

CS mayor says he likes working in college town

By Annette Primm
Reporter

As both the mayor of College Station and head of Texas A&M's statistics department, Dr. Larry Ringer is used to seeing college students — and he likes them.

"I think it kind of keeps the community young and alive," Ringer says.

College Station, being a university town, creates a different kind of atmosphere than a town without a university, he says.

"With the students, you have a lot of facilities that serve that group," he says. "The bars, the bookstores, the fast-food restaurants — those kind of places."

A city the same size, but without a university, would be more industrial, house a different type of people and have different types of programs, he says.

"You would have people that may not be as interested in such things as libraries, concert series, the arts and park and recreation programs," Ringer says.

Even college football creates a major difference, Ringer says.

"If you didn't have a university, you wouldn't have football crowds on Saturdays," he says, chuckling, referring to the traffic rather than the Twelfth Man.

Law enforcement tends to be another area with a different kind of program in a university-oriented area, he says.

When the city council searched for a new police chief earlier this year, the council thought the individual taking the job should be aware that a college town has a different type of problem.

Most of the city's crime problem involves theft, often of stereos and other items from cars, he says.

"It's a mischief kind of thing," he says. "Youthful exuberance, I guess."

The police should remember and work around the fact that these are young people, Ringer says, and not something that will affect their lives forever.

"Maybe scare them a little," he says.

Although being mayor takes up a lot of his time, Ringer says, the statistics department takes up more time.

Since that job pays his salary, he feels he should devote most of his working hours to it.

"I found that being mayor takes maybe a little more (time) than I thought at first," he says, although he says his seven years on the College Station City Council gave him enough insight to know the mayor's job isn't a slack one.

Ringer says his interest in the position of mayor started when he worked on community activities as a member of the council.

"I felt like there were programs that I liked and wanted to keep going," he says. "I think our parks and recreation programs have come

a long way from when I was first on the council."

Ringer says he would like to keep those programs and add others. Two important plans he says he wants to focus on are improvement of College Station's attractiveness and the landscaping of major entrances into the community.

"I'm going to try to get some community groups involved in programs much like the adopt-a-highway program," he says. In his version of the state litter control program, groups adopt a road or street inside the city's limits and keep it clean and attractive.

"I just like the community, and I want to work with the community and try to do what I can to help it," he says.

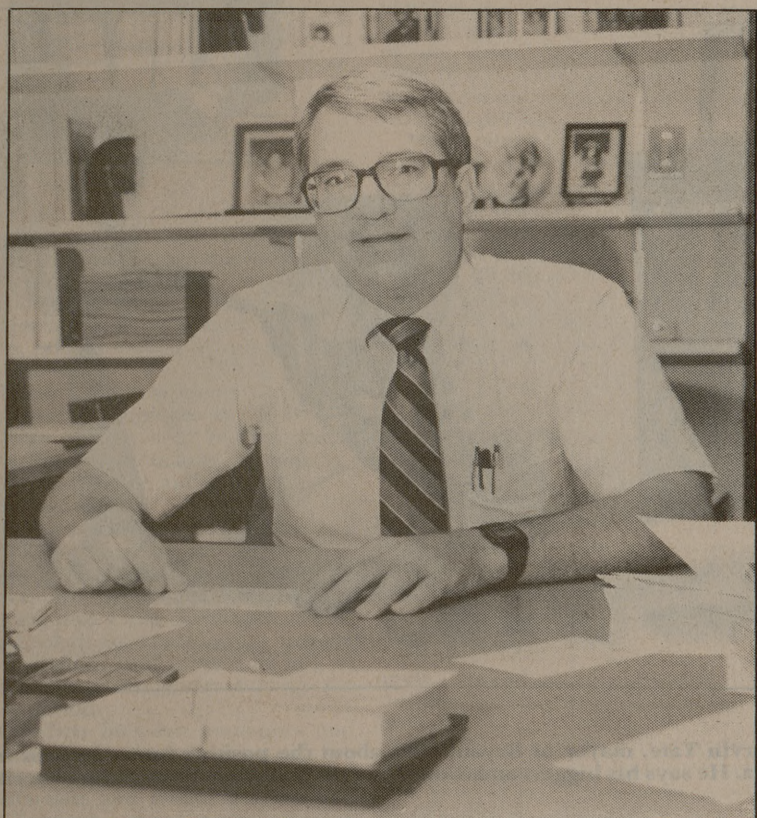


Photo by Sarah Cowan

Dr. Larry Ringer, mayor of College Station

Counselors offer reasons people turn to cocaine use

By Tere Thompson
Reporter

Although the American Medical Association declared drug addiction an illness in 1954, people continually experiment with cocaine and other drugs.

How and why do people get involved with cocaine? What keeps so many of them coming back for more cocaine? How does cocaine affect the people who use it? How can one tell someone he knows is addicted to cocaine?

"Many people think if you do it every day, then you have a problem," Sandra Hove, a certified alcohol and drug counselor, says. "It's not how much you use cocaine or how often you use cocaine, but why you use cocaine."

Charlie McMordie, a counselor-training in substance abuse, says, "One reason people use cocaine is because it has become so socially acceptable."

"If you want to have a party, it sets the stage to have a good time. People date cocaine to having a good time. The drug brings relief to a world that's crumbling around them."

If someone is having problems with his family, with his job or with dealing with world crises, he might turn to cocaine, McMordie says. People have an obsession with self-destruction and they rationalize that they deserve it.

After a hard day at work a person might rationalize that they deserve a dose of cocaine because of the relief it brings them, he says.

"Cocaine addiction is a feelings illness," Hove says. "It makes you feel part of." People who use cocaine usually have a low sense of self-worth, she says.

The psychological addiction is rapid," Hove says. People begin to believe they cannot relax or have a good time without it, she says.

Continual use of cocaine, a narcotic obtained from dried coca leaves, causes the body to build up a tolerance for the drug and more cocaine is needed to produce the same effects that were previously produced by a lesser amount, McMordie says.

"If you start out with one gram a week, six months from that you won't bother with a gram," he says. You continually and continually want more of the drug to achieve the same effect."

Because of the increased tolerance cocaine produces, and because the high does not last very long, cocaine is an expensive drug to use.

McMordie says, "A lot of people, since they can't afford the habit will turn to dealing."

Hove says people also get money

for cocaine by selling their belongings.

McMordie says cocaine affects all ages.

"Young people from ages 15 to 19 financially are not able to support the habit, but the mentalization can be cultivated here," McMordie says. "They'll burglarize and get arrested, but Mom and Dad bail them out." The kids then think they can get away with it for a while, he says.

Many people get involved with cocaine because of its availability.

"There is probably not a town in the United States you can't go into and find cocaine," McMordie says.

Hove says most people experiment with a chemical. This does not mean they will get addicted, however.

"People who become addicted do so the first time they use cocaine," Hove says. "It has to do with something in the body chemistry."

McMordie says prolonged use of cocaine depletes the brain chemistry and causes a craving for more.

Hove says once someone becomes addicted the process is sneaky.

"You have no control over the progression of the addiction process," Hove says.

Hove says she advises the patients she counsels to test their control by having one hit an hour. She says the control the patient thinks he has will not last.

"If you are an addict, there is no such thing as controlled use," Hove says. "Cocaine is a major drug and I don't know how someone could continually use it and not be addicted."

McMordie says cocaine addiction is a disease that gets progressively worse and results in self-destruction. "Cocaine addiction is chronic," McMordie says. "If left untreated, it is fatal 100 percent."

McMordie says when a cocaine death occurs, however, the cause of death is usually attributed to the physical problem that resulted from cocaine use, such as a heart attack.

Hove says when a person becomes addicted to cocaine, the five major areas of life are affected. The areas are social, physical, emotional, mental and spiritual. The spiritual area of life is the first area affected and the last area to return. This results in a change in morals and values.

With the personality change comes a distorted perception of reality, Hove says.

Denial is a core element in the life of someone who is addicted to cocaine, Hove says. The person begins to deny the fact that he is addicted.

"People don't come to counseling because they want to, they come in because they are pushed by someone

or something, like the loss of their job," Hove says.

McMordie says, "Denial has a lot of rationalization and justification." When a person is addicted, he rationalizes and justifies his use by saying he deserves it to relieve the tensions he may be under.

Hove says cross-addiction often occurs.

"Someone who uses cocaine usually thinks that is all he's addicted to," she says. "So, he turns to another drug like alcohol and eventually comes back to the cocaine."

"Johnnie," who asked that his real name not be used, is a sophomore at Texas A&M and uses cocaine approximately twice a month. He says he first experimented with cocaine during Christmas break in 1986.

"I did it out of curiosity," Johnnie says.

Like many first-time users, Johnnie was drinking alcohol first. He went into the bathroom with some other people at the party and tried cocaine for the first time.

"I was disappointed because nothing happened," Johnnie says. He did not experience a high.

After this first experience, Johnnie says he tried cocaine again.

"Why not do it?" Johnnie says. "When friends do it they don't usually like to do it alone. So you do it with them."

Johnnie says he tried cocaine the second time to find out what the high was like, since he had not experienced anything the first time. There was not much of a high this time, either, so he tried cocaine a third time.

"The third time I got some really good stuff," he says. "Since then it's been great."

"The high doesn't last very long."

"There's a feeling of euphoria right after you do it. After it's gone you don't feel bad if you don't do a lot."

"Your heart beats faster, you have a lot of energy and you feel like dancing."

"If you do too much you feel bad afterward."

"When I did a whole lot I didn't want to dance. I just wanted to sit there."

"Some people do so much they can't sleep. When they finally do fall asleep it's really late and they have to do a line just to get up in the morning."

Cocaine can either be inhaled or injected.

"You want more when you're high on it," Johnnie says. "You make irrational decisions to spend more money to get more cocaine."

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