

# Famous people watch you eat

By SUSAN HOPKINS

Battalion Reporter

You don't often find President Carter and Mad Magazine's Alfred E. Newman sitting side-by-side in Rudder Auditorium — unless, of course, you're inspecting a mural on the west wall of Backstage restaurant and coffee house.

There the two characters seem in place. They are surrounded on the wall by likenesses of such stars as Miss Piggy and Kermit the Frog, the Beatles, the entire Sesame Street gang, John Travolta, Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, Willie Nelson, Popeye and Olive Oyl, Albert Einstein, Dennis the Menace and Woody Allen.

The mural at Backstage was painted by Molly Jaeger-Begent in keeping with the restaurant's theater theme, which was created by her husband David Begent.

She said the mural is very eclectic in its portrayal of both cartoon characters and "real" people, who were painted to look like an audience at Rudder Auditorium, peering at those who are eating on the restaurant's "stage."

The theater theme is carried out with 30-foot black curtains trimmed in red which drape over the mural,

authentic stage lights, black walls and ropes and ladders that are set casually about the small room.

Jaeger-Begent said the entire restaurant interior was designed and built by her husband, who came up with the idea for a mural, and selected her to do the painting.

Since then, it has turned into a long project that is only about half finished. She said it has taken two years to fill the first few rows on the mural with characters. Although she said she used to paint on the wall while Backstage was open, she recently had to restrict her painting time to Sunday afternoons when the restaurant is closed.

"I ended up spending more time talking to people who were eating there than I spent painting," she said.

Jaeger-Begent recalled the time a 6-year-old girl sat down beside her while she was painting, and proceeded to fire a list of questions typical of a child's curiosity. She said, "After I had explained exactly what I was doing and why, the little girl turned to me and asked, point blank, 'Are you an artist?'"

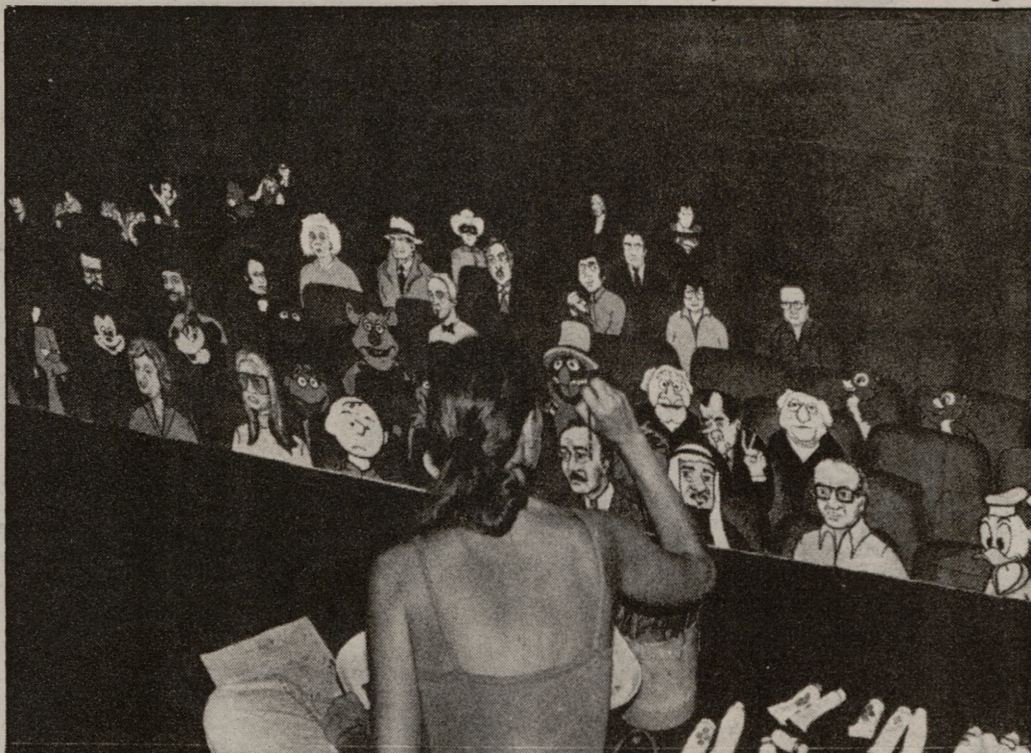
Jaeger-Begent said she thought the question was funny coming from a child, but still finds it hard to



Molly Jaeger-Begent touching up characters in her mural at Backstage. Jaeger-Begent said she finishes about two characters a week on average, since the acrylic paints she uses dry so quickly.



President Carter and Mad Magazine's Alfred E. Newman sitting side-by-side in Rudder Auditorium, along with the Blues Brothers and Woody Allen.



The mural at Backstage. Jaeger-Begent said she will take suggestions about who the new characters should be.

handle when adults don't recognize characters on the wall.

However, she said, not all of the characters should be readily recognizable to everyone. Some of them are personal friends, such as the owner of Backstage, her husband's parents and a man who became a "regular" at the restaurant before he moved from College Station.

Jaeger-Begent said she painted in Begent's parents to surprise them when they came to town.

After taking them to Backstage for dinner, and discussing most of the characters on the mural, Jaeger-Begent said, she finally had to point out the surprise. She said that afterwards his parents admitted wondering who the couple on the wall was supposed to be, because they never dreamed their faces would appear there.

Finishing about two characters a week is average, Jaeger-Begent said, since the acrylic paints she uses dry so quickly. She said that although most of the prominent cartoon characters have already been done, there are plenty of other subjects for the mural, including the

new president of Texas A&M, when he is named. In the meantime, she said, she is open to suggestions for the wall. Her only requirement is that she have a good picture of the person or cartoon character for replication.

From that picture, she said, she copies the figure to exactly the size it will be on the wall. With the thin paper drawing held close to the wall, she reaches behind the paper and sketches the basic shape, which is usually a sufficient guideline to paint from. Jaeger-Begent said the main obstacles she comes across on the concrete wall are bumps and cracks that tend to distort faces.

This is her first attempt at a mural, she said, although she went to art school and even took a shot at being a professional artist before moving from Ithaca, N.Y. to Austin. She got a degree in journalism from the University of Texas, then moved

to College Station to join Begent, who had gone into interior designing and building after two years at Texas.

Jaeger-Begent said that while her husband was doing interiors for local places like Dudley's Draw, Fish Richards and Astraptes, she was busy selling ads for Center magazine, where she is now editor.

However, both Jaeger-Begent and her husband still spend a good deal of time at Backstage. She said that Begent built a bar for the restaurant last summer, while she completed 40 characters on the mural. Begent is working on a backdrop for the east wall that will be a cityscape when completed.

Jaeger-Begent said her greatest fear is that someone will eventually try to expand the restaurant, knocking out the mural that has become a part of her pride.



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