

Photo by JOHN MAKELY

Topsy Turvy

David Gilbert, 17, was driving south on Wellborn Road about 7:15 p.m. Tuesday when he failed to negotiate the curve at FM 2818. His car went off the road and landed in a ditch. A

police spokesman said Gilbert, of College Station, was traveling at an "unsafe speed" when he approached the curve. Gilbert was taken to St. Joseph Hospital, treated and released.

BBB works to ensure fair business

By LORIE WOODWARD
Reporter

"A lot of things don't go on in the Bryan-College Station area that could because the Better Business Bureau is here." — BBB member Billie Ingram.

Once upon a time, an Aggie bought a shiny new bicycle. On the way home from the store, the bicycle's wheels flew off. The Aggie cursed. He cried. Then he called the Better Business Bureau.

His call was answered. His complaint was resolved. And the Aggie and his bicycle lived happily ever after.

Fairy tales do come true. The local Better Business Bureau is working to ensure that both buyers and sellers are treated fairly.

Leroy Balmain, executive director of The Better Business Bureau of Brazos Valley, Inc. said fairness and credibility are the keys to the bureau's success.

"We wouldn't have been in business some 70-odd years if we took sides," Balmain said.

The bread and butter of the Better Business Bureau is the consumer inquiries, Balmain said.

"It allows consumers to call up and find out about a particular company's reputation before doing business with it," he said.

The typical reply to an inquiry is "The XYZ Company has a satisfactory business report to date," Balmain said.

If the business is a member of the bureau that information is given

also. Consumers can get a reputation report on businesses in other cities as well, Balmain said.

Businesses also can use this service to check out their business associates.

The bureau's arbitration process is another means used to ensure fair treatment.

Arbitration administrator Linda O'Donnell said "Hopefully, most complaints through the general bureau never get down here (the arbitration room)."

"The bureau hopes to mediate a complaint, to resolve it, before a hearing ever has to be held."

O'Donnell said the process is set in motion when a consumer files a written complaint with the bureau. The bureau reviews the complaint and if the complaint is justified it is forwarded to the business.

The business then has time to respond and offer a settlement if any. The bureau forwards the proposal to the consumer who can accept it or reject it.

If the settlement is accepted then the matter is closed, otherwise an arbitration session is set up.

The arbitrators are community volunteers, O'Donnell said.

"This arbitration program could not work without people volunteering their services," O'Donnell said. "If we don't have arbitrators, we don't have hearings."

Balmain said although decisions are sometimes hard to make, arbitration is the fastest way to settle a dispute.

"Once you come to this arbitration table and the arbitrators, who you helped select, hear your problem and make an award that is fair both to you and the business person, the problem is eliminated," Balmain said. "Then you can go back to your knitting or whatever and not worry about it."

O'Donnell said an arbitrator's decision is difficult to change, but a consumer can take a decision to a court-of-law if they still are dissatisfied.

The bureau also provides the public consumer education pamphlets, such as a recent publication about buying condominiums.

The bureau also polices the business community, Balmain said.

Billie Ingram, bureau member and owner of Brazos Kennels said, "The Better Business Bureau acts as a preventive measure. A lot of things don't go on in the Bryan-College Station area that could because the Better Business Bureau is here."

Balmain said one area of particular concern is advertising. The bureau checks advertisements for falsities, and if any problems are found the bureau will ask the publishers to hold the advertisement until the corrections are made, Balmain said.

All businesses are eligible for bureau membership if they pay membership dues, fill out an information sheet and agree to follow the Better Business Bureau's guidelines, Balmain said.

The basic guideline is cooperation with the bureau.

In addition, a business must agree to answer any complaint from the bureau and undergo mediation if the complaint warrants it, Balmain said.

Repeated complaints without rectification can cause a business to lose its membership.

Though Balmain's office deals with a wide range of complaints, no particularly poor area of service exists in the Bryan-College Station area, he said.

"We get complaints about everything," Balmain said. "But you have to remember there are those out there who wouldn't be happy living in the Garden of Eden."

Easter Seals telethon to include local spots

By BRAD WHITTEN
Reporter

The Brazos County Rehabilitation Center began its 1985 Easter Seals campaign Tuesday by naming Matthew Swich as its poster child.

Swich, a 5-year-old victim of spina-bifida, a congenital cleft of the vertebral column, has been coming to the center since he was 5 months old and is now able to walk with crutches.

Jim Thompson, director of the rehabilitation center, announced that for the first time, this year's Easter Seals Telethon in March will have local spots included.

Thompson said the national broadcast will begin at 10:30 a.m. on March 30 and run until 6 p.m. on March 31. The local spots will be broadcasted from the rehabilitation center for 20 minutes every hour. KCEN-TV will carry the broadcast.

"We hope to raise \$66,000 and 90 percent of all funding stays in Brazos County," he said.

Thompson thanked KCEN-TV and MaCaw Cablevision for the help and cooperation in making the telethon a local event.

The press conference Tuesday was at the new rehabilitation center near St. Joseph Hospital. Thompson said the building was already paid for entirely from fund raising events

in the Brazos area.

"We invite everyone to all come down and see where their money has been spent," he said.

"We are not state or federally funded and we are not a free service, but we only accept what people can pay," Harold McCullough, development director for the center, said.

He said last year the center absorbed \$240,000 in bills which people could not pay.



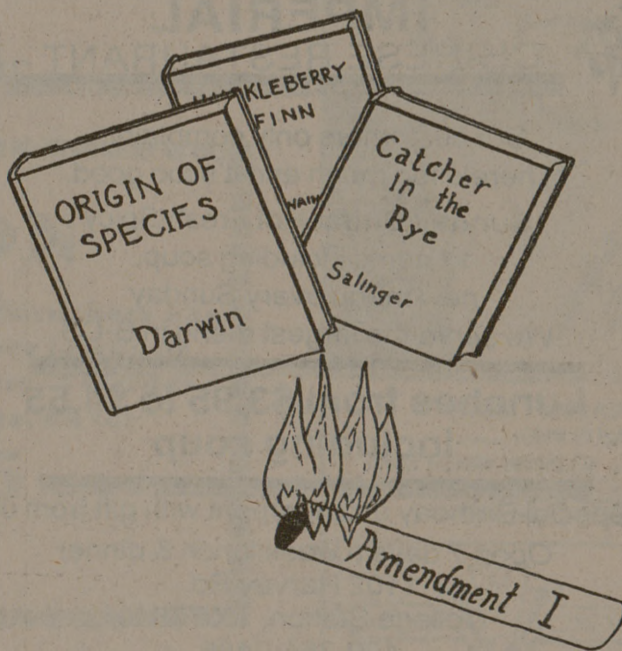
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Mike Hudson

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