

Donna '88 and David Lang - Sea Scouting Scholarship

Established in 2020 by Donna '88 and David Lang

Surrounded by the sights and sounds of coastal life, Dr. Donna Lang '88 has called Texas A&M University at Galveston her home for the past 32 years. As Associate Vice President for Academic Operations, Lang actively participates in all aspects of campus life, including the Texas A&M Maritime Academy and educational outreach programs to attract students to Galveston's shoreline.

Now, she's giving back through an endowed scholarship that will offer students in Sea Scouts financial aid to encourage a love for the sea just like hers. While Lang's passion for the aqueous realm is evident in her life's work, she was born in Topeka, Kansas — landlocked and far away from any drop of salt water. But those who don't know Lang's history would never guess she grew up any distance from the ocean.



Dr. Donna Lang '88, Associate Vice President for Academic Operations at Texas A&M University at Galveston, created the Donna '88 and David Lang Sea Scouting Scholarship for former Sea Scouts attending Texas A&M-Galveston.

The Call of the Water

From the time she was young, Lang lived an active lifestyle with her outdoors-loving father. Due to his career with the Boy Scouts of America, the family bounced around the country, but Lang's outdoor activities only grew.

"Early on, I just had a passion for the outdoors," Lang said. "I loved anything that had to do with hiking and camping. My first introduction to the water was through



Lang and her father

activities like canoeing and kayaking, but when I was a little older, we bought an itty-bitty sailboat, a Sunfish that my father taught me to sail on.”

After moving to New Jersey during junior high, Lang was introduced to the world of Sea Exploring, now known as Sea Scouts, which brought her to deeper water. Sea Scouts is an organization that teaches youths the ins and outs of water navigation and boat handling. Upon the crew’s old air-sea rescue boat, Lang and her unit learned to travel the seas, giving charter cruises

around Staten Island and the Statue of Liberty.

However, once again, Lang had to move inland. Grapevine, Texas, was her home throughout high school, but she came back to the water when her father started a high-adventure Sea Exploring crew on a nearby lake. She was recognized as the National Boatswain for Sea Exploring in 1983-1984 for her dedication to maritime pursuits. When the time came for the next phase in her life, Lang knew the answer: college.

Being the First

The process was difficult for Lang, whose parents never attended college and didn’t understand how to choose a university, navigate the admissions process or pay the accompanying price tag. Despite the challenges, however, Lang acknowledged some advantages she had over other first-generation students.

“I look at my own journey, and I was privileged,” she admitted. “I had two parents who loved me, we had a roof over our heads, and I was always told I was going to college. But when it got to the time of choosing a university and enrolling, there was this big chasm because my parents didn’t have a background in the logistics of how you do those things.”

Once she stepped foot in Galveston, however, Lang knew she had found her place. The ocean air called to her as she spent her free time on the water in her old sailboat or hanging out near the shore with her friends from the small campus.

“My classmates are still my friends for life,” she emphasized. “Even though we studied different disciplines like business, science and engineering, we were all connected to the water, so there’s this really common bond between us.”

When Lang graduated and joined the university staff, her own struggles in college inspired her to promote unity and mentorship among first-generation students on campus.

“It’s important to give first-generation students a network to lean on that they can’t find from their families,” Lang stated. “It shouldn’t be so hard to climb the mountain all by yourself if someone else can help you along the way.”

Promoting Maritime Passion

After attaining a master’s degree from the University of Houston at Clear Lake and a doctorate from the University of Houston, Lang continues to support students from all backgrounds while promoting oceanic career fields to others with a heart for the sea.

Part of that mission involves outreach to the diverse population of Galveston and all of Texas through scholarships and other opportunities. Programs such as Sea Camp and Sea Camp Kids bring K-12 students to Texas A&M-Galveston for ocean adventures, like trips on a research vessel, salt marsh expeditions and access to laboratory facilities for hands-on interactions with the water.



“Texas A&M University sends more African Americans, Hispanics and women into the marine and maritime fields than anywhere else in the nation, but we can still do better,” Lang said. “Too often, cultural and socioeconomic disadvantages hurt someone’s exposure to all the possibilities. Programs like Sea Camp and Sea Camp Kids bring children to campus and help open their eyes to the different opportunities that exist.”

Even when interacting with students, Lang’s passion for others shines through. Savannah Cushman ’22, a maritime academy cadet and former Sea Scout, said Lang’s uplifting attitude has always inspired her.

“She helped motivate me to become the person and leader I want to be on the ship and inland,” Cushman said. “Every time I see her, she is positive and encouraging to other people, and that’s really inspiring. Hearing that encouragement definitely helps, especially as a college student.”

Lang’s passion for diversity and her background working with financial aid inspired her to start the Donna ’88 and David Lang Sea Scouting Scholarship specifically for former Sea Scouts attending Texas A&M-Galveston. Lang hopes this aid will encourage students who “exemplify a love of the sea, hard work, character, leadership and service” to integrate their passions into their future careers.

“If you can do the things you love in your work, it makes life so much richer, so I’m hoping this scholarship helps make that connection between passion and vocation for a student,” she concluded. “When you’ve been in a career for this amount of time, you feel strong roots. This passion and how much I care about this place inspire me to leave a legacy that will carry on for generations to come.”