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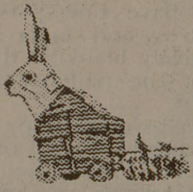


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STATE AND LOCAL

Costa takes routine out of Bryan School Board

By JENS KOEPKE
Reporter

Wendy Costa believes in public service.

"I've always felt very privileged; I have taken a lot from this country," she said. "I don't have a lot of money to give back, but I do have time."

Costa, 33, spends her time serving on the Bryan School Board, teaching English and history at Blinn Junior College, and taking care of a husband and two sons.

"I was very concerned with the schools here, because I was teaching all the (high school) graduates at Blinn," said Costa.

"I also thought the school board being all men with the same backgrounds was not good for the community."

After losing an election bid in 1983, she reorganized her campaign, and in 1984, was elected to a 3-year term on the board.

The curly-haired, blue-eyed woman laughed lightly as she recounted that many people considered her a radical in the '83 campaign. The community was surprised that a woman was taking such an outspoken role in civil affairs.

"Because I'm the first woman to be elected to the school board, I've been something of a curiosity to the community," she said.

Her directness surprises many people. They do not expect such candor from a charming, personable woman.

Her dedication to the community together with her singular views make Costa a fresh new face in local politics.

"People who are likely to call me wouldn't call another school board member," she said.

But Costa confided, "I've been surprised at how much I liked the 'good ole boys' on the school board."

She said that the board is concentrating this year on implementing the school reforms directed by the Texas Legislature.

"I was in agreement with 95 percent of the Perot report," said Costa. "I'm pleased that the school board and the school district administration are really behind the reforms."

A tone of optimism and sincerity surrounds her words as she describes the school district.

"There's a new youthfulness in

"I also thought the school board — being all men with the same backgrounds — was not good for the community." — Wendy Costa, a member of the Bryan School Board.

this district; an excitement generated by the younger people," said Costa. "I think there's a new emphasis on academic excellence."

With all her obvious enthusiasm, Costa characteristically has her own plans to improve the school board.

"I think that the most important thing we can do to improve the quality of education for every child is to bring down class size," she said.

"As of next year, 22 students will be the maximum in kindergarten through second grade," said Costa.

Based on her own substantial teaching experience, Costa has advised the school district to attract and keep qualified teachers.

"Public schools everywhere need to hire people who have academic degrees in their fields," Costa said.

She said more significance should be placed on the quality of the reading material used by teachers.

"I'd like to see this district become outstanding," said Costa.

Such commitment to the community is quite remarkable, considering Costa's initial reaction to life in Bryan.

"I thought it was pretty ugly," said Costa, "and that there was very little to do."

Raised in Connecticut, she attended Vassar College and graduated in 1972 in independent studies — a combination of literature and history.

After marrying a native Spaniard in 1973, Costa went on to receive her master's in American history from Columbia University.

In 1976, she abandoned her half-finished doctoral work and accompanied her husband to central Texas, where he had accepted a job offer as a Spanish professor at Texas A&M.

"My first impression of Bryan was

that there were no good restaurants, concerts or movies," she said.

She said Bryan still has a distinct lack of affordable cultural entertainment for a community of its size.

"When I first came, it was hard to be a part of the community unless you had lived here forever," said Costa. "Also, I didn't like the attitude. 'Highway 6 runs both ways. If you don't think this is the most wonderful place in the world, you should leave,'" said Costa. "I don't like the attitude."

This attitude, she said, kept Bryan from matching the improvements in the parks system and in zoning that College Station had instituted the last decade. It was also one of the reasons she ran for the school board.

"If Ron Blatchley had not been elected mayor, we would probably have moved to College Station," she said.

"It wasn't that important in the end, it was kind of symbolic. I thought they don't elect him, that means we will never have good parks, that town is never going anywhere."

Thus began a great turnaround. Costa's view of the community.

She said seeing people at Texas A&M who had never adjusted to Bryan-College Station, caused her to decide to make the best of it.

"I decided after a while, as Costa, "that this was home and I was going to live here. I wasn't going to blame the things I didn't like on other people, but try to change them."

"And things are getting better, any objective measure, this community looks a lot better than it did eight years ago. There are more parks and the people have fixed their houses."

"It was having children that really made me like this place. 'Children represent your commitment to the future.'"

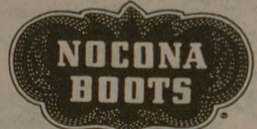
Costa has survived the culture shock and is now placing her considerable talents at the foot of the community.

"I'd like to be on the school board a while," said Costa. "I feel very committed to Bryan."

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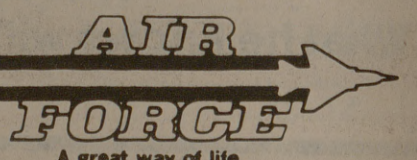
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