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You get More of the Things you Love

Local

Cerebral palsy makes walking a victory

Rachael improves in special ed class

This is the final story in a three-part series on the special problems of handicapped children.

By **MARJORIE MCLAUGHLIN**
Battalion Staff

Rachael's expressive brown eyes survey the room and her smile deepens when she sees her teacher. Her stiff fingers move slowly down to point at the symbol for swing on the plastic board in her lap.

This symbol board and some arm and facial gestures are the only ways Rachael has to communicate and, at recess, she'll be wheeled out to the swings in a stroller.

Rachael, 13, has cerebral palsy, a condition caused by brain damage either before or at birth. She cannot talk, and because her muscles are so stiff and underdeveloped, she cannot use her hands for sign language.

Mentally, Rachael is 3. She can feed herself some soft foods and can walk very slowly with leg braces and a rolling walker.

"A lot of people try to ignore these children," said Mary Ann Raatz, Rachael's mother. "They have feelings — they just can't express themselves well."

Raatz, her husband James, Rachael and her older sister

Tamara, 16, live in College Station. Raatz talked about the problems of raising a disabled child as she sliced a banana into Rachael's bowl.

"We try to keep our family life balanced — we try to spend as much time with our other daughter as we do with Rachael," she said. "My husband and I don't have much time together."

The Raatzs decided against institutionalizing Rachael despite the problems of raising her at home.

"At this time, we can give her more than she can get at an institution," Raatz said.

When Rachael was 7, the usual age for entering school, there was no special class for severely disabled children in the College Station Independent School District. A teacher taught her basic skills at home for an hour a day.

"A lot of people try to ignore these children," said Mary Ann Raatz, mother of Rachael, a cerebral palsy victim. "They have feelings — they just can't express themselves well."

Raatz disagreed, saying, "I wish that they could be incorporated into school life more. Sometimes, it's like they're forgotten out there."

At school and at home, repetition of certain tasks and strict scheduling seems to be the best way to teach disabled children. Wednesday, the bus was late and the day's school schedule was disrupted.

"Routine is very important to these children," Westbrook said. "If the bus is late, the whole day may go badly."

Rachael and her classmates start each day by working puzzles. Rachael is easily distracted, and Westbrook must continually remind her to finish the puzzle. The exercise goes slowly. It is hard not to help Rachael complete the simple task. But, as Westbrook points out, even these tasks are helping Rachael's concentration, perception and muscle coordination.

Rachael's daily trips to school have made her more independent

Two years later, a class was formed and Rachael started school.

There are six children in her class, ranging in age from 9 to 16. One teacher and two aides conduct the class, making the adult-to-student ratio 1 to 2, as compared with an average ratio of 1 to 30 in a normal classroom.

At 8 a.m. the specially-equipped bus takes Rachael and the other disabled children in the district to school. Her class meets in two large rooms behind the district's tax office on Timber Street.

Karen Westbrook, the teacher, likes the location because the often noisy activities don't disturb the rest of the school.

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Rachael's daily trips to school have made her more independent

and have helped her mother adjust to letting her go.

This summer Rachael will undergo intensive self-help training at Scott and White Hospital in Temple. Raatz, who will stay in Temple, will only see her once a day.

"It will be very hard to leave her, but the training will help her learn to do things for herself," Raatz said.

"This is a poor school district — there are no large industries in this town to generate taxes," said Westbrook. "The school system tries to get us what we just have to have, but there are a lot of things we would like to have."

She also blames the sagging economy and federal aid cutbacks for the decreased special education funds.

Local clubs donate most of the expensive equipment used in the

In her occupational therapy Rachael struggles to undress a doll almost her size. Sheryl Kalza, a therapist from the Brazos Valley Rehabilitation Center, said this exercise teaches Rachael how to undress herself and, more importantly, improves the fine motor skills in her hands.

The shirt and pants come off, but Rachael can't get the underwear over the doll's legs. She cries out in frustration.

Finally, after much encouragement from Kalza, the underwear comes off and Rachael gives the doll a bath with a dry washcloth. The physical therapist exercises Rachael's stiff back and leg muscles and helps her practice walking, sitting and standing.

The rest of the school day is spent sorting colored pegs into colored buckets and placing pegs into holes — pre-vocational skills that might enable Rachael to work someday in a workshop for disabled people.

Each task that Rachael completes is lavishly praised by Westbrook and the aides. The attitudes of the teachers, as well as those of other people Rachael comes in contact with, are all-important, Raatz said.

"Attitudes toward handicapped children are slowly changing," she said. "It depends on how parents teach their children. In this neighborhood, some parents talked to their children about Rachael and they come over and ask to play with her. Others ride their bikes by and stare."

"People think it's terrible having a child like this. But it's really a blessing. She has a terrific smile and you know it's genuine, not a put-on."

"The school system tries to get us what we just have to have, but there are a lot of things we would like to have," said Karen Westbrook, Rachael's special education teacher.

class, Westbrook said. The school system pays for two hours of occupational and physical therapy a week for each child who needs those extra services.

Aggies win Baylor law money

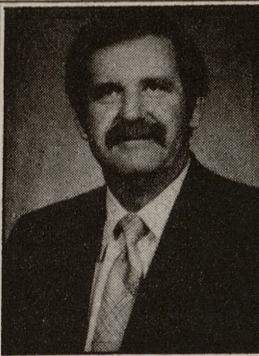
Two Texas A&M students have received a special scholarship to attend Baylor University's School of Law.

Joseph Milton Nance, \$2,400 full-tuition scholarships were awarded to Steven Webster Ellis,

a political science major from Portland, Texas, and William Kaufman, a psychology major from Houston.

Half tuition scholarships for \$1200 were given to alternates

David Wayne Tomek, a finance major from Houston, and Lisa Lynn Holmes, an accounting major from Longview.



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<p>THURSDAY EVENING SPECIAL</p> <p>Italian Candle Light Spaghetti Dinner SERVED WITH SPICED MEAT BALLS AND SAUCE Parmesan Cheese - Tossed Green Salad Choice of Salad Dressing - Hot Garlic Bread Tea or Coffee</p>		
<p>FRIDAY EVENING SPECIAL</p> <p>BREADED FISH FILET w/TARTAR SAUCE Cole Slaw Hush Puppies Choice of one vegetable Roll or Corn Bread & Butter Tea or Coffee</p>	<p>SATURDAY NOON and EVENING SPECIAL</p> <p>Yankee Pot Roast (Texas Salad) Mashed Potato w/ gravy Roll or Corn Bread & Butter Tea or Coffee</p>	<p>SUNDAY SPECIAL NOON and EVENING</p> <p>ROAST TURKEY DINNER Served with Cranberry Sauce Cornbread Dressing Roll or Corn Bread - Butter - Coffee or Tea Giblet Gravy And your choice of any One vegetable</p>

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