



TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY

Office of the President™

May 11, 2020

Dear Campus Community, Alumni, and Friends,

Tonight, we will join the Lubbock community to observe the [50th anniversary of a devastating tornado](#) that claimed the lives of 26 people and forever changed our city. At 9:45 p.m., the lights on campus will go dark and members of the Saddle Tramps will ring the bells in the east tower 26 times to honor the victims of that tragic night and to provide our Texas Tech community and city a moment to reflect. Due to the fact that our campus is closed and out of respect for social distancing guidelines, we ask that you remain at home and allow us to share images and video of this reflective commemoration through our social media channels.

When the EF5 tornado formed just over campus and touched down in the evening hours of May 11, 1970, it generated an enormous path of destruction through densely populated residential neighborhoods and eventually downtown Lubbock. Although Texas Tech only suffered relatively minor damage, the impact on homes and businesses east of University Avenue and through downtown was devastating. The 1.5-mile-wide tornado, with winds over 200 miles-per-hour, destroyed 430 homes and severely damaged another 519. The damage in downtown Lubbock encompassed 250 businesses, including 20 city and county offices.

Moments after the tornado passed, Texas Tech students joined countless other citizens from across the city in [rushing to the aid of those in need](#). Students with ham radio skills and equipment helped first responders in coordinating emergency response while others helped direct traffic and some stood guard overnight at local businesses to prevent looting. Other students helped transport storm victims to hospitals and funeral homes.

Displaced families were sheltered in the Lubbock Municipal Coliseum and inside residence halls on campus that had recently become vacant due to the ending of the spring semester. Texas Tech also housed and helped feed civil defense workers, LP&L light repairmen, members of the national guard, and personnel from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. With the coliseum being used as a shelter, and the city unable to accommodate out-of-town visitors, the University canceled its commencement exercises that spring for the first time since our founding.

The situation was dire but in that moment of need, our University community did what we do best—[provide leadership, assistance, and solutions](#).

Today, 50 years later we commemorate this solemn occasion while in the midst of a different kind of storm that is impacting families and businesses here in our city and around the globe. The COVID-19 pandemic has closed our campus, shuttered businesses across the city, left many students and Lubbock citizens unemployed, and for the first time since that spring in 1970, there will be no in-person commencement exercises at Texas Tech.

Despite the circumstances that are before us, Texas Tech students, faculty, and staff have rallied to assist our community in this time of need. Likewise, many individuals in Lubbock have generously contributed to students that have been most affected in this crisis.

We are fortunate to be part of the Lubbock community and will continue to open our hearts, minds, and doors to our beloved hometown. That fateful night in May is one we will never forget but it has strengthened our collective resolve to grow in partnership and strength so that we might provide economic and educational opportunities for generations to come.

In closing, I ask that you take a moment today to pause and remember the lives that were taken so tragically on that night 50 years ago. I also ask that you join me in giving thanks for the enormous sacrifice of our doctors, nurses, first responders, and military personnel that come to our aid in our most vulnerable moments.

Let us also be grateful for the enduring spirit of the people of West Texas and the compassionate hearts of Red Raiders all across the world.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lawrence Schovanec".

Lawrence Schovanec  
President  
Texas Tech University