

City official not afraid to dirty his hands

Look for the boss under the hood

By Scott Redepenning
Reporter

His office is pushed off to the side in the huge, metal garage behind the police station — but don't expect to find him there.

A better bet would be to go out onto the work floor and take a look around the maze of broken-down vehicles and other city paraphernalia. If there's a 57-year-old man hunched under the hood of a garbage truck, showing a young, grease-covered mechanic how to clean out a carburetor, that's probably him.

"He" is Alfred Miller, College Station's director of public services. This man runs the whole place, and he'll be the first to get his hands dirty doing it.

"I don't just come in and sit around the office, so when the workers need something they have to find me," he says in a slow, almost labored drawl — a by-product of his small-town, East Texas upbringing. "I go out and mingle with the boys."

From a weather-beaten, oversized, straw cowboy hat resting directly above two bushy, gray eyebrows, to a pair of scuffed, pointy-toed cowboy boots, Miller is the picture of a working man who's made it to the top but just hasn't noticed.

He flings his hat across his dimly lit office, which is littered with books, manuals, letters, charts and memos. Looking a bit out of place, he plops himself down behind a seemingly unused desk and transfers a large wad of chewing tobacco from his cheek to the trash can.

"How would I describe myself?" he says with a half-smile suggesting an air of modesty. "I'm widespread and ready to get things done. That's how I show up to work every morning."

And from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m., every working day that's just what he's doing — getting things done.

Though his name may not be familiar to many College Station residents, Miller contributes considerably to everyday life here. He's in charge of all College Station public services. This means his department keeps the city's streets clean and repaired, the city's garbage safely disposed of, the city's cemetery pleasant to visit and the city's vehicles running smoothly.

With a lifetime of experience in the department backing him up, Miller is enthusiastic about his job, and it's easy to see he takes it seriously.

"I wouldn't say I'm hard to work for, but I can sometimes get that way," he says, peering through a pair of tired, steel-blue eyes. "I go out every morning and talk to all the gang. We get along pretty well."

In a wrinkled, light-blue, short-sleeved shirt, anxious to untuck itself from his baggy, navy-blue pants, it's no wonder Miller gets along with his workers so well — he fits right in with them.

He says some bosses can't understand why

their workers don't do more. He seems to have a better understanding of his employees' limitations.

"I pretty much know what can be done and what can't be done," he says. "I'm not one of those who just walked in off the street into the office. Anything they do out there I've probably done at one time or another."

He boasts that good employee-boss relations are why his department runs so smoothly.

"We get pretty good ratings in the public service department, and I think I've got something

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to do with it," he says. "We do have a lot of people who stay around a long time. If something comes up and a guy wants to talk about it, I'm wide open to talk to."

Miller is devoted to his job. He says he puts so much effort into his job because, of all the hobbies in the world, work is his favorite.

"I really enjoy it," he says. "I guess that's why I've stayed here so long. You learn something new every day no matter how long you stay here."

Miller has an opportunity to learn a number of things every day because of his active and varied schedule.

From periodic trips around the city to look for needed road improvements to making sure the city's garbage is disposed of according to government regulations, Miller manages to stay busy.

He says there are a few things about his job that he dislikes.

"We get quite a few complaints, and there are a lot we can't do anything about," he says. "Sometimes this bothers us because we can't take care of everything. A lot of things are out of my hands. I just work them out the best I can."

With this kind of care and dedication to his job, it's surprising that he has the time or energy to do anything else — but he does.

"I've got a little farm and some cattle about 30 miles away, and that's my time off," he says. "I like going and taking care of my stuff out there.

It helps me get away from all the hustle around here."

But when he does feel like being around the hustle, or more accurately, the polka, he and his wife do just that — they go dancing.

With their 23-year-old daughter out on her own, he and his wife decided to go looking for a little excitement. They found it in small towns between here and Waco.

He says it's about all the entertainment he needs, and he prefers the quiet of his little farm. He is used to a simple life, says Miller, who was born and raised in Anderson in neighboring Grimes County.

Though Miller says he leads a simple life, he's quick to add that it's anything but dull. A veteran of the Korean War, he is active in the local Veterans of Foreign Wars and American Legion chapters. He is also the local director of an association that holds seminars around the United States on innovations in refuse collection and disposal.

"It may not seem like a big deal," he says, "but sanitation has become a big thing with all the rules and regulations you have to abide by."

He leans back in his chair with a glimmer of nostalgia in his eyes, remembering a day when the job was less complex. He came to work for the city at age 20 and has stayed in the same department ever since.

"When I came to College Station, it was a small town and there were only 10 of us employees doing the whole bit," he says. "Now there are about 500."

He has watched the growth of College Station and gives credit to Texas A&M University for the city's vast development. Miller says some older people he knows complain about the mass of students overrunning the city, but he doesn't agree with them at all.

"If A&M wasn't here, not much of anything would be," he says. "People complain about the crowd, but I say if it wasn't for the crowd, there would be no use for us here. I'd probably get bored and go someplace else."

He need not pack his bags. There's plenty of need in College Station for Alfred Miller. The question is, how long will Alfred Miller need College Station?

He wants to retire within the next eight years, he says, so he can spend more time on his farm and travel around the country with his wife. He says he would rather see the United States than go abroad.

"I've been in the Army, so I've already seen a lot of the world," he says. "There's a lot of things here I haven't seen that I would like to, but until then, I'll just concentrate on my job."

Police Beat

The following were reported to the University Police Department through Monday:

DESECRATION OF A VENERATED OBJECT:

• The Lawrence Sullivan Ross statue was spray-painted orange and blue.

ASSAULT BY CONTACT:

• A student reported that a man came into her dorm room and began attacking her. She said that when she started screaming, the man ran out of her room toward the golf course.

MISDEMEANOR THEFT:

• A student reported that someone stole her rust-colored, cotton knit sweater from under the bed in her dorm room. At the monthly dorm meeting she reported it had been stolen, and a few days later she said she found it outside her front door.

Man gets 50 years, fine for killing boy by force-feeding him pepper

HOUSTON (AP) — A man convicted of killing a 2-year-old boy by forcing pepper down his throat was sentenced Tuesday to 50 years in prison and fined \$10,000.

A jury in State District Judge Michael McSpadden's court handed Raymond Edward Coffey, 26, the sentence after deliberating about four hours, court clerk John Washington said. Prosecutors had urged jurors to sentence Coffey to the maximum term of life in prison.

Coffey was convicted Monday in the May 7 death of Christopher Kalmbach, the son of Coffey's girlfriend, after the jury deliberated for 3½ hours.

Prosecutor Chuck Rosenthal said the case was one of the worst episodes of child abuse he has ever

seen. Pictures of the child introduced in the trial showed severe bruises all over the boy's body, as well as scalds and cigarette burns on his arms. He said Coffey deserved life in prison.

Coffey's defense attorney, Wayne Hill, argued for probation, saying the facts of the case did not warrant a long prison term. He asked for 10 years probation or, at the most, 10 years in prison.

Hill said it was the boy's mother and not his client who force-fed the pepper to the boy.

In a statement to police, Coffey said he used pepper to discipline the boy but contended the child took the pepper himself the night he choked to death.

Patty Kalmbach, 21, refused to

testify in Coffey's two-day trial despite an offer of immunity. She is facing a charge of murder by omission.

McSpadden held Kalmbach in contempt of court after she refused to identify her son in one of the photos shown to jurors.

Coffey told police he left the pepper shaker with the boy after he had repeated a bad word. Upon returning, Coffey told police he found brown and gray matter coming out of the child's mouth. The boy's face was purple, the statement said.

Emergency room personnel at Parkway General Hospital testified the child was not breathing when Coffey brought him to the hospital.

Prosecutors said the mother was home when the boy started choking.

UT frat linked to earlier handcuff incident

AUSTIN (AP) — The use of handcuffs in fraternity hazing, one of the allegations in the drinking-related death of a University of Texas fraternity pledge, apparently had a precedent, it was reported Tuesday.

Sworn statements given to police say Mark Seeberger, 18, a Phi Kappa Psi pledge from Dallas, and two other pledges were handcuffed the night of Sept. 17 during a fraternity

"ride." Seeberger died Sept. 18 of alcohol poisoning.

The UT student newspaper, the *Daily Texan*, reported Tuesday that it obtained an earlier police report giving details of a January 1984 hazing incident involving 11 Phi Kappa Psi fraternity members—five of whom were handcuffed and bound by the ankles with tape.

The report said an apartment

manager called Austin police to the complex because several fraternity members, whose legs were bound and whose hands were cuffed, were nearly thrown into the swimming pool, the *Texan* reported.

"They stated they were members of Phi Kappa Psi fraternity. . . . They all stated that they were not aware it was illegal to haze," police officer Edmund Garza wrote.

No charges were filed because those bound did not wish to file any complaint against those who tied them up, the newspaper reported.

Brenton Monteleone, Phi Kappa Psi president, said the fraternity no longer uses such practices.

"There has been a national trend away from hazing," Monteleone said, "and our fraternity has been at the forefront. . . ."

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