County agent gets masters degree after 19-year gap

Commencement speakers sometimes elaborate on the meaning of the ceremony's name.

In the case of E. J. "Johnny" Harrison, who receives his master's degree Friday at Texas A&M University, such a discourse would carry extra meaning.

Harrison was awarded his first degree at Texas A&M in 1947.

However, the 19-year gap hardly means the 52-year-old Ward County agent of the Agricultural Extension Service has been letting his learning apparatus gather dust.

Johnny Harrison might be called a bellwether of the idea that learning doesn't end with a diploma or degree.

At Waco, Madisonville and Monahans, he's helped push agricultural production forward and outward.

He explains matter-of-factly that his second degree has been in progress a number of years. Harrison was warned that time could run out and cause loss of credit. So the West Texan who lives nearly 400 miles from A&M, since last fall has worked in the final 14 hours of his degree program.

While pressing forward for the master of education in agricultural education, Harrison has kept several unique projects progressing in the arid West Texas county.

The projects involve growing shrimp, crab, Atlantic croaker and redfish in salt water ponds. Harrison also is working with the West Texans on marketing shelled pecans, grown in the Monahans sandhills.

"When Johnny introduced pecan trees there, many people said it couldn't be done," commented Dr. Earl Knebel, Agricultural Education Department head and Harrison's graduate degree committee chairman.

"We think a lot of Johnny," Knebel said. "He's a real fine county agent, and a very fine student."

Those sentiments were echoed by others. Dr. Bobby Johnson of A&M's Student Aid Office worked for Harrison at Madisonville, and calls him a "go-getter."

"Without the encouragement and guidance of Johnny, the shrimp project wouldn't go," said James T. Davis, fisheries specialist at Texas A&M who aided in the project. "He has a genuine concern for the West Texas agricultural producers' problems. He works closely with them day by day. We can't do that from College Station."

Davis said marketing of West Texas grown shrimp is two or three years away.

Technical expertise was furnished by Dr. Jack Palmer, mariculture specialist, and Dr. Wallace Klussman, wildlife and fisheries project leader. Horticulturist Bluefford Hancock backed the pilot pecan grove with data and advice.

Reported in the July "Texas Agricultural Progress" and other publications, the five-year-old shrimp project uses gravel pits under which salt water lies eight to 10 feet deep. They soon become salt water lakes. In spite of problems, shrimp stocked in them grow at rates comparable to those in Gulf Coast ponds. The growth was obtained on natural food organisms young shrimp need when they are too small to feed on prepared food.

The experiment was Harrison's idea, and he's pushing it toward a landlocked maritime industry.

He arranged a 6 a.m. tour of the shrimp ponds last year for pe... agribusiness. Three hundred... out.

"The master's degree is ... thing I made up my mind ... to do," explained Harrison, ... grew up on a farm in Jo... County south of Fort Worth. ... can't stand still. The world ... away from you."

He credits others however ... as the West Texans "who are ... tive to someone who will ... "lots of people who have ... to me, like Dr. John Hutch... (recently retired director ... Texas Agricultural Extension ... ice).

U.S. Department of Agri... and Texas Superior Service ... winner, Harrison said the ... look at a West Texas gravel ... see a shrimp farm has its ... ground, in a remark by an ... graduate chemistry prof. ... tired, M.K. Thornton is ... emeritus of chemistry.

"Prof Thornton once told ... to call anything waste," ... said.

"It's just lying there wait... we get smart enough to use ...

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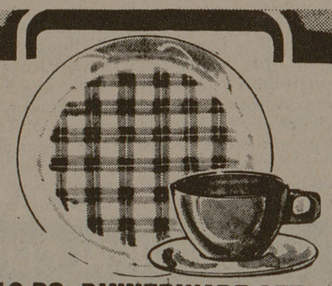
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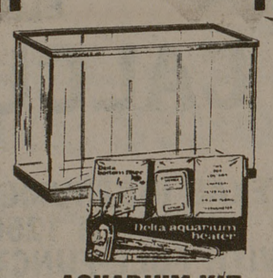

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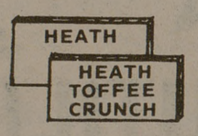

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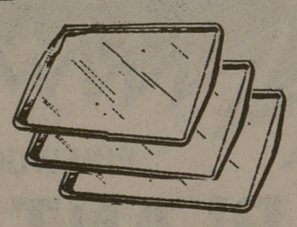
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Several Texas A&M Unive... culty plan to attend the ... Conference of Professors of ... tional Administration meet... 15-20 in Knoxville, Ten... nounced Dr. John Hoyle, ... tion president and Texas A... sociate professor.

Hoyle, a Texas A&M grad... only the second Texan ... 2,000-member group's 30-... tory to serve as chief execut... will coordinate the annual ... expected to draw hundred... University of Tennessee ca...

Dr. Harold Hawkins, Texa... Educational Administrati... partment head, will attend ... Richardson will be respons... the daily newsletter at the ... ence and Dr. Phil West will ... a paper on community ed... leadership.

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