

# 'Big Hug' raises money for charity in spite of low turnout of first year

By Carol Martin  
Reporter

Hugging a stranger is not always easy, but nearly 200 people gathered on Kyle Field Saturday to try.

"The Big Hug," sponsored by the Texas A&M Student Y Association and radio station KKYS-FM, raised about \$75 for Brazos County's Stepping Stone, a United Way agency dedicated to helping troubled teens.

Kathy Denton, adviser for the Big Hug, was pleased with the turnout although it was small.

"It went really well," she said. "I was very excited about it."

Richard Sellers, Stepping Stone board chairman, said he also was excited about the event. He wasn't discouraged by the low turnout at all, he said.

"If more than 10 people show up it's a success," Sellers said. "If it happens a second year at A&M, it's a tradition."

Dave Mendoza, a senior computer science major from Beaumont and chairman of Youth Fun Day III, another Student Y program, said the Big Hug was similar to "The Big Kiss" held in 1986.

However, he said, the two programs are completely separate. The Big Kiss was sponsored by Kappa Alpha fraternity, Delta Delta Delta sorority, OCA, the Corps of Cadets and KKYS.

It was easier to explain the Hug because of the Kiss, Mendoza said, but the programs really have nothing to do with each other.

There were rumors that the Kiss was changed to the Hug because of AIDS, he said. But he said that was not the case.

"People think what they want," Mendoza said. "They automatically think it is the Hug because of AIDS."

"We called it 'The Big Hug' because we thought more people would come out and hug (as opposed to kissing)."

Vu "Doc" Tran, a senior business analysis major from Houston and chairman of the Big Hug, agreed with Mendoza.

"You can just about hug anybody, even a stranger," Tran said. "You can't just kiss anybody. The AIDS issue really never entered our minds when we planned the Hug."

The event was conducted to raise money for a worthy cause, he said.

Sellers said the money raised for Stepping Stone will go into a fund for the building of a co-ed emergency shelter that will provide temporary care for runaways and "throwaways" ages 10 to 17.

The dormitory-style shelter will

cost about \$100,000 and will be built on 26 acres in Wellborn owned by Stepping Stone, he said.

The facility will house about 12 to 24 youths, Sellers said. However, if the full amount needed is not raised, a portion of the building will be constructed and will be used to house females, he said.

But before the hugging began, winners of the "Most Huggable Dorm" award were announced.

Underwood Hall won the award for the Residence Hall Association and Dorm 4 won for the Corps Housing Office.

Denton said she was excited about the variety of people who participated in the Hug.

People of all different ages from different organizations assembled in Kyle Field inside a heart-shaped area marked with cones to embrace friends, loved ones and even strangers.

Off-Campus Aggies bought the most tickets overall and were allowed to hug on the 50-yard line. Senior yell leaders, Doug Beal and Matt Sellers, led the huggers in a few yells between hugs.

Dennis Brezina, a senior agronomy major from Axtell and his friend, Laura Abel, a senior at Baylor University, came out to the stadium to see what the Hug was all about, they said.

Brezina said he was a little surprised at the small number of huggers.

"I was expecting a bigger crowd," he said.

Nevertheless, he enjoyed it, he said.

"It was great!" he said.

Michelle Landauer, a freshman education major from Katy, said Aggie Friends, an organization within the Student Y, was responsible for bringing members of the Boys' Clubs and Girls Club of Brazos County.

"We meet with them (members of the clubs) about once a month," she said. "This is sort of a Valentine's party for them."

Landauer said Aggie Friends helps the boys and girls learn about college life.

"Hopefully," she said, "we can set a good example about college."

"These kids respond (positively) to everything we do. They know a lot about A&M. They're great kids!"

William Mathis, a 12-year-old from Carver School in Bryan, was among the young huggers from the Boys' Clubs.

Mathis said he really enjoyed the hugging.



Photo by Thomas Fernandez

Junior Kelon Morley and sophomore Laury Waterwall give each other a hug at the "Big Hug" Saturday at Kyle Field.

"It felt great hugging people," he said.

Three teen-age girls with the Girls Club were not as eager to get on the field and hug everybody.

Angelia Dove, a 15-year-old sophomore; Mary Hubert, a 19-year-old senior; and Robin Dove, a 17-year-old senior — all from Bryan High School — sat in the stands for a while watching the Hug.

Angelia Dove said she thought that all the huggers were with dates.

"I thought they were married the way some of them were carrying on," she said.

Her cousin, Robin Dove, said she wouldn't mind getting on the field and joining in the Hug.

"Since they're Aggies," she said, "I wouldn't mind."

Finally, the three couldn't resist. "Lean on Me" by Club Nouveau began to play and they decided they could at least go onto the field and dance.

Denton said the Big Hug probably will be held again next year.

"It will be much easier the second year," she said.

Diana Selensky, a sophomore biology major from Richardson, said the Big Hug was a good way to raise money.

"It was a fun and unique fundraising idea," she said. "However, I was disappointed at the lack of participation by the student body."

Despite the low turnout, Selensky said she liked the event.

"It was fun," she said. "I'll definitely do it again next year!"

# Experts say elderly frequently fall prey to unscrupulous insurance salesmen

DALLAS (AP) — For two years the visitors kept stopping by Rubye Davis' home in Ennis, often leaving with checks in hand.

During a 13-month period in 1986-87, they had sold the 84-year-old woman 15 insurance policies, four Medicare supplement policies, three hospitalization, three nursing care, two life insurance, two cancer and one surgery policy, at a cost of \$10,489.

Officials say the case points to the darker side of the state's multibillion-dollar insurance industry — the

widespread and growing abuse of the elderly by unscrupulous agents.

"They just preyed on her," Davis' daughter, Betty Andrews, said of the case under investigation by the State Board of Insurance. "She is senile. She didn't know what she was doing."

Andrews said that she felt so helpless in trying to protect her mother that she went to court last year and had her declared mentally incompetent. Any checks now have to be co-signed by Andrews.

"There wasn't any other way," she

told the Dallas Morning News. "They would have turned her into a bag lady."

A 1987 congressional report shows that 25 percent of the \$12 billion spent by the elderly for health insurance is wasted on unnecessary or fraudulent policies. And authorities say the Rubye Davis case is not extraordinary.

Texas Insurance Commissioner Doyce Lee said the exploitation of the elderly "has always been a problem," but it has gotten bigger in recent years.

But Lee acknowledges that his agency is part of the problem.

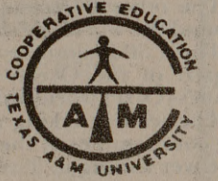
The insurance board has a backlog of about 2,000 cases against agents accused of fraud or other serious violations of state insurance law. Hundreds of cases involve the elderly, and some of the cases are years old. While the insurance board tries to catch up, the accused agents are free to continue their business.

Lawyers and support staff are being hired to help tackle cases, Lee says, but it will be at least a year before the backlog reaches a reasonable level.

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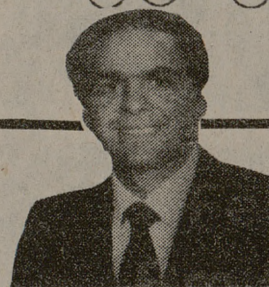
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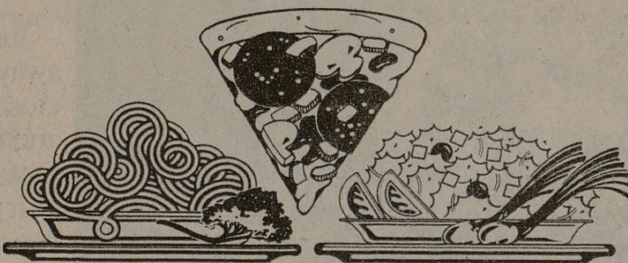
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