

# Behind the scenes

by Yvonne DeGraw

As the end of the semester gets closer, the pace of life gets faster and faster.

Instead of strolling across campus looking leisurely at the new leaves and flowers, perhaps you rush to your next class — muttering under your breath at the worker in a green cart who slows you down.

Instead of eating a relaxed lunch, maybe you growl at the woman who takes a few seconds too long to run your I.D. card through the reader.

As you run to your professor's office before he leaves for the day, you may almost collide with a woman in a maroon uniform cleaning the glass doors.

Sure you're busy, but these behind-the-scenes people are just that — people. Take time to meet a few.

There are many jobs on this campus done by behind-the-scenes people — people who aren't student workers, administrators or faculty.

They handle the cleaning, gardening, cooking and other kinds of services at A&M. But most of the time we hardly notice them.

A&M has 28 gardeners who water, trim and maintain the plants on this campus.

If you walk by Sully fairly often, you've probably seen James Charles Day.

J.C., as his friends call him, is the gardener for the buildings and area all along Military Walk. He's been working here since July. His distinctive blonde hair — long by Texas standards — makes him conspicuous. He and his wife moved here from Austin last year.

Day says his wife talked him into studying for a degree in horticulture. Because Austin had no convenient night schools, they moved to Bryan-College Station where he could start taking classes at Blinn College.

"I never thought about going

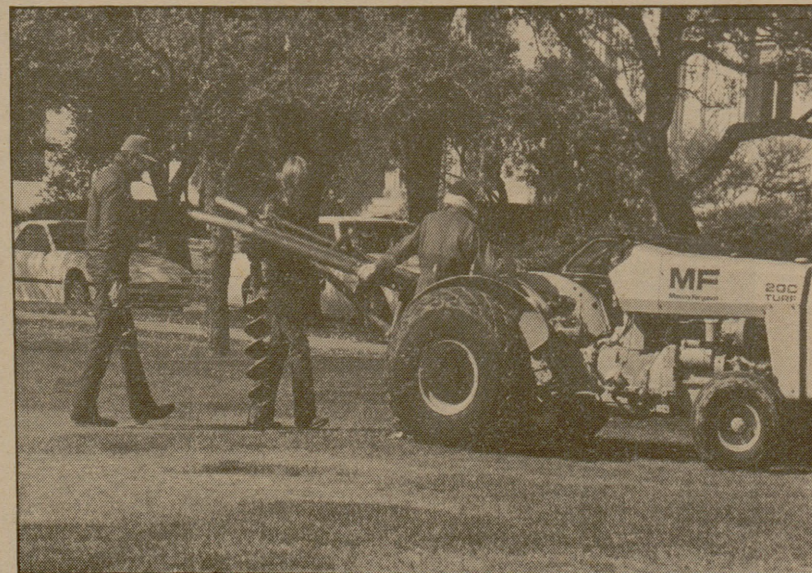
to college," says Day, 26, who got his GED from A&M this year.

"It's been nine years since I've been to school."

Day says he'll be starting classes at Blinn this summer with a couple of general education classes. He's planning to work as a gardener for A&M for two more years before becoming a full-time student.

He has been working with plants for eight years. He says his goal is to own his own landscaping business.

Day treats the plants in his area as if they were his own, and is offended when one of them gets hurt.



"This is going to be your area and it's going to be nice," is what he says he tells the residents of Hart Hall, alongside Military Walk.

One of the fruitless crabapple trees next to the dormitory was crushed a while back. An eight-inch shoot now grows from the original trunk.

Day points to one of the dorm windows to explain what happened.

"Well, these gentlemen up here on the top floor were tossing down a bike," he says. "It landed right on it. Crushed it. Luckily there was another one coming out before it broke off."

He says that he started asking questions when he

found the tree one Monday morning.

I just went up to this one particular fellow and I said, 'You broke my tree, didn't you?' and he laid it all out on me. I said, 'Look I didn't mean to come off on you like that. I was just being facetious. You admitted it to me so now I know who broke my tree.'

"It's one of these things where the younger ones do a little more drinking. I remember it — a little binge on a weekend."

Day says he can do almost any job associated with plants.

"I can upkeep, I can landscape, I can sell, I can plant, I can graft."

But his approximately \$5-an-hour job doesn't involve all these tasks.

"Basically this is just a grounds maintenance job," he says. "There's no glory."

"This campus has got like crew, crew, crew, crew," he says gesturing toward different areas of campus. "They've got a crew for everything you do."

But when Day's job gets routine he always has people who will say hello or stop to talk.

"I meet a lot of nice people who just come up and rap," he says. "More people know my name than I know their names."

Day is willing to talk about politics, Texas, his three years in

the army, religion, the environment, books and — of course — plants.

He says the best way to care for a houseplant is to find out what kind it is, so you know how much water, fertilizer, space and sunlight to give it.

You're not so likely to have met Jo Jones. She works the 4:30 p.m. to 12:30 a.m. shift. During that time she cleans the first and eighth floors of Harrington Tower and part of the fourth floor.

Jones says she's been working in the building for two years and seven months.

"I like it," she says, "especially at night. There are less people. It's easier to work."

After a few minutes, Jones relaxes, takes out a cigarette and leans against the wall to talk.

"We might get a pay raise," she says. "We got one the year before last. We get merit raises and promotions."

She says the late hours don't bother her much.

"As long as you're working, you never realize how dark it's getting," she says. "And then as it gets darker it gets better because it's time to get off soon."

Jones, who doesn't look all that old, has a 21-year-old daughter. She says she spends her spare time raising mowing her yard and raising her daughter.

Before this she worked at the Dairy Queen in Calvin — where her home is — and as a sales clerk.

"The Dairy Queen was hectic," she said. "I was a cook."

She says buttons with the

**Above left: A Grounds Maintenance crew works around the Gen. Ormond R. Simpson Drill Field. Right: James Charles Day replants a shoot from a damaged crabapple tree by Hart Hall.**