

HOUSTON CHRONICLE

Houston a heavy hitter on the Aggie 100 list

One in three companies on this year's Aggie 100 is based in the Houston area.

By HIBA ADI
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The sixth-annual ranking of the fastest-growing businesses owned by Texas A&M grads was released Friday by the university's Mays Business School's Center for New Ventures and Entrepreneurship.

The top companies overwhelmingly are in Texas, including 32 based in the Houston area. Five other states, plus Canada and France also are represented.

David Baggett, founder of the energy consulting firm Opportune, ranked No. 4 with a 106 percent increase in revenue.

"It feels neat to contribute to the economy and hiring people," he said. "It's all part of making the list. We're fairly diverse, so it's really a combination of business lines that helped us achieve this. We're not one-dimensional."

Baggett said he learns from the companies he helps with restructuring.

"Don't expand faster than what your infrastructure will allow you to expand, and really stick to higher margin business lines," he said. "It takes capital. Some people don't really realize that."

Christine Hollinden's strategic consulting business, Hollinden, returned to the Aggie 100 for the fourth time.

"We not only survived, we thrived," Hollinden said. "I think that was a reflection of the Houston economy as a whole. We are fortunate not to have had as serious an economic downturn as other parts of the country."

The economic troubles were somewhat reflected in the rankings. In a typical year, the highest-ranking companies post growth in the range of 250 percent to 280 percent; this year's No. 1 company, Calgary, Alberta-based Caltex Energy, grew by 224 percent.

"It was a challenging economic environment," said Richard Lester, executive director of the Center for New Ventures

and Entrepreneurship. "Our lowest growth rate is usually in the 20th percentile. This year it was 8 percent, but that's still remarkable growth."

To make the Aggie 100, a company must have been in existence for five years, make \$100,000 in revenue and be Aggie-owned, founded or led.

"There's something very special about the Aggie 100. It reflects the values and bonds that Aggies have, and the work ethic that is taught at Texas A&M University," Hollinden said. "Being in the room with the other honorees is a unique experience; we look at each other and know exactly what it takes to get there."



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