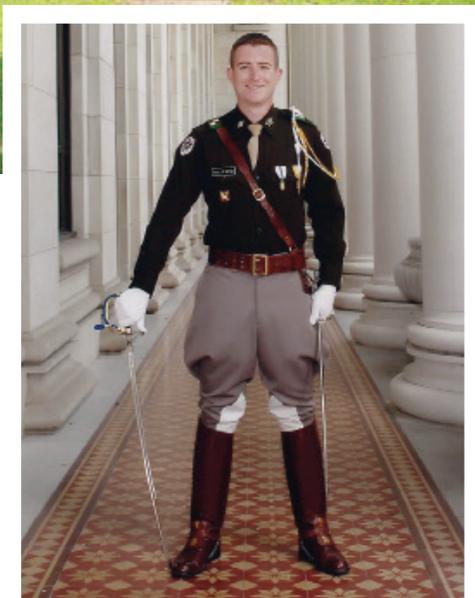
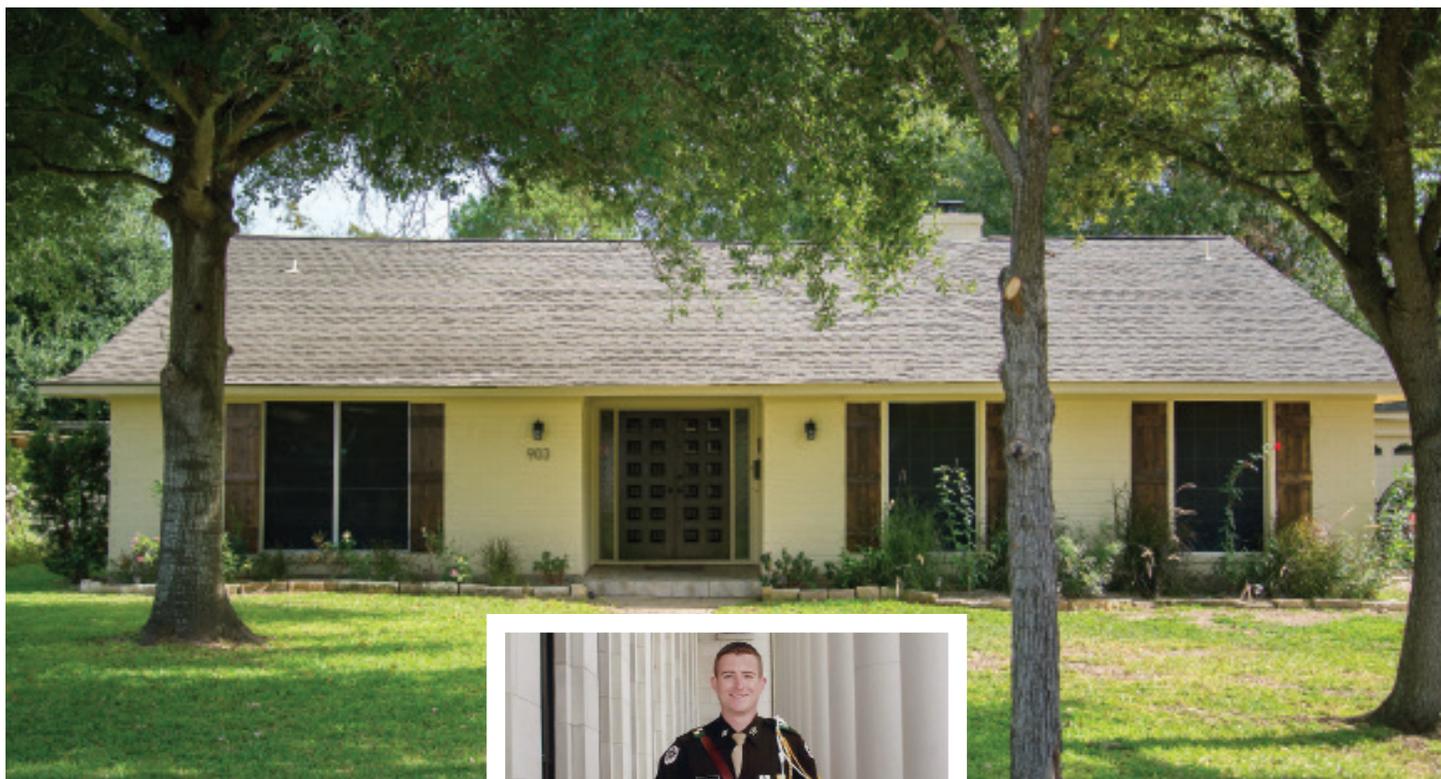


Taylor's Place— From Tragedy to Ministry

By Dennis Davenport '01



Taylor Gillespie '11

On a small cul-de-sac in Bryan, TX, not far from the Texas A&M campus, sits a house known for its Aggie hospitality. A ministry born of love, honor, and remembrance, Taylor's Place is quite remarkable. Here is its story.

From Leonard, TX, Taylor Gillespie '11 was a member of Company P-2. He was a very popular and highly respected Cadet. He had successfully worked his way through the class system ranks and was serving as Company Commander. Taylor was also a member of the Ross Volunteer Company, the Simpson Honor Society, and the student organization Ags of OAK (Open Acts of Kindness). A strong Christian, Taylor was known for his bright smile, sense of humor, ability to make people laugh, inclusiveness, and loyalty in both friendship and service. Taylor loved dancing, good music, making films, and watching hilariously bad movies.

the friendship of other Corps parents. Unfortunately, due to distance, job, and financial constraints, the Gillespies were not in a position to make trips to Aggieland nearly as frequently as they would have preferred.

Sadly, tragedy struck on January 9, 2011. Taylor was killed in a wreck on an icy north Texas highway. He was en route back to A&M to complete his last semester in the Corps and graduate. That was a devastating blow to Taylor's family and friends in Leonard, as well as to the Corps of Cadets and entire A&M community.

A prevailing thought and realization that resonated from the tragedy was just how much the Gillespies regretted not being able to spend more time at A&M during Taylor's years in the Corps. The "time is precious" reality also caused them to be

more empathetic to other families who are not in a financial position to visit their Aggie children.

The Gillespies have always been hospitable and welcoming people. They had opened their home to Taylor's high school friends who needed a little love, someone to talk to, or a home cooked meal. Over time, the combination of their background of helping the kids in Leonard, their regrets of their inability to spend as much time as desired in Aggieland, and the awareness that many other Aggie parents are not financially able to visit and be a part of their children's Aggie experience, connected. The Gillespie's realization of this dynamic sparked a vision of a ministry to provide Aggie hospitality in a home-away-from-home setting to Texas A&M students and their families. The ministry would include allowing parents in need the ability to visit their children by providing free accommodations and food. It would also provide a home-like environment for students to engage in organizational and social activities, to study, or just hang out and enjoy a good home-cooked meal.

The development and implementation of the vision involved three years of grieving, praying, brainstorming, opening of doors, planning, and action. It would become Taylor's Place, named in honor of their only son, who lived by the same helping principles that would be extended in this ministry.

The first and foremost tangible element in this Aggie leap of faith was finding a house in the Bryan/College Station area. The Gillespie's first thoughts were to start out in a rental house and delve into the ministry for a while. They planned to eventually purchase and move into a permanent location after getting a better idea of what the needs would be.

A thorough search of rental properties did not turn up anything suitable. During the futile search process, it became obvious that renting might not be the answer. Tanya and TJ filed advance paperwork for a loan. It was quickly approved. With that security, the search was broadened, and Tanya soon found the perfect house. Recently renovated, it is located on a small quiet residential cul-de-sac within a few miles of campus. The floor plan is conducive to comfortably accommodating guests. Soon, Tanya and TJ became homeowners in Aggieland.

During Labor Day Weekend of 2014, the

vision became reality. A group of family and friends packed up the Gillespies' belongings and headed for Aggieland in a motorcade of vehicles. After a day of packing, loading, and traveling, the weary group arrived at what would soon officially become Taylor's Place. They were greeted by an eager Aggie move-in delegation consisting of most of the upper-class members of Company P-2. It was FOW week and the other Cadets were on campus monitoring the fish. Thanks to the Cadets, the trailers and trucks were soon unloaded and the furnishings were set up in the house.

Within an hour and a half, pizzas had been ordered and the Gillespies were providing hospitality to their first house full of Aggies. Vision fulfilled, Taylor's Place

the house, with the addition of another bathroom as first priority.

Significantly, the Gillespies are not wealthy people. As a matter of fact, had they been financially able to afford frequent trips to visit Taylor at A&M, the vision of Taylor's Place would have never occurred. Tanya and TJ are a hard-working couple trying to make a living and fulfill this incredible ministry. They have put a lot on the line to accomplish this and are very appreciative to family and friends for their support. It is through Taylor's Place that the Gillespies are able to continue the healing process knowing the spirit and memory of their beloved son shines on. **G**



was going full speed on day one! It has not slowed down yet. Tanya's scrapbook tells the story of the inaugural year. It is filled with pictures of smiling people, messages, and thank you notes from the many who have received Aggie hospitality at Taylor's Place. The Gillespies estimate they have served well over 200 people over the course of the year.

Though already well established, Taylor's Place is also a work in progress as the necessity of growth continues. TJ is a do-it-yourself type and is always working on projects to enhance the back yard. He even visualizes someday adding a couple of apartments to the garage. They are also planning to add a few enhancements inside

Taylor's Place is a non-profit ministry and donations are applied to projects around the house and allow the Gillespies to provide accommodations and food at no expense to students and their families.

Go to:
taylorsplacetexas.org

for more information, to make a donation, or to contact the Gillespies.