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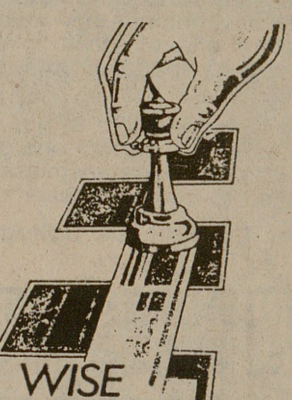
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In Advance

Parade, ball highlight A&M Mardi Gras

By Tammy Hedgpeth Reporter

The Off-Campus Aggies organization wants Texas A&M students to "Catch the Spirit" during its first "Mardi Gras at A&M" celebration.

Activities begin **Friday at 6 p.m.** with a parade running from the MSC to behind Duncan Dining Hall.

The parade has 30 entries including the Ross Volunteers, Parsons' Mounted Calvary and the A&M Consolidated High School Band.

Spuds MacKenzie, the popular mutt featured in some recent beer advertisements, will be the feature attraction on OCA's float — a replica of the Dixie Chicken — OCA President Scott Mendell said.

"This parade actually is larger than most parades in New Orleans," Mendell said. "It's a lot longer — most parades in New Orleans have only 20 or 25 floats."

Dr. John Koldus, vice president of student services, will serve as Mardi Gras king, while Reveille will serve as Mardi Gras queen.

Tommy Kunkleman, 6, of College Station, will accompany Koldus and Reveille on the king's float as "Mr. Aggie Spirit."

Kunkleman, often seen wearing a mini yell-leader outfit at A&M volleyball and basketball

games, has been entertaining A&M fans for two seasons.

The celebration will continue after the parade with a masquerade ball at 9 p.m. in the Ramada Inn Ballroom.

An award will be given for the best costume, but costumes aren't required. Music will be provided by the Executives.

Presale tickets are \$6 for singles and \$8 for couples. Tickets at the door are \$8 and \$10, respectively.

Masks will be given to the first 500 people who arrive at the ball.

People aged 21 and older can indulge in free beer and a cash bar.

Non-alcoholic beverages and other refreshments also will be available.

OCA has been working on the Mardi Gras project since September, Mendell said, and costs have totalled about \$10,000.

OCA will sell "Mardi Gras at A&M" T-shirts, posters and mugs for \$8.50, \$4 and \$3, respectively.

The items can be purchased at the MSC, Sbis Dining Hall and the Commons, as well as at the parade and the ball.

Several local businesses have supported OCA Mardi Gras, including Cain Properties, Newman Printing, Rother's Bookstore and KKYS radio station.

Earthworm ranchers handle livestock trade through parcel post

ABILENE (AP) — On the Circle R Ranch, round-ups are held at least twice a week and the livestock is dispersed to buyers scattered from Washington state to New York state — via parcel post.

If you infer that the Circle R is an unusual spread, you're right.

For one thing, the range covers about 4,000 square feet. For another, the livestock are earthworms.

Ruben Thiele has been earthworm ranching for about 20 years in Abilene.

He began in 1967 after suffering a heart attack. The doctor told him he needed a hobby. At the time, he was a linotype operator for the *Abilene Reporter-News* and the Circle R was a part-time occupation.

He started out with about 6,000 worms, never bought another worm, and last year sold about 6,250,000 of the critters without making a dent in his herd.

It seems that, if there were a breeding contest, worms would come out way ahead of rabbits. Each mature female worm produces about four egg capsules per month. The eggs hatch in 21 days and each capsule may produce as many as 20 worms.

When he first started, Thiele sold worms retail — to fishermen and gardeners. He since has moved into the big time. He now sells his Tennessee Brown Nose earthworms wholesale to suppliers.

He has customers in New York, Washington, Arkansas, Florida, Oklahoma... he once even furnished a batch of worm eggs to an experimental station in London, England.

In the 1970s, he sold some worms to two young women from Cooper High School. They were going to enter a "Worm Cake" in the science

fair, but they didn't win a prize, he said.

Raising worms doesn't involve being up before dawn, riding fences or even making sure the gates are locked. What it does involve, Thiele says, is feeding every week or so, keeping the beds slightly moist and periodically cleaning out the beds.

Worm ranching is a low-overhead occupation. Thiele says he makes a profit of about 60 cents on the dollar.

Texas prisons top capacity, close again

HUNTSVILLE (AP) — The Texas prison system, swollen by some 800 new inmates over two days, closed again Wednesday after topping a state-mandated population capacity.

The shutdown, the sixth this year, came despite implementation of a new Prison Management Act that enabled the governor to approve release of nearly 200 inmates to halfway houses over the weekend.

The latest headcount in the 26-unit Texas Department of Corrections showed 38,496 inmates — 95.20 percent or 82 over the 95 percent capacity mandated by law.

Those figures, based on a midnight Tuesday count, did not take into account an estimated 260 inmates accepted before prison doors closed at 5 p.m. Wednesday.

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