

# The people behind the pages

by Staci Finch

You know it's there. You see it in various places around campus. And you probably pick one up, for the cartoons or sports or opinion page or whatever.

It's *The Battalion*.

But have you ever wondered how it all gets put together? Those stories obviously don't jump onto the pages all by themselves. Somebody has to put them there.

Right. Somebody does. As a matter of fact, a lot of people do.

Of course, a newspaper has to have an editor. That's the person who hires and fires staff members and oversees all aspects of the paper. Sondra Pickard, Summer and Fall 1987 editor of *The Battalion*, said her job comes down to basic management.

"When people call the paper, they usually ask for the editor, so I take phone calls about complaints or story ideas," she said. "When people have complaints, I look into them, and decide if we need to run a correction."

Pickard, a senior journalism major, said she also serves as a liaison between the director of Student Publications and *The Battalion*.

"Any suggestions he has as to the business side of *The Battalion*, he suggests to me," she said.

Pickard said as editor, it is important to stay on top of current events, on campus and off.

"I have to keep on top of issues, local and around the world, because being editor I need to know what is newsworthy everywhere to be able to guide which way the paper is going," she said.

Pickard said she also writes a column each week, and usually spends over 40 hours a week taking care of the paper's business.

But it would be very hard for one person to make all the

decisions about a paper with a circulation of 23,000. The editor has several assistants, one of whom is managing editor John Jarvis.

Jarvis, a senior journalism major, said he is a jack-of-all-trades.

"My job description says I am to handle payroll for a staff of over 50," he said. "I also handle staff questions and problems, but that is not all."

"The wire services send in the first few paragraphs of the stories they will have for the next day. I have to wait for those to come in and then take them to budget meeting where we decide what stories will run."

"The thing I like best about my job is that I am a utility player. If any desk, night news, city or whatever, is short a person, I fill in. So I have to be able to do everything on the paper."

Jarvis said the biggest part of his job is cleaning out the computer files.

"I have to make sure all the miscellaneous stories are cleaned out of the computer files, and everything is ready for night news staff to come in and work," he said. "That is the biggest part of my job because I have to have a thorough knowledge of the computer system."

But the list of editors does not end here. Someone has to assign all those reporters and staff writers their stories. Meet Rodney Rather, city editor.

"My assistants and I are in charge of all the staff writers," Rather said. "I assign and edit their stories, and I have ultimate responsibility to see the story is in shape before it goes to the night news desk."

Rather said he doesn't have a problem assigning stories to writers, but sometimes the writers have problems getting the stories done.

"We had an inexperienced staff this year, which made it hard at the start," he said.

"Things have gotten better, but one of the biggest problems we

still have is writers meeting deadlines.

"The writers have classes, and so their sources weren't always available when the staff writers were calling. This sometimes causes deadline problems, and the stories don't get done, so I have to find something to fill the space on the page."

Of course, in order for the city editors to have something to do, *The Battalion* must have writers. Enter the reporters and staff writers.

Reporters are students enrolled in the Reporting and Editing I & II classes. They write stories primarily for class grades, but the stories are assigned and edited by the assistant city editor, and many are published in *The Battalion*.

Staff writers, on the other hand, apply for positions on *The Battalion* and are paid for their stories. Doug Driskell, a

senior journalism major, said being a staff writer is not always easy.

"Basically, I am responsible for generating two stories for the *Batt* each week," he said. "The topics for those are either given to me or I create them."

"This semester I was responsible for covering MSC Council Committee. Covering those meetings was probably the hardest task I had all semester, because most of their work is done in committee meetings and we only got results, not process."

Driskell agreed with Rather that it is hard being a student and a staff writer at the same time.

"It is hard to sit around and wait for people to call you back when you have classes," he said. "Sometimes you don't even get called back and you spend what little time you have tracking people down."

Driskell said although he had problems, he gained a lot of experience working for *The Battalion*.

"Working for the *Batt* this semester has given me a taste of what it might be like reporting in the outside world,"



*Battalion* photographer Sarah Cowan examines her negatives to pick the perfect picture to print.