

Local

Policies differ on check-walkers

Check-walkers plague some eateries, leave others alone

By JANA L. SIMS
Battalion Reporter

With the rising cost of living, many are finding it harder to enjoy an evening away from the kitchen. But the check-walker is not affected by rising meal prices; in fact, his meals are free. He simply walks out the door without paying.

Some local restaurants are not pestered by check-walkers. Others are bothered intermittently. And for some, it is an accepted part of business.

Harmon Wilson, manager of Pizza Inn, estimated that 10 food tabs are walked each week in his restaurant. He said the lost revenue adds up to about \$30 a week and the majority of the check walkers are college students.

He said the worst times are during their Tuesday and Sunday night buffets. Sometimes as many as 100 people will go through the buffet,

he said, and with that many eaters it is hard to watch for people sneaking out.

Wilson said customers will also try other ways to avoid the price of a meal. Some scratch out part of the items ordered on their ticket or order one buffet meal and share it with other people.

When he or one of his employees catch someone attempting to walk out, Wilson said, "We are not hostile. I don't even like to get rude. We ask for payment of the tab and let it go at that."

However, Steve Larson, co-owner of Rebels, has a different attitude toward check-walkers.

Unless he's in a very good mood, Larson said, he'll send almost any check-walker to jail.

Rebels has been open about two months and Larson estimated that his business is visited by a check-walker not more than twice a week.

He said he and his employees catch 80 percent of their check-walkers. If the culprits have been outside more than two minutes, Larson said, they usually get away.

He said that if a customer slips out because the waiter or waitress was not paying attention, the cost of the ticket comes out of his or her pocket, unless it was a very busy time, such as happy hour, and the waiter or waitress was busy ringing up tabs.

Larson estimated that 50 percent of all walked checks are the result of someone waiting a long time to have his money collected. Larson said these are one of the few types he does not prosecute.

He said the most common check that is walked is for one drink, which

he will neither prosecute nor run down.

"It's not worth my time and trouble," he said, "to go outside and chase someone for \$1.50."

But for those who try to walk checks as a "game," Larson has a firm policy: "A night in jail will teach them how much of a game it is."

He said he has had checks walked by people from age 12 to 60, by "well-dressed businessmen, to people who look like they just finished working on a road."

Walking a check is classified as a theft of services because the provisions of restaurants are considered intangible. A person convicted of walking a check is fined, which he said "is like a slap on the wrist," while a person stealing an item that costs the same as a tab is treated more severely.

Furthermore, Larson said, if someone sneaks outside without paying, and is caught and forced to pay the tab, under the law he has committed no crime. If a restaurant owner wants to press charges, he must refuse payment for the check even if the walker offers it. Thus, Larson said, the restaurant owner loses his money if he wants to prosecute.

He said that tabs for small amounts are not worth his time to go to court and if he prosecutes for large amounts, he loses the money.

Fortunately, not everyone is affected by check-walkers.

Raymond Tonai, owner of Tokyo Steakhouse, said in the past, sometimes he has had checks walked during busy football weekends. But now he said he has no trouble with check-

walkers. He said he serves a lot of honest people — people who will sometimes tell him when an item or the bar bill has been left off of their checks.

John Beltrand, owner of Tom's Barbecue, also said he rarely has someone walk out and leave an unpaid ticket. He said when someone does leave without paying, it is usually a mistake and the person will remember and come back and pay.

El Chico Assistant Manager Robert Rodriguez has been at his position for five months and has not had a check walked. But, he said, if someone attempts to leave without paying, their policy is to prosecute.

Julie's Place does not prosecute. Dana Tharp, manager, said that those who are not caught and asked to pay are written off as business losses.

Tharp said he has had three checks walked in the dining area in the six months he has been here. But, he said, about one check per week goes unpaid in the bar. He said checks in the bar are usually not paid because of forgetfulness, while those walked in the dining room are premeditated.

He said in the bar, it is usually single males that walk the checks. He said one man made a point of asking the waitress for the menu to see the desserts, causing the waitress to think that he would be there longer. He got up to go to the bathroom, but she eventually realized he had been gone too long. His tab went unpaid.

Joe Ruiz, manager of Fort Shiloh

Steakhouse, also noted that check-walkers will get up to go to the bathroom and sneak out. But he said that his restaurant does not have a problem with check-walkers; they make up less than .01 percent of his sales. But when someone does slip out without paying, he said it is usually because the person will get full at the salad bar, go to the bathroom, and think that as long as he is near the door and has a full stomach, why wait for the rest of the meal?

Larson said that some people order without keeping up with the cost and then find themselves short of cash. If more than one person was in the party, he said he would hold one member while the others are allowed to leave and scrape up the money. If it was one person, he said he uses his discretion.

Mark Conlee, manager of the Three C Bar-B-Q on Texas Ave., said checks are walked in his restaurant by people slipping out when there is a crowd at the cashier. He said at the peak of lunch time and on weekends is when it is the busiest and is hard for the cashier to watch.

He said his restaurant gets about one check walked a week. If the check-walker is noticed before he leaves the area, Conlee said they will go outside after him and make him pay.

He said he makes a point to tell the waitresses to notice whether their parties stand in line to pay, or head for the door. He said the waitresses are not held responsible for walked checks because he has a cashier whose job is to collect the money.

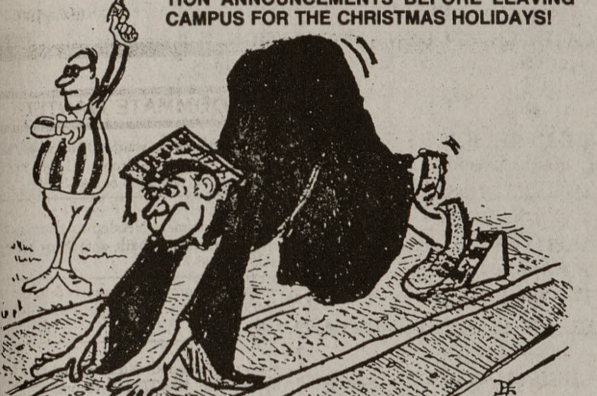
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Symphonic Band highlighted by tenor

By JENNIFER AFFLERBACH
Battalion Staff

Kenneth Alford, composer of the "Colonel Bogey March," gave his song that title because he felt certain the bogy in his game of golf would always outrank him. The Texas A&M University Symphonic Band's rendition of the march, and its entire concert Thursday night, was certainly up to par.

The 72-member band, under the direction of Maj. Joe McMullen, put on a smooth program in Rudder Auditorium for an appreciative audience of about 500.

Judging from the audience's reaction, the favorite piece was "Sleigh Ride," a lively Christmas

song complete with simulated sleigh bells, clippings of horses' hooves, and neighing that brought laughs from the audience. Even the little boy two rows in front of me who had dozed through earlier, more staid pieces perked up for this one.

The band added to the holiday mood with their impressive performance of the traditional "Greensleeves," which put a lump in my throat and a hush over the auditorium.

Rounding out the Christmas theme was a selection from the Nutcracker Suite, "Dance of the Reed Flutes," performed by the flute trio of Ginger Daniels, Perilou Goddard, and Angela Newton.

After the intermission, the band took a back seat to special guest Arturo Sergi, a tenor with the Metropolitan Opera. He quickly built a rapport with the audience, chatting about the recent Aggie football victory in Austin; then launched enthusiastically into a repertoire of operatic and American folk songs. The brevity of the songs and the energy Sergi poured into them kept the audience attentive.

His wife, Leonore, a soprano, joined him briefly in a duet from the opera "Tosca" before the band reminded the audience of its presence with an adequate, but not grand, finale by Tchaikovsky.

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