

FOR ALL TEXAS-KIND

Incoming Texas Exes president Machree Gibson wants to showcase UT's value to the whole state

BY TIM TALIAFERRO

THE BEST LOBBYISTS, LIKE THE BEST STORYTELLERS, always know their audience. For incoming Texas Exes president Machree Garrett Gibson, BA '82, JD '91, Life Member, who's been representing clients in the halls of the Texas Capitol for 16 years, it's a skill she's honed to perfection. • "Priority 1 for me as president," she says, "is to let the rest of Texas and the Legislature know how important the University is and what a difference it makes to the economy and quality of life in Texas."

These marching orders come from decades of working in and with state government and seeing how poorly the University has fared in session after legislative session.

Gibson grew up in the shadow of the Capitol, but dreamed of going to college on the East Coast. She graduated from high school a semester early to start working full-time.

"My dad promised me a car if I stayed at home and went to UT," Gibson says. "I sold my dream for a Chevette."

She got a secretarial job at the Capitol her freshman year that set her on a course toward a career in public service—"At a legislator's office, you could be making coffee one day and drafting a bill the next," she says.

As Gibson made her way through UT, she began to think of law school. She became fascinated with great lawyers like Thurgood Marshall, Abraham Lincoln, and Atticus Finch from *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

"They knew the rules and knew how to use them to change the world," Gibson says.

She also met Michael Gibson, the man she would marry, at church one Sunday, and the two wed over Christmas break her senior year. They'll be married 30 years in December.

After four years of working in the House, Gibson took what she thought would be a three-month gig in the office of Sen. Gonzalo Barrientos that ended up lasting almost eight years. Barrientos came to rely on her, even referring to her as "his conscience."

Her job was to know who was against what bill and why, what his constituents wanted and why, and how voting on an issue would affect him in his district, Gibson says.

One day Gibson's mother called the office, and the receptionist said Machree could not come to the phone—she was on the floor with the senator.

"There was a long silence on the other end of the line until my mom replied, 'There's probably a better way to say that, my dear,'" Gibson says.

She was in the senator's office when she got her acceptance letter to UT Law. With her kids just 5 and 2, Gibson told her boss she didn't think she could go.

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Barrientos would not hear of it. He was so determined that she go that he allowed her to work around her class schedule all three years of law school.

Just as she resolved to make the move, her husband Michael was transferred to New York and her 45-year-old mother suffered a devastating stroke and had to be hospitalized. Her father, Felix Garrett, stepped up and took care of the kids on Sundays, giving Gibson one full day a week to study.

On her own, Gibson struggled on. She would wake each morning at five minutes to four, study for two hours, cook breakfast, and make the drive in from Round Rock. She dropped off her son, Michael, at school; her daughter, Mallory, sometimes came to class with her.

Almost 20 years later, while at UT Law herself, Mallory would flash back to a four-hour tort exam she sat through with her mom as a child.

Gibson survived the crucible and graduated from UT Law, and eventually went to work for Gov. Ann Richards as her legislative director to the Senate. When Richards appointed Ron Kirk to secretary of state, Kirk brought on Gibson as the assistant secretary of state.

One day she attended a luncheon for then-UT president Larry Faulkner and was seated between Jim Boon, then executive director of the Texas Exes, and Mike Cook, a longtime Texas Exes supporter and past president of the Association. The two badgered Gibson about joining until she finally relented.

"They tag-teamed me," Gibson says. "But by the end of the luncheon, I was so enamored with their camaraderie and passion for UT that I wrote the check on the spot. The money came out of the kids' college fund."

Kirk's run for mayor of Dallas in 1995 marked the end of Gibson's time in government and the beginning of her lobbying career.

"The University of Texas has a remarkable ripple effect," she says. "If you touch one life, you touch three."

It's a fortuitous time to have an insider like Gibson lead the Texas Exes. More than ever, UT is struggling to clearly articulate its value to the state and to dispel the notion that it's flush with cash.

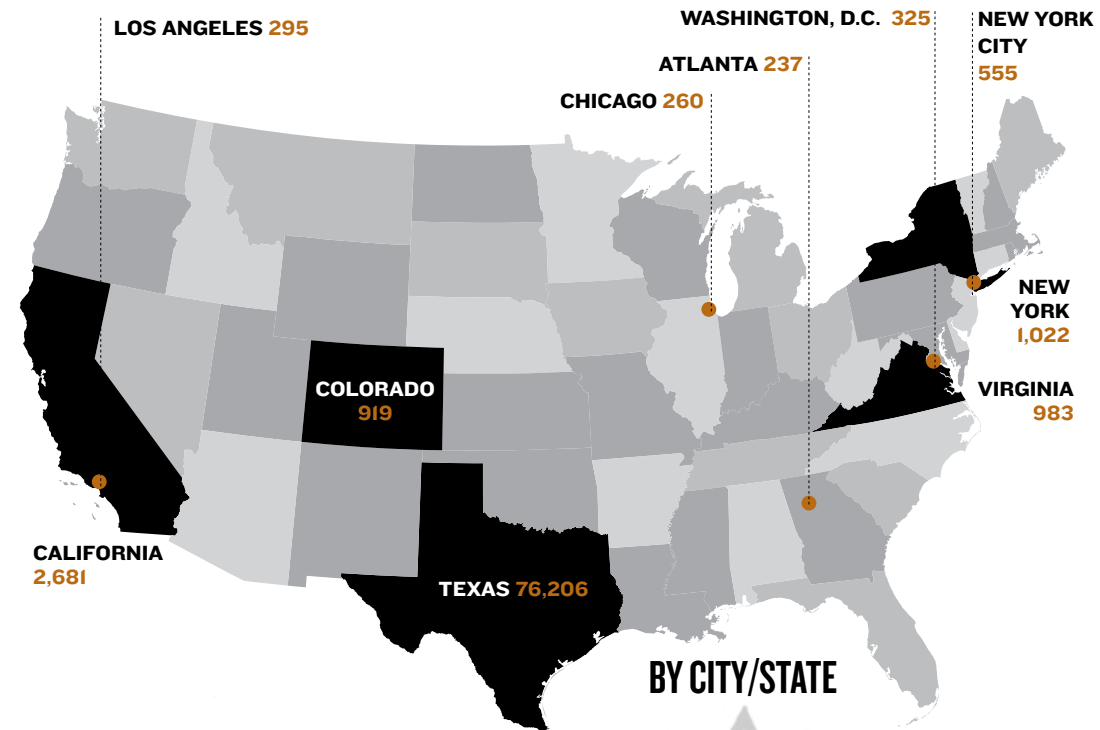
"Machree will bring insights into the inner workings of state government and the Legislature that will be hugely helpful to us," says outgoing president Richard Leshin. "She's also got a great sense of humor that will help her whenever board meetings get tense."

Gibson's other priority, she says, is raising money for scholarships. She knows from her own experience as an undergrad and in law school that for many students scholarships make the difference between getting a degree and not.

The Texas Exes' new Forty Acres Scholars program is a game-changer for UT, she says.

"We're now competing with Ivy League schools to get the best students from the state to come here," she says. "We're keeping our own

BY THE NUMBERS



TOP MEMBERSHIP

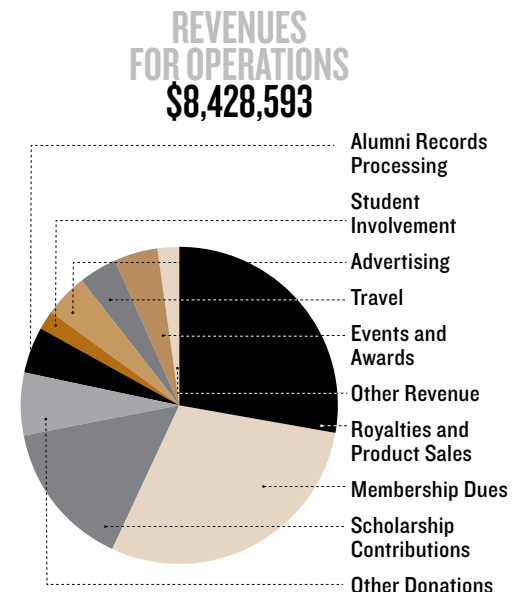
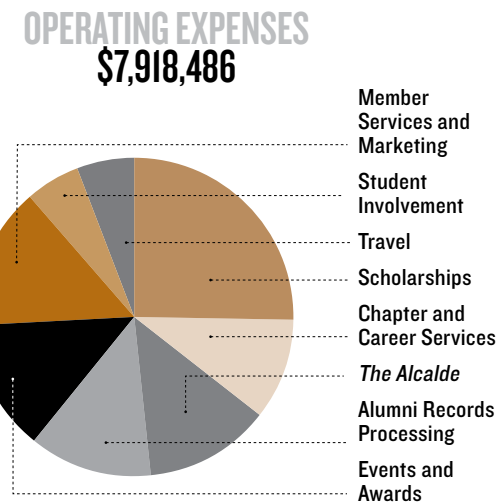
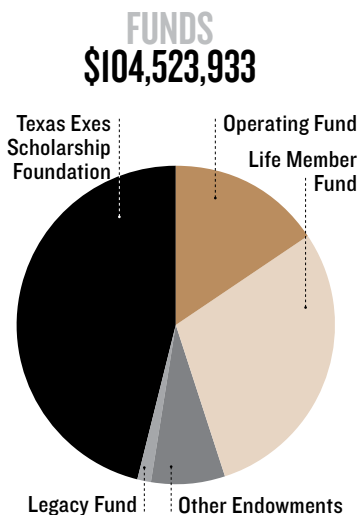
INTERNATIONAL MEMBERSHIP

MEXICO	122
UNITED KINGDOM	83
SOUTH KOREA	65
CANADA	58
JAPAN	45

MEMBERSHIP BY COLLEGE

Cockrell School of Engineering	9,281
College of Communication	7,490
College of Education	6,257
College of Fine Arts	1,962
College of Liberal Arts	19,742
College of Natural Sciences	8,994
College of Pharmacy	1,761
Graduate School of Library Science	260
Jackson School of Geosciences	785
LBJ School of Public Affairs	242
Mcombs School of Business	19,164
School of Architecture	704
School of Law	1,951
School of Nursing	1,013
School of Social Work	588
Non-Grad	13,284
TOTAL	93,478

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