

# Police hunt for abductor

United Press International  
CONROE — Authorities in southeast Texas, bolstered by two developments in their investigation, intensified their search for the alleged mastermind behind the abduction of a man who was buried alive for five days in a wooden box.

Michael Baucom, 21, White is a former employee of Bebo, an electronic component store owned by Baucom's father. Montgomery County Sheriff's Department spokesman Ed DeForest said authorities believed they were closing in on White when they discovered the suspect's rental station wagon abandoned in a wooded area in Polk County near Livingston. Earlier in the day, authorities

executed a search warrant at White's home in north Liberty County, but found no trace of the suspect, DeForest said.

Investigators hoped papers and weapons found at White's home and an examination of the car would provide clues to lead them to White, DeForest said.

Authorities, meanwhile, had no further information about an off-duty Houston firefighter who may have been kidnapped by White during his escape from Montgomery County Sunday following Baucom's rescue.

Baucom was kidnapped Tuesday night and buried in a coffin-like box in a remote oil field near Conroe. Shortly after his rescue Sunday, a woman called police and reported her husband missing.

Houston firefighter Coby Garland Hamilton, 28, who was delivering newspapers early Sunday, made a collect call to his wife, saying he had been in an accident and had to go to Lufkin.

Theresa Hamilton said her

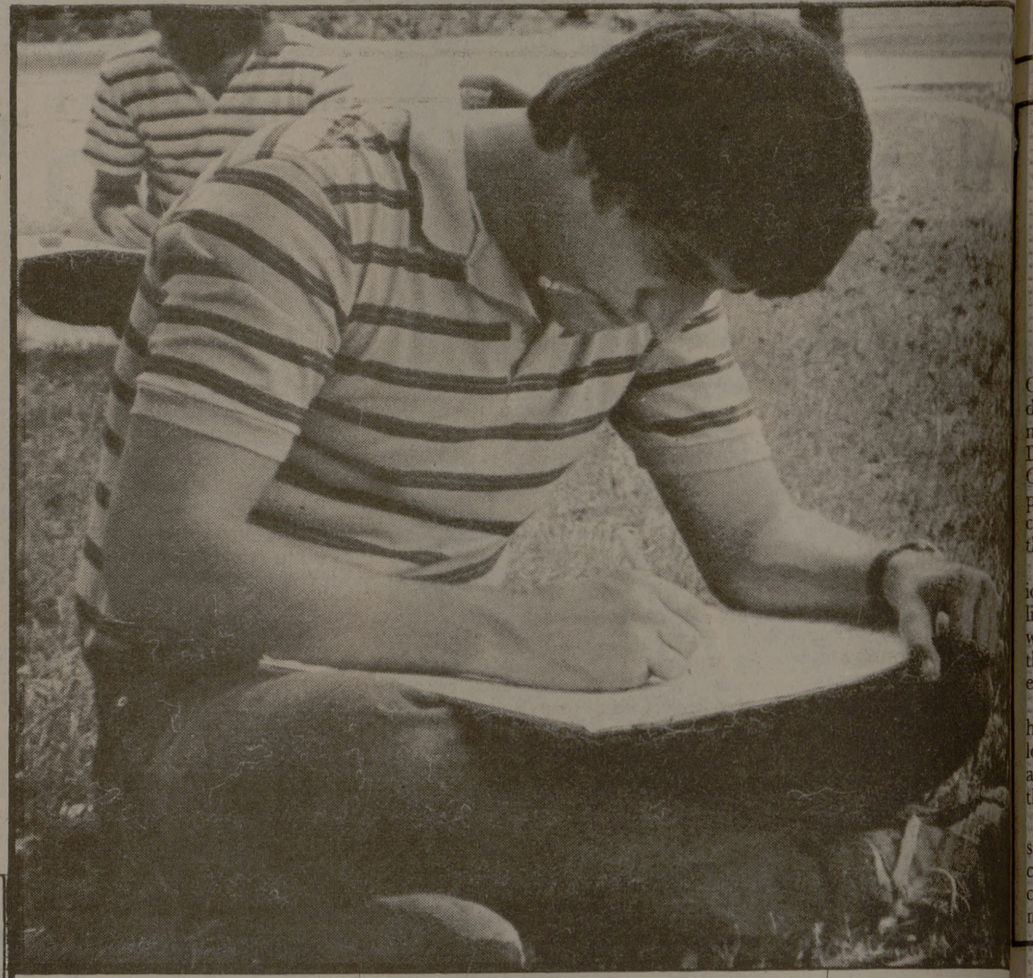
husband sounded strange on the telephone and the call was uncharacteristic of him.

"He was short and brief and wouldn't let me get a word in edgewise. He was just talking. You could tell that somebody was there. It was like he was talking to someone he didn't know," Mrs. Hamilton said.

DeForest said deputies tried to trace the origin of the call and worked under the assumption that Hamilton was kidnapped by White. Authorities searched Montgomery and Liberty counties for White and Hamilton, he said.

Lawmen rescued Baucom Sunday after one of his captors led them to the plywood box buried 3 feet deep. Air was piped into the box, which measured 3 feet by 8 feet and 25 inches high. Baucom's kidnappers left him enough water for three days and some bread.

Baucom was dehydrated and covered with fire ant bites, but he said his excellent physical condition kept him alive, although he lost 12 pounds.



staff photo by Irene M...

## Portrait of the artist

Chris Cysewski, a freshman from Bryan, makes sketches of the Physical Plant for Environmental Design 111. Design Media Cysewski is an environmental design major.

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# Tourists may save Valley businesses

United Press International  
EDINBURG — The thousands of "winter Texans" who flock to the sunny Rio Grande Valley each year may rescue the economically devastated area this winter like the U.S. Cavalry — in the nick of time.

Business in South Texas has come to a virtual standstill with the dramatic devaluation of the Mexican peso, now worth about one-third its value at the beginning of 1982.

"We're seeing some business failures here where we used to have few," said Carl Rush, director of the Bureau of Business and Economic Research at Pan American University, said.

"Since the peso devaluation, you hear horror stories all the time," he said. "Merchants who were doing \$25,000 a week turnover are now doing under \$1,000, say \$800 a week."

But all that may change when the winter Texans arrive — an annual migration from the Midwest and Canada that usually begins in October, and finally ends in April. The peak season occurs in January.

The Texas Highway Department estimates 600,000 people visit the cluster of small towns at the southern tip of Texas each year. The Rio Grande Valley

Chamber of Commerce believes about 100,000 of them are long-term visitors, staying anywhere from six weeks to six months.

Last year they spent from \$199 million to \$255 million in

"Merchants who were doing \$25,000 a week turnover are now doing under \$1,000, say \$800 a week..." — Carl Rush, business and economic adviser.

the Valley. Rush has studied the winter Texans and their habits since 1975.

"They are cautious with their money, as the elderly population is," he said. "But they are a major economic factor here. The banks actively seek their business. They deposit money here and many of them leave it year-round."

"They eat out frequently. Most of the more expensive places."

"They don't just come down here and soak up sun. They are gregarious, always looking for things to do."

Rush believes the usual 15 percent yearly growth in winter tourism will continue this year.

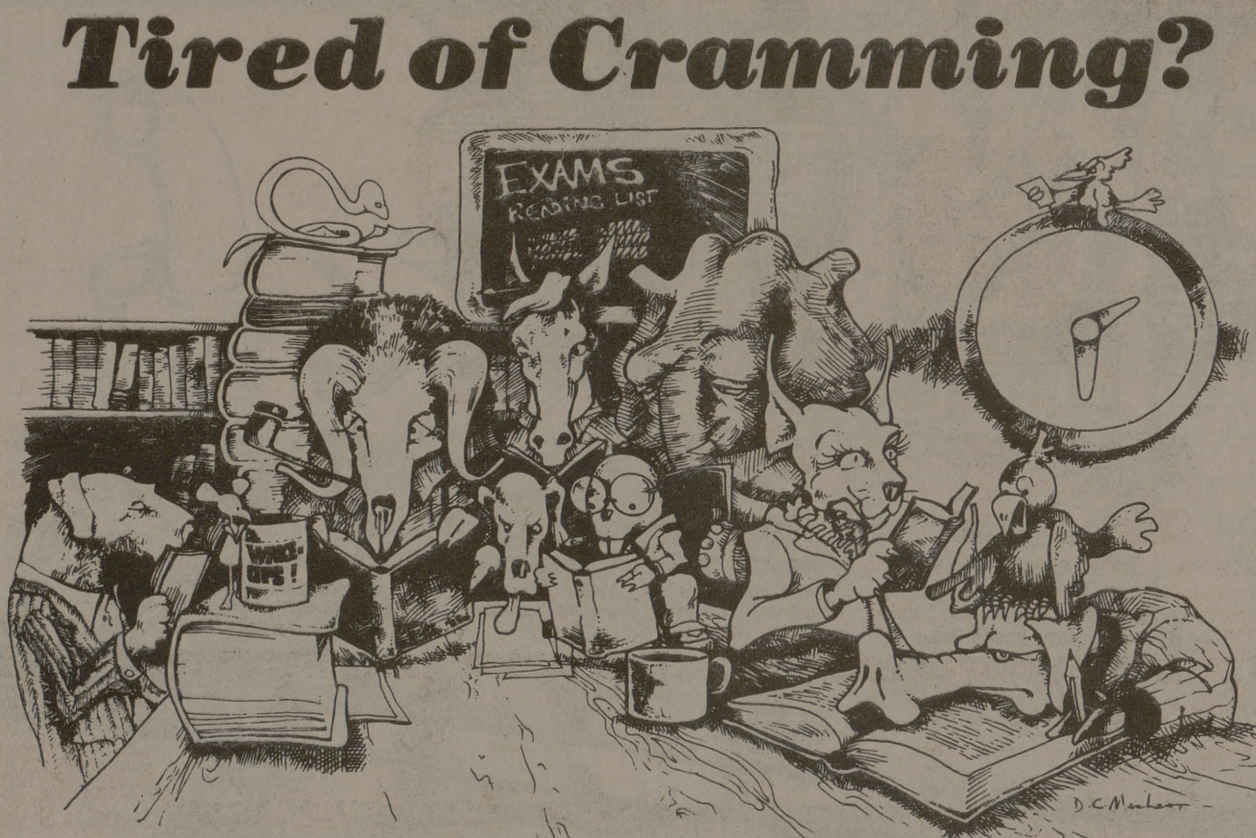
"You can judge the impact from the growth of facilities," he said. "Businessmen keep putting up new parks for recreation, one of which is the new Monte Carlo homes. They add new pads for parks already built. The businessmen don't build them until they expect to fill them."

One large park for recreation vehicles already has 10 percent of its spaces sold or reserved.

The peso devaluation probably will not dissuade winter Texans from returning to the Valley, but it may change their attitudes toward the visitors, he said.

"Sure, people complain that they clutter up our streets, they are slow drivers, they are sightseers," Rush said. "But we can be a little more hospitable than we have been. We ought to be more appreciative of the winter visitors, not just in a commercial sense but in a human sense."

Visitors have complained that Rush's questionnaires that they feel unappreciated for their economic contributions to the South Texas communities.



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