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## Kyle Field plants tailored to years

By DALE SMITH  
Reporter

Kyle Field's south endzone has received a new look every football season since the late 1960s. From the stands you can read, 1876 TEXAS AGGIES 1984, embroidered in the endzone's colorful plants.

Bill Vitopil, assistant director of grounds maintenance, said the plant beds were built when astroturf replaced grass on the playing field.

Vitopil said the plants are green and bronze variety Alternanthera plants. The bronze plants are used for the letters and numerals and the green plants are used in the background.

"When the temperature is in the 50s, it'll make the bronze variety almost a maroon — the green background turns to a yellow tint," he said.

The beds are planted every year about mid-June, Vitopil said.

"Before planting, we till the bed, rake and smooth out, mark and lay out the letters with string," he said. "We put the bronze in the letters and green around them."

Five to seven days before a home game a crew shears the tops and edges of the plants so they can easily be read from the stands, he said.

The message in the plants virtually remains the same every year, Vitopil said. The only thing that really changes is the new date each year.

Vitopil said the plant beds were designed by Dr. Robert Rucker, the

land architect at the time and currently a professor emeritus in horticulture.

Rucker, Class of '38, said he was asked by the Board of Regents in 1967 to come back to A&M. The regents wanted someone to give the campus more beauty, he said.

During the 1930s, flowers dotted the campus, he said. But after the war began, other interests occupied everyone's time and the plants weren't properly taken care of, he said.

Rucker believes it is essential to beautify academic environments with plants.

"In a planned environment such as the campus, attention to details must be given," he said. "Because without perfection of details, there cannot be perfection of the whole. It's subtle, but very important to the total educational process."

"The reason why the ground maintenance department tries to have colorful flowers at every season of the year, is a basic desire that every student attending A&M should have a daily exposure to beauty."

Rucker said that since his retirement seven years ago, he is pleased with the work of the ground maintenance department.

"I couldn't be happier with the job of the department," he said.

Many fans may not have noticed the dot, dot, dot, dash (...) after 1876 TEXAS AGGIES 1984, or know that in Morse Code it means "V for Victory," he said.

## Scientists analyze horses' speed

University News Service  
Texas A&M animal scientists are developing a new method of measuring a horse's worth — or genetic capacity — by measuring its average speed during a race rather than computing the value based on the horse's earnings.

Dr. Nat Kieffer and doctoral student James Pounds point out that while Olympic runners have improved their speed for a mile-long race by over 13 seconds in the last 30 years, horses are falling behind.

Since 1896 the winning time of the Kentucky Derby has improved by only 8.18 seconds, or by just about a second per decade, Kieffer said. The 1980 Derby winner was only three seconds faster than the 1932 champion, while the Olympic time for the 1,500-meter run was reduced by more than 12 seconds during the same period.

"Men and women don't get married because they think they're going to produce fast offspring, whereas we have been selecting for speed in thoroughbred horses for the last 300 years," he said.

Kieffer said the speed in the American Triple Crown races, including the Derby, Belmont and Preakness in which top horses annually compete, has plateaued and has tended to decrease over the last decade since Secretariat broke the two-minute record for the 10 Furlong (1 1/4 miles) race in 1973.

He suggests the method of selecting horses based on earnings rather than on speed might be one reason horses haven't gotten much faster.

"If two horses run the same race and the horse which comes in second does so only by a nose, he might get less than half the earnings of the first place winner, or \$50,000 vs.

\$125,000," Kieffer said. "The second place horse actually might be a faster horse, but if you look at the earnings, you'd assume the winner is twice as good, which really isn't the case."

The horse specialists from Texas A&M's College of Agriculture are developing criteria for measuring the horse's genetic capacity, or the speed he is capable of achieving, based on the average speed per furlong, particularly from the beginning of the top of the stretch to the end of a race.

"This is a much more objective way of measuring a horse's genetic capacity or genetic variation because, after all, we measure speed by minutes and seconds, not by dollars," Kieffer said.

Keiffer explained the final stretch of the race is particularly important because that's when the race is won.

The strategy in horse races is similar to that in human races, he said, in that the leading horses tend to stay grouped together until that last stretch. For this reason horses generally don't run their maximum speed during a race.

"Then the one with the most 'kick,' or the one who has the most energy left in the last stretch, usually pulls ahead and wins," he said.

Kieffer said another reason horse speed may not have improved over the years is that training methods are virtually the same whereas human training is much different than it was even a decade ago.

"Training is as important an ingredient as breeding," he said. "There is nothing you can do to make a horse run faster than his genetic capacity, but there are a lot of things you can do to make him run slower."

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