

Local

buying cheaper than renting?

Parents can be home brokers

By Robert R. Green
Battalion Reporter

When parents buy a home for their son or daughter to live in while at Texas A&M University, the idea is to make money — or lose it. Parents may rent out part of the unit to other students and then sell the property when their son or daughter graduates, hoping to make a profit. Or they may set the rent payments below what they pay for the unit to get a tax write-off.

Rocky Rogers, a sophomore pre-vet major who lives with two other women in a three-bedroom home in Bryan that her parents bought, said they are losing money on purpose to deduct it from their taxes.

"It's become a lot more popular in the last few years," she said.

Rogers said her parents, like most people who have bought a house for their children, plan to sell when she graduates.

Some people are looking to make a profit by buying a home for their son or daughter who will pay rent that will pay for their costs on the unit. But this is getting to be "a little bit of a high game," said Dr. Arthur Wright, a research economist with the Texas Real Estate Research Center in College Station.

Wright said the problem is setting rent high enough to cover house payments, which are far

more now than they would have been two years ago.

— In 1978, a standard duplex in Bryan-College Station sold for about \$45,000; today, it sells for over \$60,000.

— The down payment on a 1978 duplex would have been about \$5,000; today, it would be closer to \$6,200.

— Total monthly payments on the 1978 purchase would be around \$425. Because of inflation and high interest rates, payments on a 1980 purchase would run close to \$730.

Wright said the situation for single-family homes is similar.

"It's not quite as good as deal now," he conceded, "but it still might be a good deal."

One reason it might be profitable, he said, is that a duplex may appreciate to \$75,000 in two years. And considering a \$45,000 price tag in 1978, "the payoff on the thing would have been the \$15,000 you made when you sold it (\$60,000 in 1980)."

This takes money to start with, of course — particularly for the down payment, about 10 percent on owner-occupied property. Realtors and others say this is the main reason more parents don't buy houses or duplexes: they simply don't have financing.

But Evelyn Lowery, an associate broker with the Richard Smith Co. in College Station, said

that for people who can afford it, buying may make more sense than renting.

"Who are you buying the apartment for? I prefer when I spend my money to buy it for myself," she said.

Wright agreed, saying that if financing is available and if inflation continues, "you're likely to be better off owning an asset than not owning it."

The Off-Campus Housing Center does not keep exact records on such things, but Jim Thornton, a student worker there, estimated that about 2,000 students are living in housing units, including trailers, that their parents bought as an investment. In almost all cases, he said, other student are renting one or more rooms in the same unit.

"They're hoping to save some money in the long run, to beat the rent crunch," he said. "And this way, if they go ahead and hold on to something, they can write it off."

James Thompson, a senior animal science major, found a cheaper alternative. His parents bought a trailer house for him to live in. He rents out one room in the trailer, and he said this takes care of most of his monthly bills.

But for those who can afford it, a house or duplex looks like a good investment.

"If you just sit down and put the pencil to it and look at it," Thompson said, "I don't see how one of these things can't make money."

Listen to your plants' signal

By BARBARA LYNCH
Battalion Reporter

That plant in your bedroom that's turning yellow and dropping its leaves is trying to tell you something.

If you haven't watered it for a month, it's undergoing water stress. The yellow leaves are not only a sign that you need to take some quick action but are also a defense mechanism against the lack of water.

Dr. Page Morgan, a plant physiologist at Texas A&M University, says plants have hormones which aid in regular development of the plant and increase during periods of stress to help the plant survive.

During a drought trees may drop their leaves prematurely. This, Morgan said, is simply induced by the hormone ethylene to reduce loss of water through the leaves. Growth of the plant is inhibited, water uptake through the roots slows down, and the plant survives the drought for a moderate period of time.

Drought is not the only cause of stress, Morgan said. "Some people have houseplants that they 'pet.' Rubbing the leaves with your fingers can bring on stress." Over-watering, bugs, micro-organisms and mineral deficiencies are also harmful to plants, Morgan said.

Although stress hormones primarily help a plant cope, Morgan said, during extreme periods of drought they can actually contribute to the plant's death. When the leaves drop, the plant can no longer synthesize food. The food transportation system within the plant becomes plugged up, and the plant dies.

Houseplants in a well-regulated environment can survive without water for up to four weeks, he said, but greenery exposed to the elements can survive only for about two weeks. During the droughts, the best way to ward off stress in your plants, said Morgan, is to keep them watered. "Just water moderately," he suggested. "Use rainwater as much as possible. Water only as a supplement."

If there is no rainwater available, Morgan said, use a distilled water of horticulture grade.

"It's best not to feed your best Boston fern the same water you drink every day," Morgan said. "Bryan and College Station water contains a high level of salt, which can build up in the roots."

If you do use tap water, Morgan advised that you water abundantly with distilled water or rainwater when it is available, in order to wash all the salt from the roots.

Faculty organize as mentors, vow to help students seeking a friend to talk

By STEPHANIE WILLIAMS
Battalion Reporter

In loco amici. This Latin phrase means "Being available in the place of friends."

Recently a program at Texas A&M University set its goals to be just that — an available friend.

Last fall 18 professors developed a program they named "Free Love." The program was formed to benefit the students at Texas A&M. For instance, if a student at this university had a problem of any kind, the staff members who joined the program, would be available to talk with the student and try and help him with his problem.

During the first semester of the program's development, the name was changed to "Mentor," which is defined, "a trusted counselor or friend." Not only had the name been changed, but the number of members had almost quadrupled. At the start of the fall semester, the Mentor program included 172 faculty members. What's inspiring is that these

staff members are devoting their time for volunteer work to aid the students.

Dr. Rod O'Connor, professor and director of first year programs, is the creator of the mentor program. O'Connor says, "the mentors are not a crisis hotline, they're not trained for that, but are simply a friend who will listen to your problems."

No other university in the nation, to O'Connor's knowledge, has ever tried such a program. He says the program was "unique" at the time they started, but since then, several places have contacted him for information on how they can organize a similar program.

The members of the Mentor organization are not trying to replace campus counselors or advisors, just help them out. In fact, once a month the mentors meet with advisors from guidance offices here on campus for additional training and information in helping the students. The organizer of the meeting is Dr. Garland Bayliss, director of academic services.

Dr. Bayliss feels it is important to let the volunteers know where to send students for additional guidance, if needed. "Another avenue of communication between students and staff," is how the Mentor Program is described by Bayliss. Bayliss emphasizes, "it will not work unless the students take advantage of this program," and he encourages all students to do so.

If a staff member is not involved in the Mentors Program, it does not mean he does care about the students. Many professors and teacher assistants have been doing similar voluntary work for years on their own. O'Connor and Bayliss simply want to organize and publicize this group of volunteer workers who are interested in helping the students.

They plan to print and post a formalized list of all the mentors, and the times they will be available. Lists will be posted in Heldenfels Hall, where Dr. O'Connor's office is located. Copies of the list will also be on reserve at the Learning Resource

Center in Heldenfels Hall for any group or organization that is interested.

In summing up the purpose for the Mentors Program, a recently joined member said, "there can never be too many advisors for a university this size, and the widening of communication between students and faculty will always be encouraged."

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Truck collision creates fire hazard

Grass, billboards and portable buildings caught fire Thursday afternoon when two tractor-trailer trucks collided just north of Bryan on Highway 6 and FM 2818.

One of the trucks, an 18-wheeler carrying 20,000 tons of gunpowder

caught fire causing an explosion hazard.


Bob Holmes, the owner of Tri-State A&M Sporting Goods, said the truck was on its way to his magazines on Highway 6 when the accident occurred about 2:45 p.m.

He was in front of the truck leading the way when he looked out of the rear-view mirror and saw another truck hit the back of the 18-wheeler as it made a sharp turn.

Holmes said the truck was carrying smokeless gunpowder to be used in small firearms.

Three persons were taken to St. Joseph's Hospital. One of the drivers suffered a fractured leg and the other driver and a passenger received minor injuries.


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