

Battalion photo by Debbie Golla

There's a right way and a wrong way to produce design projects. Paul M. Mason, a veteran of more than 30 years here, explains the basics of design to his EDG 106 students (from left) Andy McMillen, Mike Murphy and Patrick Moore.

A&M researcher studies protecting Texas coast from oil contamination

Government agencies and private companies trying to protect the Texas coast from spilled oil have too little information to do the job, a Texas A&M ocean engineer says.

"Government agencies and ship owners handling the situation are handicapped by having insufficient data on currents and tides at Galveston Island and San Luis Pass," Dr. John B. Herbich said.

The Texas A&M ocean engineer is calling for measurements of ebb and flood tides under both on shore and off-shore winds at every inlet, cut and pass on the Texas coast.

Herbich said he recently saw two oil sheens entering West Bay through the San Luis Pass, on the west end of Galveston Island. The oil probably came from the leaking Burmah Agate which collided with a Liberian freighter Nov. 4.

Herbich, director of Texas A&M's Center for Dredging Studies, has also observed preparations and measures taken to protect bays, contain spilled oil and clean up oil on beaches.

"Texas bays and estuaries are most important for marine life along the Texas coast. They are fragile and subject to major environmental damage by oil contamination," Herbich said.

"It is really impossible to design an effective way of protecting the estuaries and bays from spilled oil without knowledge of the currents and tides," he said.

He proposed that lateral and wind-driven currents and tidal currents on both sides of inlets be measured as the basic information from which protection would be devised.

"Given this data, and knowledge of how booms, barriers and other containment equipment perform, it becomes possible to determine probabilities of keeping oil out of these delicate marine life breeding grounds," Herbich said.

"During a storm, there's no way to keep oil in the Gulf from being driven into bays. But at other times, it should be possible to deploy barriers across inlets to keep oil out, if it is known how effective a barrier is needed," he said.

Under Herbich's guidance Texas A&M ocean engineering programs have already made studies of some coastline features, such as Rollover and San Luis passes, Brown Cedar Cut and the Corpus Christi Fish Pass, an artificial opening in Mustang Island.

He was measuring currents at San Luis Pass when he saw the oil sheen. The data will help determine measures to prevent erosion of the west end of Galveston Island.

Herbich said tide and current measurements are also needed at Cavallo Pass between Mustang and Padre Islands, the artificial Matagorda Inlet, Port Mansfield Cut and Brazos Santiago Pass near Brownsville.

In 33 years, changes seen

By DEBBIE GOLLA
Special to The Battalion

Paul M. Mason, an associate professor in Engineering Design Graphics, has a lot of stories to tell about Texas A&M University. He's been teaching here almost 34 years.

One of the big changes has been in campus architecture.

"Today they build them (new buildings) like mausoleums," Mason said. "They used to have more to them back then."

Mason is well known for his anecdotes of past experiences with students, and will often tell stories of his time in World War II.

"I love war stories," said Rick Penner, an electrical engineering major in one of Mason's EDG 106 classes. Penner said he's seldom found an instructor who will provide the class with a little history along with the regular course material.

"It's good because you do a little work, then hear a little story," Penner said.

Mason often tells his students that he's not a male chauvinist pig, just an old "redneck."

Mason said he's seen few changes in students over the past 30 years, "except that maybe they're a little smarter now."

Mason graduated from Texas A&M in 1939 with a bachelor's degree in Industrial Education, and received his master's in the same field in 1947.

In 1946, Mason began his career of teaching at Texas A&M, and has been a professor in EDG 105 and 106 ever since.

Mason said that it doesn't seem too long ago that he was the youngest in the department, but now he's the oldest and will retire in three years. (He won't answer students' inquiries

about his age, but 62 is a good guess.)

"He's a lot of fun, he's down to earth — just a good ol' boy," said Mike Murphy, an industrial engineering major.

Mason said that he used to teach differently; he used to be more hard-nosed.

"But I learned students can learn more if you kid around with them. You know, teachers are frustrated thespians. Now, that may sound like a bad word, but all it means is that they're frustrated actors," he said with a grin.

Mason said he really enjoys teaching college students, and has had few disciplinary problems with them.

Mason added that his students make him feel like he's only a few years older than they are, and it seems to be unanimous that his students in turn enjoy him.



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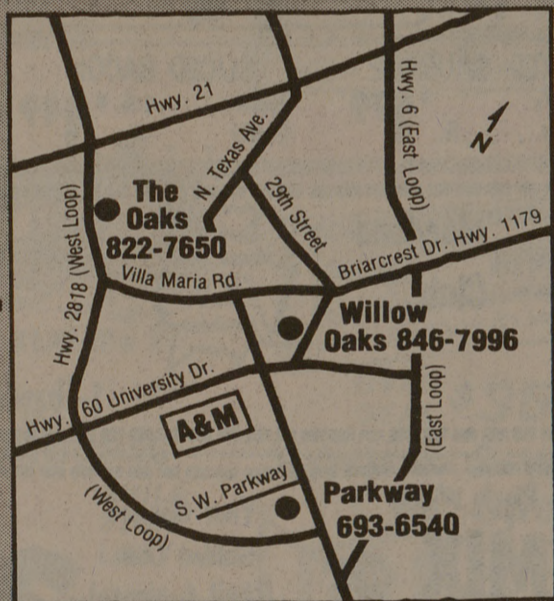
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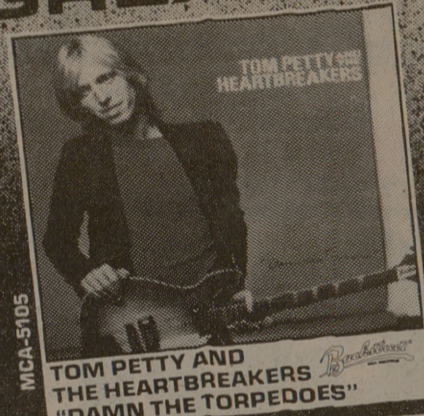


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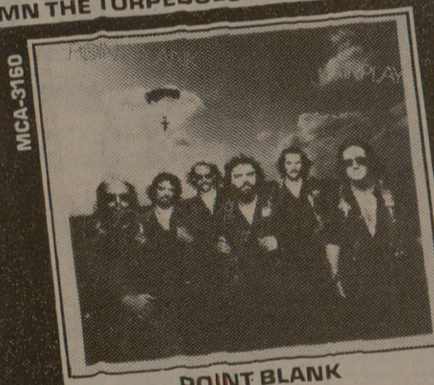
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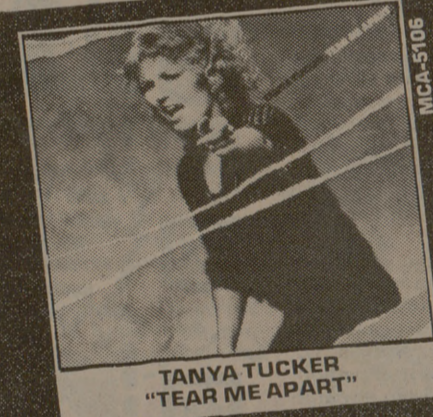
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