

Local

Brazos merchants fight bad checks

Bouncing checks land on this list



By JANA L. SIMS
Battalion Reporter

A Brazos County woman says she has given local merchants a weapon to combat the hot check writer. J. Hilton Herrod operates Checkwriter Control, formerly called Check Rite. She took over the business in January and now has more than 100 participants.

For a monthly \$15 fee businesses receive a list of hot check offenders. They also get a label for their store or office identifying them as Checkwriter Control participants.

Businesses not actually participating can also send the name of a bad check writer to be put on the list to warn others. When a business participating in the program receives a bad check, Herrod is notified. The checkwriter is contacted and has five days to pick up the check, or his name goes on the list.

"If someone writes one bad check in my circle," Herrod said, "with one of my stores, they won't write any more."

Herrod said she also acts as an adviser and works with individual employees of her businesses teaching such things as what to watch for, "how to catch a con artist," and what checks can be filed with the county attorney.

She also makes sure that a person is not listed as an offender due to a bank or store error.

Herrod is an "acting agent" for the businesses and can file collectively on bad checks, which she does about once a week.

"But," Herrod stressed, "I am not a collection agency."

She said the merchant can do whatever he wants with a bad check. Her main purpose is simply to see the check get filed with the district attorney.

"Honor the good check writer, catch the bad ones" is her policy. She said the hot check business is "taking off" and the good check writer is getting hurt. In a way, she said, her business is helping to fight inflation because businesses must raise prices to absorb hot check losses.

In the world of crime, Herrod said there are two types of thieves — the honest and the dishonest. She described the honest thief as someone who charges into a store wearing a mask, points a gun, tells you what he wants and runs.

The dishonest thief — the hot check writer — strolls into a store wearing a big smile, talks friendly, drops a few names and hands the cashier a worthless piece of paper for merchandise or cash.

Herrod said by Jan. 1 she hopes to have Checkwriter Control established in a 100 mile radius. She said she also hopes to make available a check credit card which, for the price of printing, will allow its owner (who has been cleared by her) to write checks in her participating businesses with no trouble.

Herrod advises people to list information on their checks other than an address, such as a driver's license number. Students, she said, should list their Texas A&M University I.D. number and make available an address other than a post office box.

A&M epidemic still mystery

By CINDY GEE
Battalion Staff

John felt weak, nauseated and like he never wanted to eat again. Then, 24 hours later, he rejoined the human race and his friends in the chow line.

John and at least 175 other Aggies who were affected by a 24-hour virus last Oct. 29 may never find out exactly what caused the sudden epidemic of nausea, diarrhea and fever. The possibility of food poisoning was quickly dismissed, and doctors decided not to send specimens to the National Center for Disease Control in Atlanta because the epidemic came and went so quickly.

The virus mostly affected cadets, which led many to believe that the students had food poisoning. However, doctors ruled out that possibility after examining the students and seeing students with the same symptoms who had not eaten at Duncan Dining Hall.

Just to make sure that food had not caused the virus, samples of sausage and milk were tested at a University laboratory. Lloyd Smith, assistant director of Food Services, said, "Results show the food was cooked and properly handled after cooking." Cultures from the students were also tested at the University for any disease-causing bacteria. Dr. C.B. Goswick, director of the A.P. Beutel Health Center at Texas A&M, said the results were negative; no pathogenic organisms were found. He said unless cultures were sent

to the C.D.C., he could not know exactly what type of virus it was, or how it was transmitted so quickly.

"The best I can say is it was probably an airborne virus," he said. An airborne virus is one in which the microorganisms are spread through the air by talking, coughing, sneezing or simply breathing.

A spokesman for the C.D.C. said it's a pattern for flu to spread that quickly at universities, in nursing homes or in the military.

"Anywhere you have groups of people living in such close quarters it can spread really quick," she said in a telephone interview from Atlanta.

Goswick said cultures were not sent to the C.D.C. to find out what specific virus the students contracted.

"The C.D.C. gets things from everywhere in the country," he said. "If we jumped the gun and sent them cultures every time something like this came up, we'd have problems."

UT Medical Branch to discuss med school

Representatives from the University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston will be on campus Tuesday to talk about attending medical school.

Staff from UTMB's Office of Special Programs will be in Room 200 of the Harrington Classroom Building at 7:30 p.m. Tuesday to answer students' questions. They will also present a slide presentation on a familiarization program for minority and disadvantaged pre-med students.

This summer the school will conduct its 12th Annual Medical School Familiarization Program from May 31 through June 26.

The deadline for application is Feb. 20.

The four-week summer program is designed to identify qualified minority and disadvantaged pre-med students and to expose them to the demands of medical school.

For more information and application to the program, write to the Office of Special Programs, Office of

the Dean of Medicine, University of Texas Medical Branch, Suite 165 Gail Borden Building, Galveston, Texas, 77550.

Any minority or disadvantaged undergraduate with a serious interest in medicine, as well anyone who would like to explore medicine as a career, is invited to attend.

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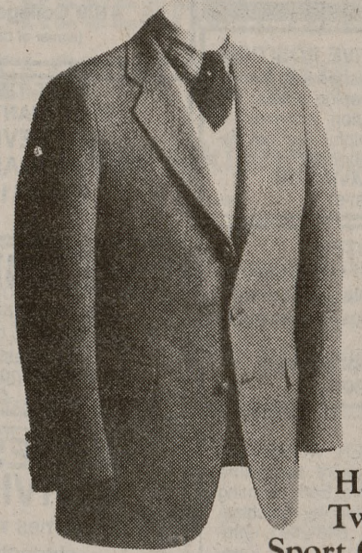
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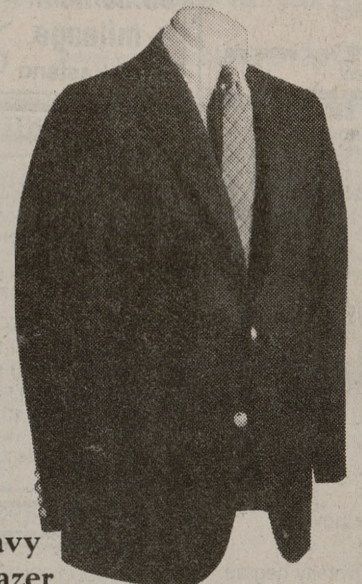
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