



postscript. A Ring for Their Fingers

The assignment seemed straightforward enough: design a class ring that is uniquely OU and determine its marketability. A broad-based committee of representatives from the University of Oklahoma Student Association, Crimson Club, the President's Leadership Class, the sophomore, junior and senior classes, veteran OU administrators, faculty and alumni accepted the challenge, approved the concept and met through the 1999-2000 school year to make it happen.

For the past five years, the University of Oklahoma has had an official class ring and a formal Ring Ceremony to mark its distribution. Unveiled in March 2000, under the auspices of the Office of Student Affairs and with the official blessing of UOSA, the ring features traditional Sooner symbols. In the center of the ring, not surprisingly, is the venerable, interlocking "OU," surrounded by the border from the OU seal with its distinctive Native American flavor.

On each side of the ring are representations of the arches—senior class gifts of years gone by—reflecting the Cherokee Gothic architecture throughout the campus. Under one arch, which bears



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Long-time Pride of Oklahoma Director Gene Thrailkill, left, now retired, receives his class ring from Ring Association Chair Jeremy Brannan at the 2004 Ring Ceremony.

the institution's founding date—1890—stands the Seed Sower; beneath the other arch, inscribed with the individual's graduation date, is a tree, a tribute to pioneering president David Ross Boyd's efforts to landscape the barren prairie campus he inherited.

Committee member Jeb Boatman, now a Washington, D.C., attorney, remembers co-chairs Kathy Kelley and Patrick Colaw moderating intense discussions as the symbols were selected and submitted to Jostens, who had been awarded the exclusive production contract. "Everyone wanted to be faithful to OU's history and tradi-

tions," he says. "It was fun working with Jostens' designers, but they put up with way more than they should have as we kept changing the ring."

The ring had to be gold, preferably available in white or yellow gold—10, 14 or 18 karat—and in four different weights, suitable for men or women. Students who had completed 72 hours were to be allowed to order their ring, to be worn with the OU facing toward the wearer until graduation, then turned to face out. It was also decided that the ring should be available to alumni, allowing those who had previous rings to trade theirs in on the new version or for purchase by those who had never had a ring.

As a special feature of the Ring Ceremony, held each fall before friends and family in the Oklahoma Memorial Union, a previously unannounced alumnus honoree is selected to receive a class ring. The first recipient in fall 2000 was OU President David L. Boren. Others have included Max Weitzenhoffer, Archie Dunham, LaQueta Jenkins and Lee Allan Smith. In an unusual twist in fall 2004, recently retired, long-time Pride of Oklahoma Marching Band director Gene Thrailkill was declared an honorary alumnus and awarded the ring in recognition of the band's 100th anniversary.

Soon after its introduction, the class ring project was handed off to the University of Oklahoma Alumni Association's student arm, the OU Alumni Ambassadors. The program is entirely student run from the business details to the ceremonial recognition.

Those who launched the OU ring project remain proud of their work. "It was important to us to create a single, significant, unifying symbol across the generations, identifying us as Sooners," Boatman says.

Five years later, he still wears his ring.

— CJB



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Ring Ceremony honoree Gene Thrailkill compares his just-acquired class ring to the woman's model worn by one of his new classmates.