

# Farm migrants' children hurt by school reforms

Associated Press

PHARR — Tears began to flow from Mary Balboa's eyes and her voice cracked as she told how important education is to her and her migrant family. The 18-year-old high school junior has worked in the fields all her life, but she hopes an education will keep her from doing that forever.

"My father tells me I have to take advantage of the opportunities," Balboa said, wiping tears from her eyes. "I put everything into my (school) work."

Her hope may be fading because, ironically, state education reform measures have made it tougher for her to stay enrolled in school, school officials said.

Jesse Vela, coordinator of the Texas interstate migrant program, said education reformers seemed to have forgotten about the estimated 100,000 migrant students when formulating their new guidelines.

Restrictions on missed classes, among other reforms, have hit hard among migrants. Migrant students do get tutors to help them, but many times, Vela said, that is not enough.

Many migrant students know they need an education to avoid going back into the fields year after year, but educators said about 50 percent drop out of school between ages 14 and 18, believing they need to help support their families.

Educators say state officials need

to develop an interstate educational program designed for the migrant students so they would not lose credits when transferring from state to state.

Ramon Billescas, the migrant program director for Pharr-San Juan-Alamo Consolidated School District, in which 5,500 of the 16,000 students are migrants, said pride and love of family separate migrant students from others.

The migrant families leave home in April and follow the harvests in northern states during late spring and summer. They return sometime in October and the children enroll in schools, several weeks late.

Slouch

By Jim Earle



"If this works we're going into bridges."

# Vet group fighting fade-out

Associated Press

WORMLEYSBURG, Pa. — Because old soldiers do die, the ranks of the American Legion have thinned to their lowest number in 30 years — and the Legion fears that will mean declining political clout at a time when veterans' benefits are getting a close study by a deficit-conscious Congress.

"All you have to do is look at an obituary column in the papers every day and you'll see where the veterans are," says Edward Hoak, assistant for Pennsylvania, the state with the largest Legion delegation.

"They're dying. We're at that age." Fifty-five percent of all Legionnaires served during World War I. Membership in 1984 dipped to 2,536,062, the lowest mark since 1 million in 1945 and far below the peak of 3.3 million in 1946.

To combat the loss, the Legion mailed 8 million letters in February to potential enlistees who are members. Special targets are younger Vietnam vets and women. The plea to join was supported by 30-second television spots in 24 selected cities.

That Madison Avenue approach departs from traditional mobilization, which depended mainly on word of mouth or a beer blast at the local post. So far, recruitments are 48,000 ahead of last year, and the Legion hopes to have 2.7 million members at year's end.

"We were founded after World War I as an organization that would go out of existence," says National Commander Clarence Bacon, 33-year-old veteran of World War II and Korea.

World War I was supposed to end the war to end all wars.

In 1944, the influential Legion pushed for passage of the GI Bill, which provides schooling and job opportunities to veterans, along with low-interest home, farm and small business loans.

The Veterans' Administration budget this year is \$25.8 billion.

Health care costs are likely to soar. The number of veterans aged 65 and over will peak at 9 million in 1987, triple the figure for 1980, according to the VA. And the number 75 and over will climb from 859,000 in 1980 to 4 million at the end of the century.

# Echo-less?

Bustling railroad town loses its steam

Associated Press

ECHO — Southern Pacific train crews still begin and end their runs here, but the bustling railroad community that thrived for more than a century is gone.

And the beanery, which used to be the railroad crew's eating place, is now the bottom half of a home on West Bluff road north of here.

A worn butcher block once used in the cafe now serves as the centerpiece in the kitchen of Jo Rogers, a retired railroad telegrapher.

Rogers ended her years with the Southern Pacific Railroad last September, but the butcher block and trains passing near her home in Orange keep memories of Echo fresh.

Locomotive engineer William Schroder of Houston remembers the echoing whistle of the steam train.

"The settlement got its name from the chilling echo of the steam locomotive whistles in the woods," he said. "If you have never heard one, it's hard to describe."

"It's the kind of sound that makes young men want to leave home for the outside world, one of the most lonesome sounds at night that I have

ever heard. It is a sound not soon forgotten."

The beanery served railroad men 24 hours a day, seven days a week. At this time it nestled near a complex of buildings that furnished lodging for rail crews between runs.

When Rogers retired, she was a train-order operator. She received the orders from the Southern Pacific dispatcher in Lafayette, La. and handed them up to engine crews as they passed.

Now Southern Pacific crews receive their orders over a two-way radio system.

Rogers remembers when the Echo buildings housed as many as 50 trainmen at a time. Southern Pacific, which set up the depot at Echo, tore down the bunkhouses seven years ago when the railroad began lodging trainmen at a motel in Orange.

When crews demolished the Echo buildings, they removed the butcher block from the beanery.

"They were going to throw it away," Rogers said. "I took it home with me."

She and her sister, Peggy, remember working during World War II as telegraphers with Southern Pacific at a place midway between Beau-

mont and Orange called Terry.

"We bunked in a boxcar beside the tracks and handed up the orders as the trains passed," she said. "We were both girls then."

"Southern Pacific ran shuttle trains between Beaumont and Orange to carry shipyard workers, and when we needed groceries we would flag a train and ride into town. Then when we finished shopping, we would flag one back."

Roger's sister is now married to Jack Carrick, a retired railroad freight conductor.

Carrick remembers spending many nights bunking at Echo and long hours riding the rails during the war. Railroads did most of the nation's hauling then.

"When I first started staying at Echo they didn't even have electricity," Carrick said. "They used coal-oil lamps. There was a great big building that looked like a depot, a cafe and a recreation room men played cards in all night."

Echo is now a residential community near the site of the Southern Pacific railroad complex.

# New attendance laws troubling ag students

Associated Press

SAN ANTONIO — Texas' new laws on public school attendance have put a crimp in James Cates' future plans.

The 17-year-old wants to become an agriculture teacher and hopes that his current participation in livestock shows will prepare him. But Cates and hundreds of youngsters like him will find it difficult to participate in these shows because of House Bill 72, which allows students only 10 unexcused absences a year.

Students who miss more than the limit would fail courses, and since exhibitions usually last up to a week, students are forced to either miss school or have someone else watch their animal.

Mary Nan West, president of this year's San Antonio Stock Show, said the attendance requirement is going to have a great impact on the students.

"I feel the bill should be modified

so these children can pursue education in agricultural endeavors," she said.

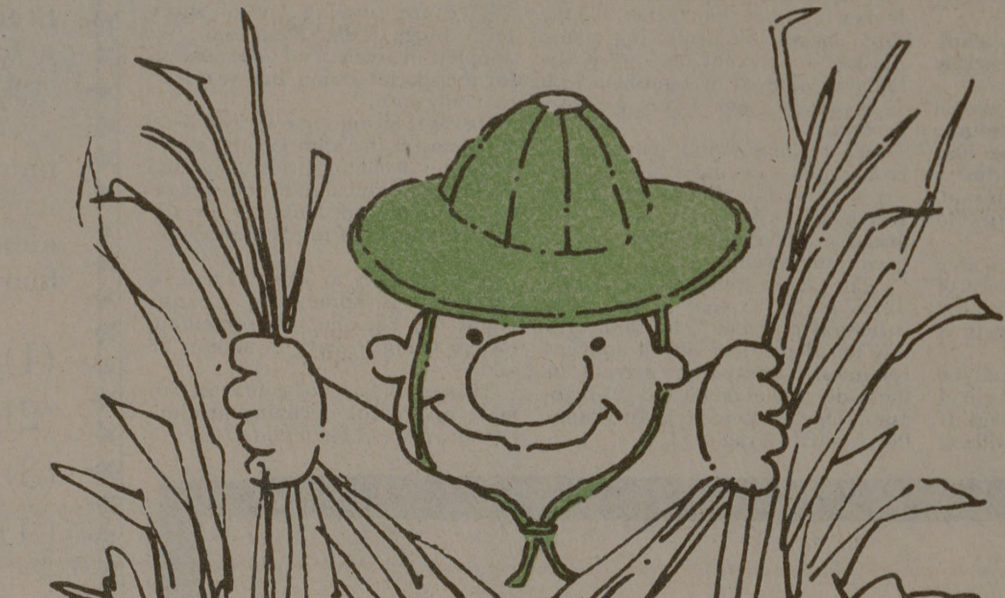
At the Southwestern Exposition and Fat Stock Show in Fort Worth, participation among school-age youngsters dropped 20 percent at competition held on weekdays this year.

"We attribute that 20 percent to the school rule," spokesman Delbert Bailey said.

"We feel like the youngsters lost something from the standpoint of not being able to visit with other youngsters from elsewhere in the country. It's an educational aspect they're not going to learn in the classroom. We feel like it's a bad deal."

Although participation in the Bexar County Junior Livestock Show was also down 20 percent, spokesman Doug Presley said officials didn't totally blame the education measures.

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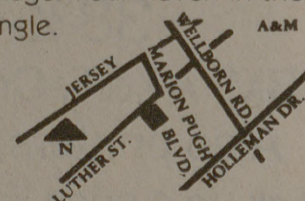
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