The OU alumna hoped that her daughter would attend the University of Oklahoma, even though her son had chosen to go to the University of Kansas. But their 1980s visit to the Norman campus did not measure up to their visit to Lawrence. The daughter chose KU.

Her mother related the story of those visits to an Oklahoma City friend. From that small incident evolved a group of outstanding students who are perhaps the University's best ambassadors—members of the Crimson Club.

Well-groomed in their uniforms of crested navy blazers and khaki skirts or slacks, they present a handsome picture. But it is their enthusiasm, their knowledge of OU and its history and their genuine interest in those they meet that are Crimson Club's hallmarks.

The Crimson Club was born in 1987 during Frank Horton's presidency with an immediate goal of assisting the University during its 1990 Centennial Celebration. Following the Centennial, through a series of circumstances, the club was not utilized to its potential for several years.

The group was revitalized in the summer of 1995 by President David Boren and first lady Molly Shi Boren, who serves as honorary chair of the Crimson Club Advisory Board. The Borens persuaded former veteran OU administrator Anona Adair to forsake her retirement for a year to sponsor the reconstituted group.

The president then chose Crimson Club to host speakers and special guests during his Inaugural Weekend. Club members met VIPs at the airport, escorting them to their hotels, then on to luncheons, receptions and symposiums, and finally back to the airport. They also served as ushers and hosts at the Investiture ceremony, the Inaugural Concert and other events.

Toya Hall, a Holdenville speech pathology major and incoming executive committee chair, served as the 1995-96 membership chair. She describes VIP escort activities as the most interesting of her Crimson Club duties.

"The opportunity to meet someone like the ambassador to China is such a privilege," she says. "During the inaugural events, I hosted Bob (Robert L.) Crandall, the CEO of American Airlines. It was fascinating to observe and talk with one of this country's business leaders. I'm grateful that the Crimson Club has given me these experiences."

A Crimson Club activity since its inception has been conducting historical campus tours, and Hall also values this experience.

"That has been very rewarding," she says. "Learning the history of your university, knowing your heritage, gives you
"The time I have spent with Crimson Club students is so rewarding," Anderson says. "I come away each time thrilled that the next generation is in such good hands. I am delighted that President Boren has made the Crimson Club one of his priorities."

Tour guides relate to campus visitors various facets of the University's past—the engineer-painted green owls on the old law barn—the ill-fated administration buildings, three-time victims of fires—the Bizzell statue, whose sculptor Joseph Taylor was suspected of vandalism when he chiseled his name into the base of his most famous work—and the ghost in Ellison Hall.

The 1995-96 executive chair of Crimson Club was Kate Somvongsiri, a May graduate in letters and Spanish, who studied in Spain, Italy and Mexico during her collegiate career. She came into Crimson Club as a freshman from Shawnee.

"I was attracted to the club because I knew some of the people and respected them a great deal," she explains. "Once I was in, it became so rewarding to work with the terrific visitors that come to the campus."

Somvongsiri, who hopes to enter the Peace Corps and plans a career in either international relations or Renaissance studies, also enjoyed working with prospective students.

"We hosted a Senior Sooner Weekend for high school students," she explains. "Of the group that attended this particular weekend, 75 percent of them came to OU, and two are in Crimson Club now. That is really satisfying."

This year, the Crimson Club had the formidable task of coordinating Boren's ambitious and exciting program, the President's Trophy. Created and funded for the first year by President and Mrs. Boren, this prestigious new award encourages and recognizes exceptional contributions to the University community.

Trophies and $5,000 cash awards were presented by the president in three categories: Outstanding Housing Center, Outstanding Fraternity and Outstanding Sorority. The awards are based on excellence in academics, campus activities, community service and volunteerism, and cultural interaction and diversity.

In addition, five commuter students ("Five Who Drive"), judged on the same criteria, were chosen to receive awards of $500.

Much of the Trophy coordination fell to Jeff Hickman, a broadcast journalism senior from Cherokee who was serving as special events chair.

"The President's Trophy is an exciting program," he says. "I was pleased to be a part of it, even though it was a lot of work."

Hickman agrees that contact with campus guests has been a valuable opportunity.

"It's great to have one-on-one conversations with the outstanding men and women who visit here. And the opportunity to interact with President Boren himself is a real honor. He has created such an overall good feeling here. A lot is happening, and we're fortunate to have occasions to talk with him personally."

Crimson Club membership is limited to 60 men and women who, as the application letter for membership says, "further the understanding of the history, traditions and unique environment of our university community to prospective students, their parents, guests and dignitaries visiting the University of Oklahoma." The requirements are strict. Attendance at meetings is mandatory with only...
two absences per semester allowed. In addition, each member is required to fulfill one Crimson Club activity each month.

The process of selecting new members for the 1996-97 academic year was changed slightly. Faculty members, student organizations, housing units and current Crimson Club members had the opportunity to nominate candidates for membership. Letters then invited those 271 individuals to apply for membership. From the returned applications, current club members selected the additional members for next year.

In many ways the club was the brainchild of Oklahoma City civic and cultural leader Sarah Hogan, although she is quick to credit others. She was the OU alumna mother's friend who heard the story of the KU and OU visits.

"These were not picky people who visited," Hogan explains. "And the OU experience wasn't awful. It was just that her reception at KU was so much better."

Hogan, who was an OU Regent at the time, discussed the matter with Adair, then vice president for student affairs. Next she talked with Horton, and the concept of the Crimson Club began to take shape.

"We talked to people at a lot of universities about similar groups on their campuses, and our club is modeled somewhat after a group at the University of Virginia," Hogan explains. She credits a number of people for their input.

"Anona was very involved, as were J. R. (Morris, former interim president, provost and Regents Professor emeritus) and Paul (Massad, executive director of alumni affairs and associate vice president for development). It was Paul who found Linda, and without her help, the club would never have existed."

Linda is Linda Clarke Anderson, an OU alumna in Houston who has been the patron of the Crimson Club since its beginning, providing the private funding necessary for the club's establishment and continuance.

Massad says Anderson had approached him some time prior to the beginning of the Crimson Club.

"A couple of years earlier, she told me if I came across a special project that I thought would be a fit for her, to give her the first option at funding it. With her interest in OU and her personality, I thought she would love to be involved with a group of vivacious and outstanding students," Massad says.

Anderson wanted to fund a project that was meaningful to her and also honor the memory of her parents, Ralph and Toadie Clarke, who were OU students in the early 1920s.

"The time I have spent with Crimson Club students is so rewarding," Anderson says. "I come away each time thrilled that the next generation is in such good hands. I am delighted that President Boren has made the Crimson Club one of his priorities."

Anderson and her husband, Kent, have two daughters at OU. Both were selected for the President's Leadership Class, and both have been involved with Crimson Club. Whitney is a May graduate, while Huntley is a current member.

Hogan enjoyed seeing the group come into being.

"Matt Hamilton (now director of financial aid services) was their first sponsor, and he and the students just took off with the help of some wonderful people. Kate Hammett, an Oklahoma City communications specialist, prepared the historical scripts. Harold Powell (OU alumnus and owner of Harold's Men's and Women's Apparel) helped design the uniform and the crest."

Now the male members also wear one of four OU ties designed by Boren and manufactured for Harold's.

In addition to campus tours, Crimson Club members serve as hosts for the president's guests at football games, attend student recruitment banquets in Oklahoma communities and assist at special events such as ground-breaking
Crimson Club host Jeremy Zeman, left, inspects Kappa Alpha's entry in the President's Trophy competition with fraternity officer Chip Albert of Tulsa and chapter adviser Pat Samter of Oklahoma City.

The changes in campus buildings. Former dormitories house book stores and architectural services. A one-time art museum now hosts prospective OU students. And Ellison Hall certainly has seen dramatic changes.

Students of the 1950s and before remember Ellison in its original state—as the University's infirmary. Those from the 1970s recognize it as the site of the newly designated Hollomon Center for student government. Today a delicatessen and a fast-food restaurant occupy the first floor, and numerous student government offices are located on the second and third floors.

Also on the third floor, reportedly once a mental ward, there is occasionally an unusual occupant.

"He's a ghost," one Crimson Club member contends. "Some members have seen him. He's a little boy on roller skates."

The Bizzell statue commemorating one of OU's outstanding presidents, the Oklahoma Memorial Union with plaques that pay tribute to those who were killed while serving their country, Owen Field where Heisman Trophy winners once played, the Fred Jones Museum of Art where the works of the Kiowa Five are preserved—and a ghostly child on roller skates.

All are part of OU's history and traditions, a legacy the members of the Crimson Club treasure proudly and willingly share as they serve the University.

Below: Assisted by Crimson Club hosts Christina Harvell and Stephanie Sadberry, at right, special guests board the trolley for Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History groundbreaking ceremonies. At left are Norman Transcript reporter Christine Meyer, U.S. Senator Don Nickles and OU Foundation trustee John Snodgrass.

ceremonies for the new Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History building.

The campus tours continue to be a favorite activity for Crimson Club members, in part because of the diverse aspects of OU history:

- Monnet Hall, the once and future law building, was reported to be headquarters for the DDMC, the Deep Dark Mystery Club, known for outrageous pranks from 1910 through the 1920s.
- The Chemistry Building, where the acrobatic professor Guy Williams entered his classroom through the transom.
- The 2-5-0 club, a group of individuals who contributed $250 in funding for Oklahoma Memorial Stadium in the 1920s. In return, the donor received a lifetime ticket to games; more than 20 club members retain those tickets.