

Disabled persons receive jobs from gardening service in Bryan

By Sherry Copeland
Reporter

Geranium Junction Garden Center in Bryan is well known for its beautiful foliage and reasonable prices. But there is one service the nursery provides that is sometimes overlooked — job employment for the disabled.

Since 1982, Geranium Junction has been operating as a non-profit organization. Its purpose is to provide employment and training for persons with disabilities, says Richard Muse, director of Geranium Junction.

The main source of funding is provided by the Texas Rehabilitation Commission with additional funds coming from the United Way.

"Our job is to facilitate the transition so it isn't so abrupt," Muse says. "We know that persons with more severe disabilities do better if they are able to learn skills in a natural environment compared to an isolated one."

The idea originated primarily from within the horticulture industry, Muse says.

"Initially the employees started out working in the garden center," he says. "But prior to my coming to the center in January, it branched out into lawn and landscape maintenance."

Muse says the goal is to diversify

the program's basic operation. In March, a training program was developed for individuals who are under 22 and have disabilities. Working in conjunction with both the Bryan and College Station school districts' special education programs, they are trained in vehicle maintenance and fleet washing for the Brazos Transit System.

"We are looking at a transition for youth with disabilities from school to

work," Muse says. "Historically, persons with more severe disabilities graduate from high school, go home and sit. There is a waiting list for employment or none available at all. We are trying to bridge that gap."

Muse says persons with disabilities are eligible for a free and appropriate education up to the age of 21.

"What usually happens is when they turn 18, or once they go through the cycle with their class peers, they are considered to be graduated," Muse says.

"The most important thing is that we stay within this community and can continue to meet its needs. We are here to provide employment to persons with disabilities, not to make dollars ourselves or give things away free."

— Richard Muse, director of Geranium Junction

The high school's job primarily is to prepare people for college or to teach vocational skills for job entry-level positions, Muse says.

"Most often, persons with disabilities don't access those regular vocational programs," Muse says. "Usually, it is because they don't have the basic math or language skills to get into a regular class."

Geranium Junction provides training for persons, no matter what their disability — physical or mental. In the future, Muse says, the program will focus on persons with severe disabilities.

Muse says most people don't understand the difference between handicapped and disabled.

"Without my glasses, I have a visual impairment — a visual disability," he says. "Consequently, in order for me to read a calendar across the room, I am handicapped because of my disability to see it without a visual aid, my glasses. But when I put my

glasses back on I no longer am handicapped. Basically, I no longer have a disability either.

"No one has a handicap until his disability prevents him from doing something."

Muse employs 15 people who each work 30 hours a week either in the retail garden center, in lawn maintenance or as fleet washers. Once employees gain specific competencies, Muse says he tries to place them in a community job with the cities of Bryan or College Station.

Muse has six staff members working for him who function as supervisors and managers.

"I have a fantastic staff working here," Muse says. "They are very dedicated to the job. They are people. Our employees are people also. I think one would find our staff possibly more tolerant of certain behaviors or actions than most individuals. But at the same time, they have a special job to do and they know that."

Muse is very excited about expanding operations at Geranium Junction.

"The most important thing is that we stay within this community and can continue to meet its needs," Muse says. "We are here to provide employment to persons with disabilities, not to make dollars ourselves or give things away free."

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Senate elects new speaker, urges return of stolen signs

By Christi Daugherty
Staff Writer

Senator Jay Hays defeated the former chairman of the Rules and Regulations Committee in an intra-Senate election for the position of speaker of the Texas A&M Student Senate during the Senate meeting Wednesday evening.

Former chairman Clay Baker suggested in his campaign speech that the Senate should re-evaluate its role as a representative of the student body and said it was time for the Senate to go to the students for input rather than waiting for the students to come to it.

In his speech, Hays said that during his time on the Senate he had come to the realization that the Senate could not seriously alter the university in a short period of time but could attempt to slowly change it for the better.

"The bottom line is we're not

going to change the university in a year," Hays said. "I'm not going to change it. Student Government is not going to change it."

"But if you look at what we did last year — the bills we passed and the legislation we started — if we just build on what we started, and follow up on our legislation, we can really make a difference."

Hays was endorsed by 1986-87 Senate Speaker Miles Bradshaw, who emphasized Hays' support of the doomed Senate Reform Bill that would have altered the composition of the Senate in the hopes of increased involvement. Bradshaw said that the new attendance bill passed last month, which also shares that goal, was written by Hays. He said that showed Hays' determination to improve the Senate.

Also at the meeting, Garrett Leeson, a junior finance major, was elected to the position of speaker

pro tempore, and Pat O'Neal, a sophomore finance and accounting major, was elected as chairman of the Rules and Regulations Committee.

Student Body President Mason Hogan introduced his three appointments for executive vice presidents — Renee Dix, vice president in charge of programs, Brian Banner, vice president in charge of administration, and Jody Kay Manley, vice president of development. All were approved and sworn in.

In legislative action, the Senate passed a resolution calling on A&M students to return street and traffic signs that College Station Police say have been stolen in the past year.

Mike Hachtman, the student liaison on the College Station City Council, authored the bill that was written in coordination with the Council and offers amnesty to those who voluntarily return the signs.

Accused murderer of Houston woman granted reprieve from lethal injection

HUNTSVILLE (AP) — A New York man once imprisoned for drowning his 3-year-old son won a stay Wednesday that blocked his scheduled lethal injection after midnight for the 1982 robbery-slaying of a prominent Houston theater manager.

Clifford X. Phillips, 52, who prefers to be called by the Islamic name of Abdullah Bashir, submitted a handwritten appeal to U.S. District Judge Gabrielle MacDonald, claiming ineffective assistance of counsel during an earlier part of his appeal process. The judge set a May 4 hearing to consider his request.

The state would not challenge the stay, said Bob Walt of the enforcement division of the Texas attorney general's office.

Phillips, when told of the reprieve, told prison officials, "Thank you." The court order came about eight hours before the scheduled injection.

Phillips insisted he did not intend to strangle Iris Siff, who was working late the night of Jan. 12, 1982 at the Alley Theater.

"I had to protect my own well-being and safety," Phillips said in a recent death row interview. "I just wanted her to extend me a few dollars. I don't know what motivated her to react.

It's hard for me to determine. I didn't provoke her."

Phillips strangled Siff, 58, with his hands and with a cord from a nearby telephone.

"She started kicking, she went wild," he said.

Phillips' chances for a reprieve appeared to dim a week ago when the Supreme Court ruled in a major capital punishment case out of Georgia that although blacks were more likely to get the death penalty for killing whites, the law was not unconstitutional. Phillips is black. Siff was white.

Phillips ate breakfast at 3 a.m. Wednesday, then read his Koran several times before he was transferred to a small holding cell adjacent to the death chamber. He requested a final meal of fish, french fries, peas, bread and milk.

His mood was described by prison officials as calm.

Phillips, a Buffalo, N.Y., general contractor, came to Houston in late 1981 and found work at the Alley Theater as a security guard. He was fired, however, when he locked himself out of the place one night.

In a confession to police, he said he sneaked into the downtown Houston playhouse and

strangled Siff when she resisted a holdup attempt.

Siff had worked at the theater for some 30 years as both a performer and administrator and was working late that night, filling out a government grant application.

Testimony at his trial showed he stole the woman's television, fur coat, jewelry, tote bag and Lincoln Continental. Police arrested him in Los Angeles on a Houston arson charge about three weeks after the slaying.

Phillips' record goes back to 1951 with an arrest in Buffalo as a wayward minor and included arrests for burglary, larceny and disorderly conduct.

He served seven years in prison in New York after being convicted in 1970 of killing his 3-year-old son by forcing water down the child's throat. The child's body was found in a suitcase in the Bronx. The conviction later was reversed but he pleaded guilty to manslaughter rather than face trial again, records showed.

He was arrested in California for burning an abandoned meat market in Houston.

Woman weaver puts animal hair into artwork

HEREFORD (AP) — Priscilla Ham says it was the lean years of graduate school that led to an innovation she is still using in her artwork.

"I read where some lady used hair from her angora cats to create sweaters, and finally it dawned on me that the sacks of hair I regularly brushed off my dog might be put to good use," Ham says. "Someone had given me poor-quality wool, so I decided to incorporate the dog hair in with my weaving."

Weaving is just one of the artistic pursuits for which she was recently honored with a display at the Deaf Smith County Chamber of Commerce. Woven wall hangings, porcelain sculpture vessels, batik, water colors and pottery were among her creations shown in the Chamber's artist-of-the-month exhibit.

Ham moved to Hereford last November with her husband, Sid, and their 3-year-old daughter, Lenzy.

"So many women marry and have children and neglect their own interests," Ham says. "When Lenzy arrived, I was determined to never

give up the things I enjoy so much just because I have a baby."

Born in Amarillo, the 34-year-old artist is a graduate of Amarillo High School and Amarillo Junior College. She has a bachelor of fine arts degree from West Texas State University, majoring in pottery design and sculpture.

"It seemed I was always taking art classes, but I never considered myself as having the temperament of an artist," she says. "In fact, I was a business major at WTSU until the accounting courses dissuaded me. So, in my senior year at WTSU, I tried art. I went from clay, sculptures, pottery, into weaving."

In 1976 she married Ham, who at that time owned the "Last Water West Restaurant" in Amarillo. Getting married slowed Ham down from 18 hours to 8 hours a day for art work.

She says her husband was supportive and understanding; often their bathtub would be full of unwashed wool, soaking to remove impurities.

The couple enrolled in graduate

schools at Texas Tech University, she working on her master's degree in fine arts while he went to law school.

"This was the period when we were really short of money," she recalls. "Sid built me a large loom of maple sticks using directions out of a book; a ready-built one would have cost 10 times as much. Sid was in charge of the coffee concession and worked in the law school library while I sold pottery and an occasional blanket or pillow. The dog hair came in handy when we were trying to make ends meet," she says.

Ham says she still sometimes sells some of her work, but says she's too sentimental to part with items made from the hair of her 12-year-old St. Bernard, Sir.

She is willing to share her skills. "Weaving is a dying art form," she says.

Ham says although she sometimes uses pre-spun wool, usually she spins her own wool or dog hair, first washing and drying it, then blending the fibers in a drum carder. She spins it on a bobbin and then dyes the fiber.

"I use natural ingredients to make the desired color of dye, such as certain plants, berries, or nuts. I also use mordants mixed in with natural berries, citrus peels, rose hips, soot, bugs, and cochineals. Coffee makes a rich brown color, and beige can be created from onions," she said.

Ham says one day she would like to have a spinner's garden, growing the plants specially used for dye.

Next to weaving, pottery is her favorite pastime.

The Hams' basement is full of pottery. Several pieces are constructed using her special double-walled technique. "I'm impressed with professors with my double-walled concept; they didn't know what I was thinking!" she exclaims.

The Hams' garage houses her 1200-pound kiln. "I was extremely nervous about moving it from Amarillo and getting it here in one piece; I haven't tried it yet, so I hope it's okay."