

campus & city

Better Business Bureau work is just beginning

By FLOYD WILTZ
Battalion Reporter

The Better Business Bureau of Brazos Valley has been in operation for 10 years helping consumers who feel they've been ripped off by businesses and, if the past is any indication, its work is just beginning.

The BBB is a non-profit organization supported entirely through dues from member businesses.

Leroy Balmain, director of the BBB office located in downtown Bryan, said the bureau was formed in Brazos County in 1970 after a group of people had been swindled by a business. The Bryan office is one of 15 Better Business Bureaus in Texas, out of 146 nationwide.

Balmain says his job is "to keep the marketplace as honest as possible."

His office has already processed 793 complaints this year. The bureau keeps a record of every complaint lodged by a consumer and issues reports on how businesses handle their operations with customers. These reports, which are available to the public, also contain information on businesses across the state and nation.

Balmain said all complaints must be in writing before his office can act. The BBB will then ask the business for their side of the situation and act as a mediator between the parties.

If an agreement still can't be reached, the BBB tries to get the matter settled by arbitration. An impartial third party, agreed upon by both parties, listens to both sides and makes a decision based on the merits of the case. That decision is to be followed by both sides.

The types of complaints are numerous, Balmain said. Recently an elderly woman was cheated out of about \$400 by three men claiming to be roofers. Balmain said they sprayed some type of film on the woman's roof and then drove the woman to her bank where she withdrew all the money she had in her account. They gave her a receipt for the work. The receipt contained no address and the signatures of the roofers were illegible.

"And the only thing we know is that they are three white men in a red pick-up truck," Balmain said.

In addition to fly-by-night oper-

ators, Balmain said the number of mail-order complaints has increased by 49 percent over last year. However, Balmain said the number of complaints to his office about peddlers has decreased over the last eight years.

"We work very closely with law enforcement agencies," Balmain said. BBB files on a business, he added, may be used in investigations by law agencies and have been subpoenaed as evidence in court.

"We have no legal clout," Balmain said, "but we have a big mouth. A business won't stay in business long here if it is doing something wrong."

Balmain said he gets complaints from students mostly about apartment security deposits. The BBB has helped some students get their deposits back, but in other cases apartment managers have been right in withholding or returning only a portion of the deposit, he said.

Balmain has a few words for the doubtful consumer: "Read before you sign and investigate before you invest."

Gramm energy panel today

U.S. Rep. Phil Gramm is to be in the Bryan-College Station area today for an energy symposium conducted by Texas A&M University.

Gramm is to outline federal energy policy during a panel discussion beginning at 10:45 a.m. in Rudder Theater. Gramm, a member of the House Energy and Power subcommittee, is to discuss congressional legislation and federal policy dealing with the energy crisis.

While in the area, Gramm is to tour St. Joseph Hospital in Bryan and address students and faculty at Hearne High School.

A&M regent concerned

More education aid urged

AUSTIN — Texas' public colleges and universities will stagnate or revert to their inferior position of two decades ago if not adequately supported, the chairman of the Texas A&M University System Board of Regents warned Wednesday.

Clyde H. Wells, who has headed the governing board for Texas A&M's statewide teaching, research and public service network since 1969, expressed his concern at a hearing of the Higher Education Financing Committee.

"We seem to be on a plateau in higher education," Wells said in tracing recent progress and quality enhancement by various colleges and universities. "Stagnation or retrogression of education must not happen."

Wells said when he joined the Texas A&M board in 1961 public higher education in Texas was in a generally unenviable position.

He recalled that it was as recently as 1963 that Texas A&M was able to hire its first internationally known scholar away from an American university with a better reputation than A&M's.

"Hiring and keeping those top scholars has been

the best investment we have made for the citizens of this state, he added.

Wells also cited the need for continued construction and acquisition of sophisticated equipment.

"Most of the advances of tomorrow will be made with giant nuclear installations, huge computers, electron microscopes, and perhaps deep in space and in the depths of the earth and the oceans," he pointed out, citing work done at Texas A&M's cyclotron as an example.

Wells said an adequate physical plant is "absolutely essential to a university of the first class" and quoted the old verse that says "It'll be a wonderful world if we ever get it finished."

"We will never get our campuses finished — not if we are making scientific progress," he said.

In underscoring the need for the state's colleges and universities to keep pace through adequate funding, Wells pointed to the growth of the Dallas-Fort Worth area.

"That economy is built on brain power," he said. "There can be no doubt that the universities in that area — and others in the state — have provided the base for this phenomenal economic development."

Survey compares student costs

A&M prices are still a bargain

Texas A&M University ranks favorably in a student expenses survey conducted among the 142 member institutions of the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges.

"In the almost expected yearly increases in student charges, A&M has minimized its increases for 1979-80," said Howard Vestal, vice president for student affairs.

"On a comparative basis, A&M ranks below national figures and below the figures for numerous schools, and even below the increases in the cost of living," he said.

NASULGC findings indicate that median total charges for tuition, fees, room and board rose 5 percent nationwide. A&M's total charges are in line with this figure, Vestal said, and are well below the Consumer

Price Index of 9.3 percent. The university's total charges for non-residents rose 3.3 percent, while the national increase was 6.3 percent.

Of the institutions responding to the survey, 70.1 percent have higher total charges than A&M for resi-

dents, and 66.7 percent charge more for non-residents.

"From the information contained in NASULGC's report, it is clear that A&M continues to be a bargain in education," Vestal said.

Gulf awards \$2,000 to A&M

Texas A&M University's petroleum engineering department has been awarded a \$2,000 assistance grant by the Gulf Oil Foundation.

S. R. McHaney, Gulf's production personnel director in Houston, presented the check to Dr. W. D. Von Gonten, department head.

Von Gonten said the grant will be used to help purchase computer

equipment for the department. McHaney said Gulf assistance grants are designed to help advance special projects proposed by specific departments in colleges and universities.

Other phases of Gulf's aid-to-education program include undergraduate and graduate fellowships, employee gift matching, capital grants and special grants.

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