

Physical Plant Department Men Receive Unusual Requests

Texas A&M janitors daily sweep an area equivalent to 14 football fields.

That's just one of numerous responsibilities of the Physical Plant Department.

The department, directed by retired Army Col. Walter H. Parsons Jr., employs 500 persons to operate, maintain, expand, plan and construct physical facilities of the university. In addition, they are called on to fetch monkeys out of trees and control electrical current for complex equipment to within one-quarter cycle.

Six-hundred buildings with floor space equivalent to 70 football fields are maintained by the recently reorganized department. The figure will rise with several buildings under construction due occupancy within the year.

The man responsible for A&M's \$100 million campus is kin of the difficult. While an active Army engineer officer, he organized and directed construction of an oil refinery and 1,000 miles of pipeline in Yukon, Canada.

Parsons emphasizes that organization is the key to maintenance, repair and upkeep of buildings, streets, utilities systems, grounds equipment and furnishings. Apparatus and equipment fabrication, improvements, renovation and major repairs to existing structures are also department responsibilities.

Sections under five assistants to Parsons include landscape design, carpenter, electrical and plumbing shops, the modern A&M utilities plant, fire station and transportation and custodial services.

The staff includes engineers, architects, technicians and a large number of associates with skills in a wide band of activities.

Deficiencies are phoned to a work order clerk, or reported by custodial personnel. Clerks notify the proper section, which schedules repairs.

"We put out the fire, and find out why it started to stop it elsewhere," the wiry structural architecture engineer remarked.

Organizational lines drawn up in the department last fall and approved by President Earl Rudder in February lend to planning and management.

Parsons' military background shows in the chart, however. The 59-year-old director keep organization flexible to fit the job, rather than making a job fit into the system.

"We get a lot of weird requests," the 1930 A&M graduate smiled. "We invariably get all requests, unusual or otherwise, because people don't know where else to take them."

A skunk under a building was removed by physical plant department personnel. A pet monkey escaped into a tree in south College Station. A&M's fire department was called for assistance.

A new generator installed in the power plant was equipped with a frequency control governor. One-quarter cycle current regulation is required by Data Processing Center computers, Educational TV Center equipment and the Electron Microscope lab.

"We're investigating a new governor that will do a better job," Parsons commented.

Joining 43 air-conditioned buildings on campus will be one calling for unusual maintenance.

The Space Research Center will have a dual air-conditioning system, requiring maintenance and periodic operation of the standby.

Department personnel don't have to seek the unusual. Eventually, it comes to them.

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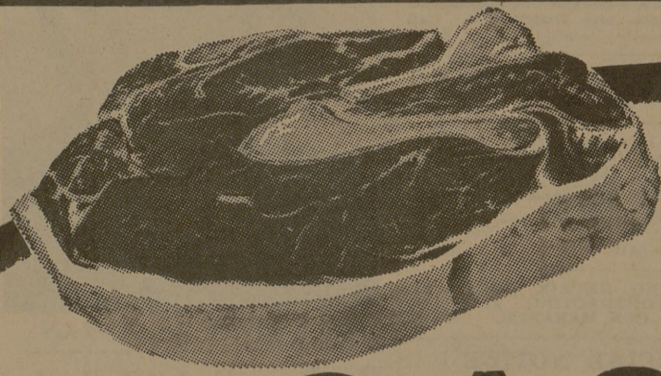
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