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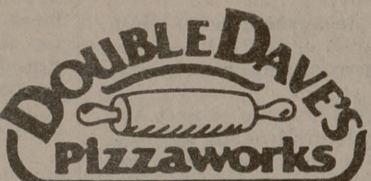
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A Sprinkle A Day . . . Tom Bacus, 20, junior civil engineering major, sprays his horse down following a "Fast Chukkers" polo team practice. Bacus has been on the team 1 1/2 years. "Fast Chukkers" is for beginners. Photo by Robert W. Egan

Associate prof: U.S. needs to bypass foreign markets

Construction lagging behind competition

By Pamela Carpenter Reporter

"American contractors need the will to move forward in the industry," Epling says.

Many foreign contractors are subsidized by their government, and foreign laborers cost less to use than American laborers. This is one of the main reasons foreign contractors are getting the jobs in the United States.

The foreign laborers are fed and housed by the contractors; they just sleep and work, Epling says. The American construction industry is competing with a system unlike its own.

"The American industry needs to find a way to compete while maintaining its free political, economic and social structure," he says.

American contractors need more effective leadership and need to be better informed and better educated in order to rise to the top again, he says.

A&M's construction science department is helping to educate students so these needs can be met.

A&M is educating the new builders of tomorrow, Epling says.

Many people don't realize that construction industry doesn't build houses and buildings, it builds anything from garages to power plants, he says.

Construction industry management techniques are becoming increasingly recognized in the United States, he said, and American contractors are very good in management leadership.

In several instances, American contractors have worked with foreign contractors because there is need for the management expertise of American contractors, he says.

Working together is good, and can relieve some of the tension of competition, he says.

A&M's construction science department was one of the first of its kind in the United States, and professors are considered to be leaders in construction education.

Survey shows troubled real estate causing problems for Texas banks, not oil as thought

DALLAS (AP) — Troubled real estate assets became the major problem of troubled Texas banks during 1986, a recent analysis shows.

"The way we look at the data, it is more of a real estate problem than an energy problem," said Alex Sheshunoff, principal of Sheshunoff Rating Services Inc.

Problem loans jumped 46 percent to \$6.5 billion in 1986, forcing the state's 1,968 banks to pile up a combined loss of \$883.2 million for the year, the Austin firm reported.

"This will not be quickly resolved with the change in the price of oil," Sheshunoff said. "All those buildings will not be filled with geologists."

Texas had the sixth-largest amount of non-performing loans of any state when measured as a percent of gross loans. But Texas had the second-fastest-growing level of troubled loans, even faster than Louisiana and Oklahoma, which also have been buffeted by energy and agriculture problems.

Sheshunoff said there were some positive signs that bank analysts see for Texas banks.

Oil prices have firmed to \$18 per barrel. Also, the state's inflation growth is above the national average, the unemployment rate in Texas has now declined and the industry continues to come back to state, including J.C. Penney's announced move of its headquarters from New York City.

"Fundamentally, there are good things happening," Sheshunoff said. "It will be longer before people start investing in real estate again and the local level picks back up."

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