

FROM FARM TO CAMPUS:

Early experiences motivate alumna Beatrice Mladenka-Fowler and Jesse Fowler to support CLASS Cougar Emergency Fund



Mladenka-Fowler snaps beans on family farm

Having both grown up on rural farms, Beatrice Mladenka-Fowler '76, '83 and her husband Jesse understand the financial hardship, family obligations, and other hurdles facing UH College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences (CLASS) students impacted by COVID-19. Beatrice, a retired civil rights attorney, and Jesse, a geologist, have provided need-based scholarships to CLASS students for the past seven years. But this spring, with the pandemic taking an unexpected and devastating toll on CLASS students and families, the Fowlers recognized the urgent need to support vulnerable students and rose to the occasion like never before. Their rural Texas roots, which they continue to nurture on a family farm just outside of Shiner, are linked to their generosity in creating opportunity and serving others.

“At the time we left our respective farms for college and life in the city, we thought we would never go back to working on a farm,” Mladenka-Fowler said. “Even though our families were

poor, university life was inexpensive compared to today. We were able to get by on scholarships and loans, campus jobs and often, food from our parents’ farms and gardens. We are so grateful for all the help we got — this scholarship is our way of helping others.”

“When the Cougar Emergency Fund was launched because of COVID-19 financial hardships, I knew I could count on Beatrice and Jesse to support our students,” said Dr. Antonio D. Tillis, dean of the UH College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences. “When approached, they quickly designated support to the Cougar Emergency Fund. Along with gifts from CLASS faculty, alumni, and friends, their contribution helped trigger matching support from two area foundations, aiding CLASS students with unforeseen school-related expenses. Through their own successes, they continue to pay it forward.”



Jesse prepares a nutritious meal on the farm

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