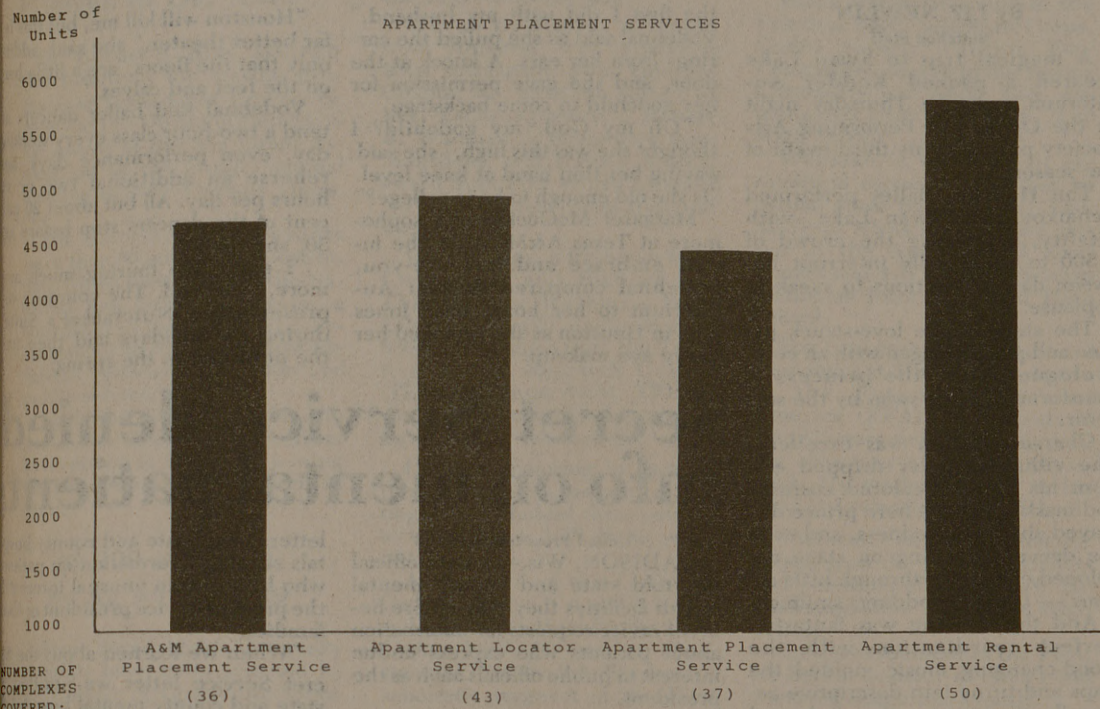


Apartment finders: Are they worth it?



(This is an approximate count of units in apartments, duplexes and townhouses)

By KIM TYSON
Battalion Campus Editor

You're looking for an apartment, but have no idea where to start. There are about 75 apartment complexes in the area but where's one that fits your pocketbook and dreams?

Some students at Texas A&M University solve this dilemma by trying one of the four commercial apartment placement services available.

But are the services worth the time and effort?

The four main businesses which specialize in this are A&M Apartment Service, Apartment Locator Service, Apartment Placement Service, and Apartment Rental Service.

Jensen said his company charges 25 to 50 percent of the first month's rent as a fee from each complex, depending on the complex.

and Apartment Rental Service. The main drawing card of the services is they operate free to the prospective tenant—apartment complexes pay for the service.

The businesses have the same general procedure when someone comes in looking for an apartment. Agents will usually ask what size of apartment, the number of bedrooms and baths and the price range wanted. Other questions include: shuttle bus, apartment furnishings and closeness to campus.

The services have brochure files which show floor plans, prices, parking, laundry and recreational facilities, or most of the information found by visiting each complex. An agent will drive you to the complexes to look them over.

Some of the apartment placement businesses offer special incentives to attract prospective tenants. Apartment Placement has a roommate match-up file and A&M Apartment Placement offers a free lunch at a local restaurant if a lease is made.

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through them. Apartment Rental will pick up newcomers at the airport who plan to look for apartments. Apartment Locator provides free city maps.

Bill Sisson, president of the Bryan-College Station Apartment Association, estimates that 85 percent of apartment complexes are covered by at least one placement service.

"I haven't heard anything bad from any of the apartments about the placement services," Sisson said.

Sisson, who is also manager of Briarwood Apartments, said his complex uses some of the services. He said that the fee for the service is not passed on to the client through higher rent.

"It wouldn't be feasible for us to do that," he said. Although the fee enters into the budget of running a

complex it is not considered a big expense item.

Sisson said that each of the services usually gives the same amount of service to the different complexes. He said 10 to 15 percent of those placed at a complex go through a placement service, depending on the time of the year.

Most of the students who use the service are freshmen or transfer students because they are unfamiliar with the area, Sisson said. "The majority already live here," he said.

Although the services are basically the same, each business operates a little differently.

The six-year-old Apartment Rental Service is operated out of a real estate office and has three salesmen. Manager Don Jensen said about 50 percent of his company's business comes from students.

Jensen said his company charges 25 to 50 percent of the first month's rent as a fee from each complex, depending on the complex.

He said someone in the placement service must have a broker's license and each person who rents must have a real estate license.

Most of those who want housing and don't come to a service don't know it exists, Jensen said.

"This service is useful for people who don't know the town," Jensen said. "The main reason some don't come in is they already know the area and where they want to live."

He said, however, that a placement service knows apartment availability and "can pull it all together in a few minutes for them."

Jensen said one advantage to a placement service is some complexes let them know that they're lowering prices to get units filled. "Most students wouldn't know this," he said.

Eighty percent of the Apartment Locators business comes from students, said manager Joyce Luedemann. The four-year-old service is run by three realtors and also

operates out of a realty office. Luedemann said the busiest time for placement services is in the summer, during freshman orientations.

"Students need to realize that they are under no obligation to lease when we take them out," she said.

Luedemann said one problem placement businesses face are people who use the service but don't take out the lease through the service. She said some are afraid they will have to pay later for the service. Agents lose their commissions unless the lease goes through them for the lease. "But that's just part of the business," she said.

Gerald Farrar, manager of A&M Apartment Placement, said his company also manages houses, duplexes and tri-plexes, as do some of the other businesses.

Farrar estimates that students comprise 75 percent of his two-year-old placement business. Six people work for the business.

One reason that some students don't use placement services is because in some cities renters are charged for it, Farrar said.

"If it's a real tight market, all booked up, the prospective tenant will sometimes pay a fee for you to locate them there," he said.

Farrar said his company negotiates with each complex for the fee, depending on the length of the lease and the size of the complex.

Apartment Placement Service operates out of a motel.

Karen Davis, manager, said the service is five-years-old and run by three full-time employees and two part-time employees. Students

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comprise 75 percent of its business. Apartment complexes pay their fee based on a set percentage of the first month's rent, Davis said.

Davis said though the housing office at A&M tries to keep up with apartment vacancies, there are times when they don't keep up with what's available.

Karen Switzer, student development coordinator at Texas A&M, said the housing office provides services comparable in some ways to these placement services.

For the past two years, the office has kept up with vacancies in complexes 20 units or larger. And for the past six years have provided a roommate service.

Switzer said by next March, the Housing Office will also keep up with price information.

She said one complaint she heard about apartment locators were from students who misunderstood available vacancies and were placed in an apartment far away from campus.

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