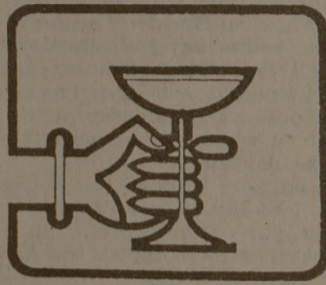


State and Local

Alcohol awareness

New organization promotes responsible drinking at A&M

By SUE A. KRENEK
Reporter



Texas A&M is to become the home of the newest chapter of a national student organization that has used theme parties, fun runs and educational seminars to promote responsible alcohol use.

Heather McBreen, a student assistant to A&M's Alcohol Awareness Program, says that an attempt to start a BACCHUS chapter here two years ago was unsuccessful. BACCHUS is an acronym for Boost Alcohol Consciousness Concerning the Health of University Students.

But now, legal and social changes have provided greater need for a student alcohol education group, she says.

"We're not here to advocate drinking or not drinking," she says. "We're advocating alternatives to drinking."

McBreen says one of her motives for starting the chapter is to provide more student input into the alcohol awareness programs already sponsored by the University.

She says she hopes the group can help students adapt to new alcohol policies, especially the change in the drinking age from 19 to 21 that will take place Sept. 1.

"I felt like in order to help students adapt to the change, we had to start educating them now," McBreen

says. "Part of the responsible use of alcohol is using alcohol within the limits of the law. So at one point BACCHUS is going to have to advocate not drinking if you're not of age."

"I think that we'll have a really strong role in advocating alternatives to the use of alcohol as the focal point of entertainment."

McBreen says the organization hopes to work with area bar owners and students to ease the effect of the shift in the legal drinking age.

She says a smooth transition also will benefit the owners because it may lessen the economic impact of the age change. BACCHUS may be able to represent student concerns in the face of that change, she says.

Jan Winniford, assistant director of student affairs, says although the new legal drinking age is the most visible of the recent alcohol reforms,

BACCHUS also wants to educate students about changes in drunk driving laws.

In a 1984 survey by Dr. Wayne E. Wylie, an A&M assistant professor of health and physical education, 84 percent of the A&M students surveyed said they drank, and of those, 56 percent said they had driven while intoxicated.

Winniford says driving while drunk now carries stiffer penalties, thanks to new state laws.

"It's easier now to get a conviction," she says. "Before, there were lots of loopholes and ways to get out of it. For example, before the new laws went into effect, you could refuse to take a breath test when arrested but the fact that you refused was never admissible as evidence. Now that is admissible."

In addition, she says, the conviction for drunk driving can no longer be wiped off a person's record once he has served a successful parole period.

But both Winniford and McBreen say BACCHUS also wants to educate students about social host liability, the area that could have the greatest immediate impact on students.

Social host liability, or third-party liability, is a new legal concept that allows hosts to be held liable if an intoxicated guest leaves the party and causes an accident.

Winniford says although the host must be proven negligent to be liable, the courts are finding more people negligent in these cases than ever before.

This affects any organization that serves alcohol at its parties. She says social host liability is, to a large extent, behind the current national trend toward dry rush for fraternities.

"I think that most organizations, residence hall groups and fraternities and sororities are forced to be aware of what could happen if they're not responsible and don't prevent people who aren't of age from drinking and don't keep people who are intoxicated from driving," she says.

BACCHUS was founded in 1976 at the University of Florida, and since that time has grown to include over 200 chapters at campuses in 44 states and Canada. Winniford says at A&M, BACCHUS will act as a student arm of the Alcohol Awareness Program sponsored by the Department of Student Services.

"We're not here to tell people they shouldn't drink or to give up their voices," she says. "We're just here to try to make them be a little more careful about what they do."

First lady praises drug program grads

Associated Press

FORT WORTH — First lady Nancy Reagan, in Texas for a visit by Britain's Prince Charles, handed out 11 diplomas Tuesday to graduates of a drug rehabilitation program, saying "the best things in life don't come easy."

"The past two years have been tough for you graduates . . . but in sticking it out to the end, each of you has learned a lesson . . . the best things in life are worth working for," Reagan said.

Reagan visited the Cenikor Foundation, a nonprofit program that provides treatment and education for people with drug and alcohol problems.

"The past two years have been tough for you graduates . . . but in sticking it out to the end, each of you has learned a lesson . . . the best things in life are worth working for."

— First lady Nancy Reagan.

Before the ceremonies, the first lady participated in a group session with 10 members of Texans' War on Drugs, an anti-drug abuse group, and clients at Cenikor.

Reagan said, "If we can get all the young people involved (in preventing drug abuse), we've got a big leg up."

"We need all these young people, but we need you clear-eyed and clear-headed."

"We don't need you all drugged up," Reagan said.

Members of Texans' War on Drugs are mostly high school students who visit schools to speak against using drugs.

Karl Dunn, a Cenikor resident, said solving the drug abuse problem is his chief goal in life.

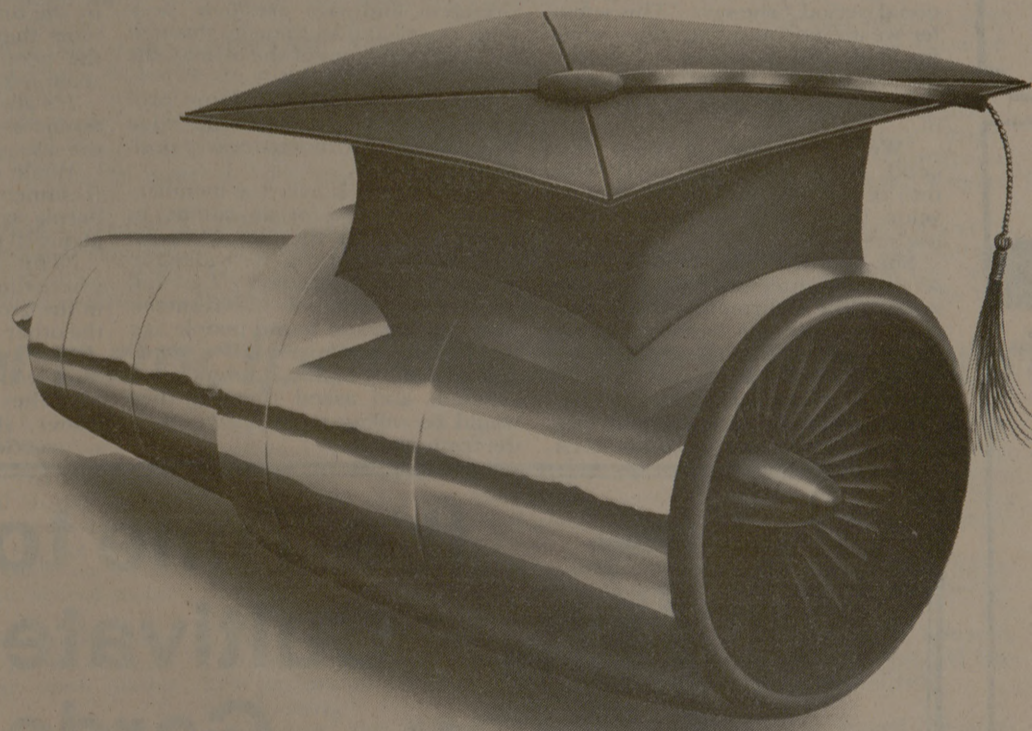
"It's nice to know that someone is running the front line, because it's needed," he said.

Kathy Weatherford, another resident, said her drinking, which began at age 15, led to some drug use.

"I ended up in Cenikor because I had been convicted of felony theft," she said.

About 50 percent of Cenikor residents are referred to the program by courts, said Tyrone Evans, assistant to the president of Cenikor.

The program currently has 450 residents, who receive up to 30 months of treatment, Evans said.



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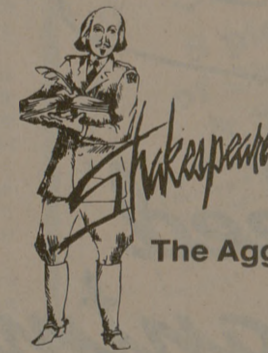


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