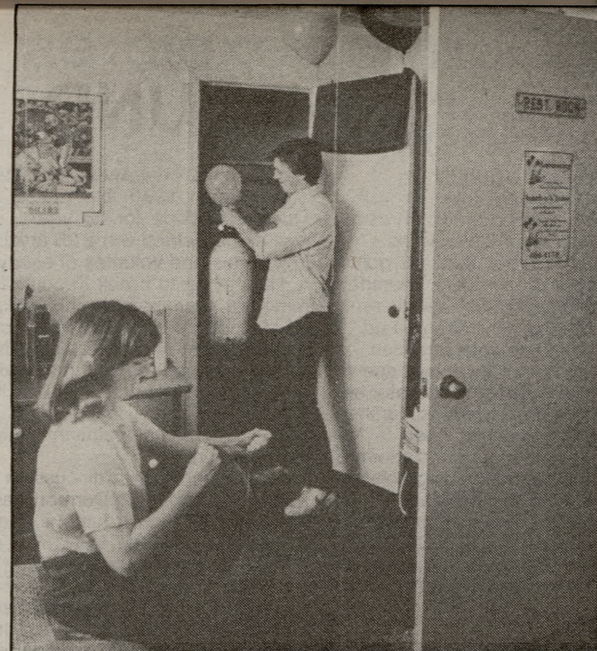




Sharon Broun ties a bunch of balloons while Rusty Fenton consults a map.



Above: First the balloons must be inflated, which is done in Fenton's apartment. Below: Bunch-A-B'loons prepares for a delivery; a bundle of balloons must be put in the back of Fenton's car.

Even better than flowers ...

By JENNIFER AFFLERBACH
Battalion Staff

The idea to start a business delivering balloons in College Station just "popped" into Rusty Fenton's mind one day last summer.

Now he and his partner, Sharon Broun, are thinking about expanding, not just balloons, but the entire business.

The two Texas A&M University juniors, who started Bunch-A-B'loons in September, are temporarily operating out of Fenton's apartment, but plan to be in an office by spring.

When they started their balloon business, they pictured an informal operation, recalled Fenton, an environmental design major from Houston.

"We thought we'd just run it out of a shoe box," he said, "like a kid selling lemonade."

But instead they wound up with an assumed name certificate, a partnership agreement, a Texas sales and use tax permit...

"It makes you hate bureaucracy," Fenton said.

They financed their business with a loan from a bank in Houston that "thought it was a good idea," Fenton said.

"We had no income, no credit, no collateral," said Broun, a management major from Dallas.

"So we had to succeed or else," said Fenton. "It gave us a little incentive."

The two Aggie entrepreneurs will deliver the balloons anywhere in Bryan-College Station.

Well, almost anywhere.

They did decline to make a delivery amid the throng at a Texas Aggie midnight yell practice.

At a rate of \$10 a dozen (plus tax), they will fill the balloons with helium and attach a card with the requested message. Then they will load the bunch into the back seat of Fenton's car, drive through town trying to keep the balloons in the back seat of Fenton's car, and finally, bestow them on the unsuspecting individual.

Reactions range from laughter to tears, from excited screams to embarrassed silence.

"Usually they don't know what to say," Broun said. "They take them and they're quiet."

Onlookers, on the other hand, are seldom at a loss for words. Typical comments are:

"Those are neat."

"Where'd you get those?"

"I want some balloons."

"If I give you my boyfriend's phone number, will you call him and tell him to send me some?"

When he delivered some to a Texas A&M student in a classroom, Fenton said, the professor remarked, "If she's not here, I'll take them."

And when making a delivery in the Sterling Evans Library, Fenton "had a whole entourage following me through the library to see who they went to."

Most of their customers are Texas A&M students. In addition, "the majority are ordered by girls for other girls or for guys," Fenton said.

"Balloons are something you can send to a guy without being mushy," Broun said.

Fenton cited other advantages of sending balloons.

"Balloons are unique. They're cheaper than flowers, and you don't have to water them."

Birthdays are the most popular occasions for balloon orders, but

they also get requests for thank yous, get wells, congratulations, good lucks, and I love yous, to name a few.

"One girl sent an order to two girlfriends thanking them for getting her a date with a guy," Broun said.

Fenton mentioned a delivery he made to a professor at the veterinary school: "I think it was from a student trying to get an A."

A delivery made to Duncan Dining Hall in the middle of dinner was for a cadet who was about to get quadded, Broun said.

The card read: "Hope you enjoy your shower."

Along with delivering to the apartments and dormitories of Texas A&M students, they have appeared bearing balloons at local businesses, residences, and St. Joseph Hospital.

They are already considering hiring part-time help, Fenton said. They also plan to extend Bunch-A-B'loons to the college communities of Waco and Lubbock.

No squabbles have arisen out of the partnership so far, but just to be on the safe side, they had half of their business cards printed with Fenton's name first and half with Broun's first.

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