

Our Founding Hosts – Season One, Episode One

Transcript

Amy: You're listening to Beyond 1894, a podcast where we hear from Louisiana Tech University scholars, innovators, and professionals on their personal journeys and the impact they are making in the world around them. I'm your host, Amy Bell, and my co-host is Teddy Allen.

Amy: So I'm excited to start this podcast because something I've noticed is that we have a lot of faculty, staff, students, professionals, alumni that are doing great things to impact the world around them, and I'd like to bring more awareness to their stories.

Teddy: Amen, there's a lot of studs walking around here. There's a lot to learn. You can learn something from everyone. People are doing some fascinating stuff around here, Amy. I mean, they really are.

Amy: And there are also things that people are doing that are related to each other's projects, and I think it'd be really good to increase communication and awareness of those things, for sure.

Teddy: Interdisciplinary, a word I learned two or three years ago, is a big thing now. And everybody working together, which is how the world works. You know a little bit about something and a little bit about something else, and then somebody knows a little more than you, and you pile that all together. And there's strength in numbers.

Amy: For sure. And it starts with awareness and with storytelling. So that's what we're doing.

Teddy: We're trying to point you in the right direction, hook you up with some people that could help you out and you can help them.

Amy: Yeah. And I think, though, that people are gonna question the name of our podcast. So can you tell us what is the significance of the year 1894?

Teddy: Okay, yes, I can. That is the year that this university was founded. The town was founded 10 years earlier in 1884, but immediately, the founders knew they wanted to have an educational building process here. So it took them a while to get down to brass tacks, whatever that means, but you know how it is, when you found a town, you got to do some other stuff before you just build a college. But they got around to it in 1894 and Representative G. M. Lomax, he went down to the state legislature, some other people went with him, and after several weeks finally in July, it was called Act number 68, of the General Assembly Center of Louisiana, they established the assurance that the school would become a reality and they named it the Industrial Institute and College of Louisiana.

Amy: Wow.

Teddy: What do you think about that? In 1894. So who...? They had never thought that, however many 125 years from then, that me and you would be sitting here doing a podcast, or what a podcast was, but here we go. It started with Old Main, which is just a few probably 70 yards east of where me and you are sitting now that the Old Main was built on 20 acres. The town donated that land. And in September of 1885, the first session began, the school bell rang and here we went. It was a two story brick building. A little piece of it is left out there: the bricks in front of the library. Eight large classrooms, a big auditorium, a chemical lab, two offices nearby was a little frame building that they used for instruction and mechanics. They had six faculty members, 202 students from 22 parishes, and Harry Howard, the alliterative Harry Howard, was the first graduate in May of 1897. He had a Bachelor of Industry, the degree which is what you got back then for the first few years till they figured out that stuff. So you can go see Harry's brick. It is on Alumni, you know, Walkway. He's just one little class. It was a very small graduation party that they had. In fact, they didn't even have graduation, they just handed him a slip of paper... is what the history books tell me. So that's why it's 1894: that is when this wonderful institution was founded.

Amy: Yeah, and I think that we've done so many cool things since then. And we're moving on. I think one of the things that we can definitely say about ourselves as members of the Tech family, is that we really want to innovate and be creative and problem solve some of the world's largest leading problems and challenges. So I think that we are all about, you know, doing cutting edge research and going beyond the status quo, going beyond what we just see in the foreground and really reaching beyond our limit. So I think it'd be really good to get some of those stories of how people are doing that.

Teddy: Yep. Once we got a Chick-fil-a, I knew we were serious.

Amy: Yeah.

Teddy: And honestly, there are people every month at least, every couple of weeks probably, they come from all over the world to see what we're doing in engineering or trenchless technology or whatever. You'd be surprised. When I was a student, I didn't know any of this was going on.

Amy: For a minute, I thought you were gonna say that they come just to eat at Chick-fil-a.

Teddy: Just to eat at Chick-fil-a. And they do that, too. Anyway, people come from all over to learn about what's going on here. And it's obviously the flagship university of the area. And that's because we've had great leadership and a lot of people buying into... um, everybody pulling in the right direction. This is the economic driver. And that's our.... You know, we're a nonprofit, we're here to make things better. And if we're not doing that we're failing at our job. And I certainly think that things are going well now, and I'm happy that the leadership is not satisfied, and we all continue to push. Try to get two Chick-fil-a's.

Amy: Maybe. Whoa. You know, West Monroe has two Chick-fil-a's.

Teddy: Uh, yes, they do. Wow. Progressive city.

Amy: So, I think something that people can look forward to, as they tune into our podcast, is, you know, students can hear about maybe career paths they never thought were even possible, or majors that they never thought were possible. I know when I was a high school student, and even in my first couple years as an undergraduate student, like one, I had no idea what to major in. I had no idea what was possible or out there. I didn't know how to apply some of the things that I was learning, like in math and chemistry. Like, who knows how to apply those things, you know? But, we can definitely learn by talking to these role models and the professionals and scholars that we have here on campus. And then also, of course, we can hear about their personal journeys, how they're relatable, and like I said earlier, you know, maybe how we can partner up with what they're doing now.

Teddy: You're going to be introduced to people who, if you're a student, these people, believe it or not, although they are Dr. So-and-so, they were once your age. They didn't know what they were going to do. They by accident fell into something, realized they loved it, and have people that helped them. And now they're helping others. But they started out confused and 18 and 19. Very few people know exactly what to do at that age, and we'll introduce you to people like that. And I think it'll make you feel more comfortable. And all these people are very approachable. There was always somebody when I went to school here willing to help me and to point me in the right direction. And if you're willing to work, that's a step in the right tracks. They'll help you.

Amy: For sure, and you know, I'm excited that you're my co-host, because you've been a journalist here for a really long time and there are several people that know and love you. And I'm excited that the other the other week, we did an interview with each other, and that... and people will be able to hear a little bit more about your personal background.

Teddy: If they wish. Yeah, that's correct. But long story short, I didn't know what I wanted to do. I had an idea, but somebody approached me and helped me. They kind of saw that in me and then they said, "Okay, do this, that, and that," and I did, and then I just kept doing it.

Amy: And I'm a fresh face. I haven't been here at Louisiana Tech for long but you can hear about my background, or a little bit about it, in the interview that we did. So let's go ahead and play that now.

Teddy: Amy, where in Texas are you from?

Amy: I am from the border of Texas. You know how at the very Southern tip, it kind of makes like a hook? So at the very point, that's where I grew up and was born. So I lived there for about 18 years and then I moved up the coast to Corpus Christi. That's where I went to college.

Teddy: That ain't far up the coast.

Amy: No, it's not, it's only two and a half hours, but when you're from an itty bitty town, you think it's a really big difference.

Teddy: What's the name of your itty bitty town?

Amy: Mercedes, Texas. Yeah. It's really only known for, uh, an annual stock show that we have, and it's known now for the outlets that we have there. And we have some really nice outlets.

Teddy: I've heard. Who knew? Who doesn't know about the Mercedes Texas outlet?

Amy: Yeah, who doesn't?

Teddy: Leaving your house? What street did you grow up on?

Amy: Iowa street.

Teddy: Iowa street?

Amy: Yeah. It's very close to my high school, so I got to walk a lot.

Teddy: The name of your high school is?

Amy: Mercedes high school.

Teddy: Okay. Um, how far leaving your house before you can stick a toe into the Rio Grande?

Amy: The Rio Grande? Um....

Teddy: Or the Gulf?

Amy: The Gulf, it's about 45 minutes. The uh, the Rio Grande, about 10. Yeah, we're really close to the Rio Grande. I think we only have to pass this little small town called Progreso, which is also on the Mexican side as well.

Teddy: I can tell.

Amy: So yeah, I mean Mercedes is actually Mercedes, but we call it Mercedes.

Teddy: Yeah, it makes it easier for guys like me from South Carolina. Okay.

Amy: Oh, are you from South Carolina?

Teddy: Yeah.

Amy: Oh, my husband's from South Carolina!

Teddy: Where at?

Amy: Greenville.

Teddy: No fooling. He's from up at the more richer part of the state. I'm from.... My town was 750 people called Lake View. And if you get on I-20, and you drive east from Louisiana Tech, in about 12 hours, you'll be in Florence. And then that's where I 20 ends, and you drive 40 more miles and you get to my hometown of Lake View. So Florence is where we drive to buy school clothes and stuff like that. And if you drive 40 more miles, you'll be at Myrtle Beach.

Amy: Yeah. So when did you come to Louisiana?

Teddy: When I was a teenager. My dad was a preacher in a school. I mean, a church, in um, West Monroe, which is where my mom's from. Asked him to be their preacher, so we moved, like you did, from an itty bitty town to, I thought West Monroe was New York city. Scared to death, freeways everywhere, you know, cats, dogs fighting each other. Anyway, but it ended up working out.

Amy: And you stayed here. Did you go to, um, did you go to Tech?

Teddy: I did

Amy: And what did you major in?

Teddy: Uh, the alphabet.

Amy: The alphabet. Oh man, I would have failed that.

Teddy: We had like three majors back then. Um, so that was the one that was the easiest, and that's.... We don't want to talk about me. We were talking about you who moved to Corpus Christi, and then you had no tie really to Louisiana Tech and you ended up here?

Amy: Yeah. So my husband is an electrical engineer. He was a part of this program where he got to travel to different parts of the nation and work a different job every two to three years so that he can get a variety of experience and then pick the job that he liked the best. And so after meeting me in Corpus, he, uh, came to El Dorado, Arkansas. And so when we were making the move, we traveled, um, and visited El Dorado and Ruston. And at the time I had just graduated with my bachelor's degree in sociology, and I wanted to continue my education. So I told him, let's move to Ruston so that after a year I can get in-state tuition. So that's what we did. And I, then I ended up.... I actually ended up getting a job here before getting my master's. So I got my job, I started working in the College of Engineering and Science and then found out that as an employee I get a discount for a graduate degree. So then I used that very quickly and ended up getting a master's in Industrial Organizational Psychology.

Teddy: Which is a huge deal at Louisiana tech.

Amy: Yes, it is.

Teddy: Much awarded program.

Amy: For sure. The PhD program is very highly recognized nationally.

Teddy: Your actual title, Amy is?

Amy: Research communication specialist. Yeah. It sounds really fancy, but for anybody that's wondering what that actually entails: I am supposed to talk to faculty members and students about the research they're doing and then figure out ways to highlight that and tell the masses about it.

Teddy: Yeah. And that's a lot about what this podcast is going to be about: research, innovation that students, faculty are involved with that you would.... When I was a student here, I had no idea what was going on, but our folks at the top have been here a long time. They think way ahead. It's why the campus has changed so much in the last 25 years.

Amy: But hey, I didn't get to ask you that many questions.

Teddy: Well, I'm not that....

Amy: You're very interesting.

Teddy: Ask me a question.

Amy: How long have you been working here at Tech?

Teddy: 11 years.

Amy: 11 years. Have you been a writer the whole time?

Teddy: Yes. I, um, when I left tech, I went, I was a sports writer for a long time and um, I covered the Saints and LSU. Before I did that, when I got out of college in '84, I caught a really good break because the Monroe paper hired me, and I already knew everybody at Tech, so they put me on the Tech Beat. This was when everybody got the newspaper, and 1984 turned out to be one of the greatest athletic years in Tech history. They lost the national championship in football, but they went to the national championship. Um, basketball was Karl Malone and that team and they went to the sweet 16. Baseball was good that year. The Lady Techsters were good in basketball. They lost in the regional. So I got to, it was a, I got to cover a lot of extra stuff and um, everybody at what was then the Northeast was mad because Tech was always in the newspaper, but the fact of the matter was they just kept winning games and um, a lot better than NLU that particular year.

Teddy: So then I went to New Orleans, and then they wanted to start a column at the newspaper. Just a column. There was so much bad news in newspapers: house burned down, somebody gets sick. So they said, "Well, you come write a three or four times a week column that's kind of uplifting or funny." And I said, "Well, I'm down here covering the Saints and LSU," I hadn't written a funny story in like two or three years. This was when they were terrible. The Saints were awful. LSU was bad. But I said I'd give it a shot, and so I started doing that. And then 11 years ago I looked around and most of the people at the paper were gone. And my son had come over here to Tech, and there weren't anybody around to crack jokes with, and the job was open here so I applied for it, and...

Amy: Found a bunch of funny people.

Teddy: People to crack jokes with. So I'm very grateful for this school. Um, I had not planned to go to school. The sheriff of Claiborne parish picked me up one day after I got off work at the gas plant and said, "I'm taking you over to Tech, and you're going to enroll." And I said, "Don't. I don't want to do that." And he said, "Well, that's what's fixing to happen." And he was the Chairman of Deacons at my dad's church. And so, um...

Amy: How did you know that you liked writing?

Teddy: I didn't know. Nobody knows you like writing. That's another thing about Tech. If you hang around, it's not so big that there's going to be somebody that'll help you if you're willing to do, to work. So, um, you know, one day Wiley Hilburn, God rest his soul, he was Head of Journalism for a long time. He came up to me outside of this building and he said, "Well, you're a junior." And he introduced himself and he said, "Your English teachers tell me you have, you know, you're good at English." He said, "You'd never know by talking to you these few months I've spent with you..." "

Amy: Well, with that degree in the alphabet.

Teddy: Right! Well, that helps. He said, "I want to put you on the school paper," and he said, "I'll help you." And so he did. And I was willing to work, and right out there on that pavement, outside of GTM, he gave me the best lesson I've ever had in writing. He said, "Write what you know about," and "It's hard work", and I've worked ever since I was a little bitty boy, in my bitty town, driving tractors and milking cows and all that kind of stuff. And uh, he said, "You know about ball..." " So that's how I got started, and he was willing to help me, and I was willing to work.

Teddy: So at Tech, it's been my experience that, again, somebody dropped me off here at school that cared about me, they gave me stuff to do that nobody else wanted to do, and then, um, they saw that I might have a chance to be a writer." And cause, if you want to be a writer, who do you go up to and say, "I want to be a writer. I need you to give me some money, and I'm going to start writing." That. It doesn't work like that. You have to have somebody to help you, somebody to help you to get into the, um, whether it's music or writing or engineering, you just gotta show them you're willing to work. And there's plenty of opportunity here if you're willing to do something. So...

Amy: And you've talked to a lot of alumni, correct?

Teddy: Yes.

Amy: Yeah.

Teddy: I do now. Today, you mean?

Amy: Yes, and you write a lot about what the alumni are continuing to do after graduation and the projects doing now.

Teddy: Yeah, we do a lot of that through our magazines and through latech.edu. There's some amazing people out there. Everybody, everybody you meet. Just people. People will shock you. Now Michael, we're gonna do a podcast with Michael, I'm sure at some point, but I was asking him about what his favorite instrument to play. Michael Austin, our director of art music. And you know, he says the organ. And that's just fascinating to me.

Amy: Why?

Teddy: Just that somebody.... Have you ever looked at an organ? Have you ever looked at that thing? It makes no sense to me. There's a guy named Ray Stevens who you probably don't know, but he was, he's a wonderful keyboard player and he was a, he has like a 40 year career in the music business. He may still have a place in Branson, but 30 years ago he was on fire. But he said one day as a little kid, "I just sat down and looked at a keyboard." He said, "It just all made sense to me." And so different people have different, you know, callings or something that this makes sense to them.

Teddy: And so some people say, "How do you," you know, "write stories and all that." And it's difficult for them. And writing is hard. It's a craft like anything else. But it sorta made sense to me. And I grew up listening to my dad tell three stories a week as a preacher with beginnings, middles, and ends. And these funny farmers that didn't know they were funny, when I was growing up, and their wives, they were hilarious, but they were great storytellers. So that made sense to me.

Teddy: And somebody, you know, Dr. Guice, our president. Architecture and engineering, it just makes sense, that's just how his brain works. Um, so yeah, our alumni and students and faculty, if you just sit and hang with them long enough, they'll tell you something that'll, you know, get you over the hump that day and give kind of.... There's a bunch of inspiring people around here. And a bunch of people that are trying to get better, and a bunch of people there trying to help other people get better.

Teddy: So, and that's what I hope we can do through this podcast. Give people a little hope and say, "Hey," I always tell people, "If I can graduate, good Lord, I know you can." You used to.... When I was working at the paper, all the time, these teachers would get me to come speak to their class, because they see me in the newspaper, and they think, "Okay, well he must know," you know, and I'm just an idiot. But they see that, and they say, "Well, he must know something." And I would just get up in front of them and always tell them, "I'm an example. Your teachers asked me to come today cause I'm an example that when I leave here you'll say, 'Well if that man can get a job, I know I can graduate and eventually get one.'"

Amy: Yeah. But I think you're absolutely correct when you talked about, the fam, the tech family, and how they will help you if you're willing to work. And I know that's definitely been my experience. Like I, you know, like I said, I started in engineering and science, but I quickly got to know people throughout the department, and after getting my master's degree.... So I actually met Dr. Ramu there in engineering and science, and um, while I was working there, he got his new position in Graduate School as the Dean of Graduate School. And so after getting my masters, he's the one that actually contacted me and said, "Hey Amy, I know that you just finished. Are you looking to stay in Ruston? I have this project for you. Um, would you, are you interested? And so I immediately jumped on it, and that's how I got pulled back into Tech.

Teddy: They pulled me back...

Amy: And yeah, they pulled me back in. And then after working on, a little bit with him, I started working with Tonya, and so it just... Throughout, you know, throughout my experience here, people have definitely taken care of me, and have been extremely supportive. So, and I've loved all the bosses that I have and it's just a really good support system. So I've really enjoyed my time here, for sure. And I'm excited to tell more people about it because I think we talk about the Tech family being supportive, but I don't think people outside of the university actually understand how.... the dynamic of it. And so I think it'd be really good to talk more about that.

Teddy: Yeah. We we want to. If you're willing to do something, if you want to learn something, somebody will help you. That's the thing about here. I always just tell people about Tech. If you show up, somebody will help you, and then if you're willing to work, we'll, we'll push you down the road, man. We want you to get to where you're going, and we're going to hopefully highlight this trailblazing attitude among our faculty, and alumni, and students, and just the Tech family that's around here. We want you to leave refreshed and having a little hope. If me and Amy can do it, well, I'll speak for myself anyway.

Amy: So can you.

Teddy: Thanks, Amy, for asking me to be a part of this.

Amy: Thank you for listening to this episode of Beyond 1894. If you liked what you heard, please rate and review us. It will help others find our podcast. If you would like to find details about the episode, check out our show notes. To find our podcast webpage, go to 1894.latech.edu/beyond. If you have suggestions for future episodes email us at 1894@latech.edu. We would love your input, so tell us what you would like to hear!

Amy: Beyond 1894 is produced by the Office of University Communications, with help from The Waggoner Center and The School of Music, at Louisiana Tech University. Dave Norris is the executive producer. I, Amy Bell, am the producer and chief editor, and Teddy Allen and I are co-hosts. The sound engineering for this episode was done by Jensen Gates and the music featured was arranged by Kaelis Ash.