was given by Dr. Brett Giroir, Vice Chancellor for Strategic Initiatives at Texas A&M. His comments were very inspiring. His group had worked together on a common goal and brought it to fruition by receiving a \$285.6 million contract. These funds will help build 1 of 3 U.S Dept. of Health & Human Services Centers for Innovation in Advanced Development & Manufacturing. This is a great achievement and one that Texas A&M University, Texas and U.S.A. will benefit for years to come. The Center will develop, manufacture, provide, perform and train the next generation in the area of Biosecurity. Congratulations on a job well done.

Once again Dr. Jim took the podium and asked that the TALL XIII class members to come forward introduce themselves and give a brief background spot. Each of us is so different and accomplished in our own right. I felt so humbled to be among this group of people. When my turn came, it was so surreal that I do not even remember what I said other than knowing I had forgotten to include facts about my ranching business. Oh, my! Dr. Jim assured me that I would have ample opportunity to get it right. Several people actually knew where Ozona is located, and in fact my guest hosts for dinner were Jack & Jodie Baggett from home. Jack was in the TALL II class. We had a most enjoyable dinner and the whole experience was memorable.

Day 4: (Friday, July 13, 2012)

"Bio Energy Research"- Bush School of Government

Mr. Bob Avant, Program Director, Corporate Relations, Texas Agrilife Research opened our morning presentations. This was our last morning and time restraints were making it harder for subject matter to be covered. The topic is broad, but Mr. Avant was firm in his belief that bio energy is well on the way into this era. Some of the things discussed were sustainability issues, supply verses population growth, conservation of resources. One very interesting plant species, the Guar, which can be used for alternative fuel is now being grown in US. Understanding how bio energy works in society today is opening new avenues, like the biomass project that I hope to have at the ranch in the near future. I found this all very fascinating. Wish we had had more time to converse.

"Responsibilities of the TVMDL"

Our next speaker was Dr. Roger Parker with the Texas Veterinary Medicine Diagnostics Laboratory. I really liked hearing what has happened to all the samples from livestock that I have had to send to A&M over the years I have been in ranching. Anytime you lose sheep or goats unexpectedly, the source for answers has always been the TVMDL. I finally understood the process. These folks have their hands full! Labs are strategically located in more densely populated areas to help expedite the diagnosis and prevention of diseases. They do a fantastic job. They are aware of homeland security issues in the food supply and keep close tabs on possibilities of threat to Texas and the contiguous states.

"Leadership, National Securities and International Affairs"

Our time is short and Dr. Joseph Cerami took advantage of the shorten presentation to pour a ton of information at us. Bottom line is that we are no longer a nation unto ourselves. The tragedy of

9-11, our lives will forever be changed. Every aspect of how we deal with others must be scrutinized, evaluated and viewed from the inside out. Dr. Cerami gave his opinion on world views and how to parallel them to those seeking power. He gave us a lot to think about in a very short time. I am still scratching my head, but I am sure given time to ponder there will be a conclusion.

Photo Session- "Freedom Horses"- George Bush Presidential Library

Breathing fresh air and viewing the most gorgeous sculptures of wild horses was the perfect back drop for our TALL XIII picture. We are all starting to tire but one final smile and all is, as they say "in the record books". A picture is worth a thousand words. We are true CLASSMATES!

"Behind the Scenes" Tour of the George Bush Presidential Archives

What a way to end the week! The Bush Library is so beautiful. The entry hall was filled with high school students' art work from around the state. We wandered around for just a few minutes until our guide, Mr. Douglas Campbell, joined us for a wonderful look at the secret world of documents. We were briefed on what to do and not to do prior to going up the stairs. Everything that we saw was classified, so we really didn't see anything but rows and rows of labeled boxes. Mr. Campbell explained how all the materials are categorized, copied and then stored in secured areas until which time they become public. Everyone that works in Archives has special clearance and is subject to "gag rules". You have to love history and/ or politics to be employed here. Impressive group of young people.

There were rooms with gifts given to President Bush, but due to rules he is not allowed to keep most of them so they come here to be preserved. Word to the wise.... don't send your President something you think he/she is going to get to keep. It just doesn't happen. Am anxious to return and take a tour of the museum.

Closing Remarks and Adjourn

Cannot believe Session 1 is over! Dr. Jim did a short summary on requirements and time frames for those things. He praised us for our efforts to follow the guidelines and for being prompt. He told us we would be receiving information on Session 2 – Lubbock/Amarillo in about a month so to prepare. Dr. Jim encouraged us to do our speaking engagements about what we had learned and to spread the knowledge we have gained the past week. I plan to do just that.

My Summary of Session 1- College Station

Tired but inspired! My selection to this elite group of individuals has already been a highlight in my life. I am so looking forward to making lifetime friends, connections and changes that advance our chosen livelihoods involving Agriculture. Programs like TALL can only stimulate great minds to help keep our great state and this great nation at the forefront of agricultural industry. I am humbled to be a part of something so meaningful. Thank you to TALL, the alumni, all the supporters, teachers, and mentors for selecting me to such an honored position. Also, thank you to God, my family and friends for their love and support on this great journey. I promise to give this my very BEST.

