

Battalion Classifieds

RVs, Fish Drill Team represent A&M every year at Mardi Gras

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By Shannon O'Neal Reporter

Texas A&M was well-represented last weekend when the biggest party in the world reached its peak. Mardi Gras in New Orleans has become part of the yearly routine of two Texas A&M organizations. The Ross Volunteer Company and the Fish Drill Team spend three days each year in the city on the river. "It's a great opportunity," senior marketing major David Dommel

See related story in At Ease

said. "These guys get to go to a huge party, it is citywide and six weeks long and it is a University-excused absence." The RVs' led the King Rex parade, an event the group has been part of for 36 years, RV historian Mike Blakeney, a senior political science major, said. "The RVs' first Mardi Gras was in 1952, and they have been every year except 1979," Blakeney said. "That year there was a police strike and the president of the University wouldn't let them go. The place is a madhouse anyway, and without police it wouldn't be safe." The drill team also paraded in New Orleans, but that was not its reason for going to Mardi Gras. They competed in the Mardi Gras Drill Meet at Tulane University Friday against teams from throughout the nation, and won first place overall. Saturday they marched in the Krewe of Iris parade. George Szymeczek, commander of the drill team, explained how the drill meet works.

"We draw massive crowds when we do our fancy drill, that is something out of the ordinary at drill camps. You can hear people in the crowd asking, 'When does A&M perform?'" - George Szymeczek, Fish Drill Team commander

"The drill team competes in four areas in the meet: fancy, basic, squad drill and the inspection phase," Szymeczek, a senior mechanical engineering major, said. "Varying numbers of people compete in each area, from 32 to only eight men. All areas are weighted equally." Though the parade is secondary for the drill team, they enjoy performing in it, he said. "It's rewarding when the crowd goes wild, especially elsewhere, and the Mardi Gras crowds are as wild as they come," Szymeczek said. Both the Rex and Iris parades are extremely long and tiring, RV commander Bradley Hall said. "It (the Rex parade) is a grueling seven-mile parade through downtown business districts and residential areas, winding up at the (Mississippi) river," Hall, a senior exercise technology major, said. Szymeczek said the Iris parade was especially hard on the freshmen. The RVs and the drill team have different purposes although their activities are similar. Both organizations march with dummy rifles and perform complicated and difficult drills. But while the drill team competes in drill meets, the RVs simply parade.

Hall said competition is not the RVs' purpose. "We're not a drill unit; we are representatives first and foremost of the governor, the state of Texas and Texas A&M," he said. "Our function is as a ceremonial unit." "We are 'goodwill ambassadors' and representatives of the state by the state Legislature's decree. That is why we always participate in the governor's inauguration and many other state functions." Szymeczek said the drill team, on the other hand, exists to compete. "The team has a reputation for excellence that is well earned," he said. "We practice about 21 hours a week in the spring - which a lot of people can't handle. We had 238 members at the beginning of the fall semester and now we have 37 members. It is a tough organization to make it through, but we don't kick anybody off the team." "We draw massive crowds when we do our fancy drill, that is something out of the ordinary at drill camps. You can hear people in the crowd asking, 'When does A&M perform?'" Hall said the RVs are a well-known part of Mardi Gras. "Last year the announcer at the

reviewing stand commented that Rex Parade wouldn't be the best without the men in white who led it for so long," he said. "The crowds know us down there. They have a reputation for their steady faced discipline and they really get into trying to make us smile or laugh around." Both groups got out to see the parade while they were at Mardi Gras, Hall said. "The highlight of the trip is an annual congregation at Pat O'Brien's Bourbon Street when the RVs parade over the piano bar," Hall said. "It's strange how 70 Aggies can change New Orleans landmark bar into Dixie Chicken. We sang 'The Aggie War Hymn' twice, 'Up Against the Wall You Redneck Mother' and 'Never Even Call Me By My Name. Those piano players love us.'" Cheap plastic beads gain new significance at Mardi Gras, Hall said. "The goal of every Mardi Gras reveler is to collect beads from the floats," he said. "Of course the RVs like the Rex beads most. A close second are the varying colors of pearl necklaces." "During Mardi Gras you see the beads in a sort of barter system with the other parties, and trade with the beads, maybe a kiss or something along those lines." The party atmosphere can lead to trouble, though. Mark Anderson, a senior aerospace engineering major said Mardi Gras was another way "The place is wild," he said. "It is my second year down there, and I couldn't believe it was actually my way I remembered it."

Experts say Texas has failed to 'come to grips' with AIDS

HOUSTON (AP) — Texas hasn't come to grips with AIDS although the disease is spreading and society's costs for treating patients is expected to increase, experts testified at a public hearing. "Houston and Texas are the best examples of how not to deal with AIDS," said Brown McDonald, executive director of the AIDS Foundation of Houston. "In the midst of a pandemic, we are losing momentum." McDonald was one of several people who testified Tuesday before the state Legislative Task Force on AIDS. Other experts echoed similar sentiments. "Texas is behind," said Dr. Palmer Beasley, dean of the University of Texas School of Public Health. "Texas has not yet come to grips with this disease."

Treatment programs are needed for AIDS victims, but it also is important to follow such states as New York and California in offering education programs that will help to stop the spread of the AIDS disease, he said. "We can do that in Texas, too," he said. "We need a concerted effort to educate." McDonald said treating AIDS patients through the public hospital system is more expensive than funding educational efforts and supporting outpatient treatments and low-cost housing for indigent AIDS patients. King Hillier, the Harris County Hospital District's comptroller of cost payments and budget, said AIDS costs in the county's tax supported facilities are expected to double each year over the next four years.

Treating the district's estimated 300 patients with AIDS will cost about a total of \$3.7 million in 1988, Hillier said. Treating the district's projected 4,800 AIDS patients in 1992 is expected to cost the district \$59.2 million, he said. Other speakers raised concerns over confidentiality surrounding AIDS tests, job discrimination against those infected, and the potential impact of the disease on the school system. The public hearing at the University of Houston was the third of eight to be conducted throughout the state to assess the growing impact of the fatal AIDS disease on Texas. The next meeting is scheduled for Friday and will be located in El Paso.

Agents search for pilot of plane carrying marijuana into Texas

PALO PINTO (AP) — Agents from several law enforcement agencies continued searching Wednesday for the pilot of private plane that allegedly carried more than 1,200 pounds of marijuana into Texas from Mexico. After authorities tailed the plane from a drop-off near Possum Kingdom Lake to an isolated airstrip in Borden County, the pilot landed the plane, and he and another person fled into heavy brush, said Department of Public Safety officials.

Agents from the Drug Enforcement Administration, Department of Public Safety and Customs Service Tuesday converged the area to search, but scaled down their efforts Wednesday, officials said. Earlier, DPS narcotics agents arrested two men and confiscated an estimated 1,229 pounds of marijuana near the lake, according to officials. Gerald Blake Mackey of Cedar Creek was being held in Palo Pinto

County Jail on \$150,000 bond, and Gary M. Whittington was in Erath County Jail on \$100,000 bond following their arrests Tuesday, officials said. Both men were arraigned on charges of aggravated possession of marijuana, Palo Pinto Chief Deputy Allan Spurlock said. DPS Sgt. Bob Porter said customs officials and an Austin DPS agent followed the plane from Mexico to a small airstrip at Sportsmans World.

Agents raid wrong house for narcotics

ABILENE (AP) — Narcotics agents mistakenly raided a minister's home after counting houses from the wrong end of the block, officials said. "I thought they were robbing," said Hector Sanchez, whose daughter, Noemi, woke him to say three men were in the back yard with crowbars and guns. Sanchez, a minister at the Spanish Assembly of God Church, said he found three men in the yard early Sunday who told him to freeze or be shot. "When he (one of the officers) told me he was from the state police, I was relieved," Sanchez said. "But I was still frightened." His wife and two daughters were in the living room while the men went through the house and out front, where they ran into the rear of the raiding party — and learned of their mistake. Sgt. Don Bush of the Department of Public Safety narcotics division said human error was to blame for the mix-up. The department had assigned men to two groups, Bush said. One group was supposed to enter the targeted home from the front, and the other — the group that raided the Sanchez home — was supposed to guard the rear. Because the houses don't have numbers on the back, the group in the rear was instructed to count houses from the corner. Bush said. The problem, he said, was that they started counting at the wrong end of the block. Later Sunday, the agent found the house they initially intended to raid down the block and arrested seven people.

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