In 1941 Allen Early, an influential and public citizen in Amarillo, decided he would give his 21-room Amarillo residence to a public organization or institution under the condition that it be used for public service. He approached Dr. D.L. Sheffy, head of the Department of History at West Texas State College, about the college accepting the residence as a gift, and Dr. Sheffy took the offer to the administration.

At the time, WT had several extension classes in Amarillo that were inconveniently scattered around the city, in places that were unequipped for learning and costing the college rent. They also met inside various Amarillo schools, but those arrangements had to be worked out each year. A few Amarillo businesses also requested that WT offer downtown courses for their employees, but rooms downtown were hard to find, very expensive and not made to accommodate college work.

Faced with these and others challenges, the WT administration happily accepted Early’s gift. The residence would be used for educational purposes, and the title would automatically revert to the Early estate if and when the college discontinued such use. It would be called the Amarillo Center of West Texas State College.

A study revealed that most adults did not want to attend ordinary college classes because of the age difference, so it was decided that the Amarillo Center would serve the adult population of the city.

The doors opened in September 1942, with about 20 classes. The first student to enroll was a 70 year-old woman, and the average age of 159 originally enrolled students was just below 40, solidifying the plan of an adult educational facility. The availability of upper-level and night classes made the Center incredibly appealing to students who worked full time and had families.

As the number of available classes and students increased at the Center, so did its popularity. So many professions and walks of life passed through the Amarillo Center hallways that it was soon referred to as “Amarillo’s great melting pot.”