HISD officials seek inquiry into degrees

HOUSTON (AP) — Reports that some Houston Independent School District administrators got their degrees from an unaccredited, mail-order university prompted four school board members to call for an investigation to determine just how many have those degrees.

Board member Tarrant Fendley said Monday that the district should investigate to determine how many administrators may have used mail-order degrees to qualify for a certificate from the Texas Education Agency.

"I would personally like to be assured that people are getting the proper credit," Fendley said. "I don't think the person (with a degree from an unaccredited institution) should even be allowed to use the title."

Trustees Elizabeth Spates, Ginia Wray Wright and Tina Reyes agreed, saying the district should make an effort to determine whether all of its administrators are qualified for their positions.

HISD Superintendent Joan Raymond has not spoken publicly about the issue.

TEA spokeswoman Terri Moore said the agency cannot take any action unless a complaint is filed.

Last week, published reports said that at least five, and possibly as many as 25, school district administrators have received advanced degrees from non-accredited Pacific Western University in California.

The school offers master's and doctorate degrees in nine months or less and guarantees that "no classes are required" and only "pertinent examinations are administered."

Firemen training school begins utilizing facilities

By Lyn Jenkins
Reporter

Starting fires will be more fun and putting them out easier this year for firemen at the Brayton Firemen Training School.

Firemen will utilize $500,000 worth of new facilities to test innovative training concepts.

The training field, the largest in the world, provides practical training for state and international firefighters.

New additions include two classrooms, a chemical complex, a rescue vehicle, a rescue tower, a smokehouse and other training facilities for fire training purposes.

Firemen will be using the facilities to generate fires in new ways and to fight the fires using a water-cooling system that runs throughout the field. Another improvement is an upgraded sprinkler system.

John J. Donovan, training field manager, said sprinkler systems are becoming more important for fire control in the United States.

Most of the facilities were completed and in use last month.

Funds for the facilities were generated through student firefighters' fees. Brayton channels this revenue back into the field for improvements.

The improvements are affecting enrollment at Brayton. Donovan said this will probably be the last year for open enrollment because of increased attendance.

"We're getting very close to the saturation point," Donovan said.

He said enrollment will be limited to about 2,000 firefighters next year.

Future improvements include a firefighting simulator that will cost more than $5 million. Donovan said he hopes to have the simulator installed and working by 1993.

Sessions: Drug legalization wouldn't be like Prohibition

AUSTIN (AP) — While problems enforcing today's drug laws are similar to those of Prohibition, the notion of legalizing drugs is unimaginable, the FBI director said Tuesday.

"I cannot imagine that this community or any other community would surrender itself by saying, 'We cannot cope with the problem, this is insurmountable, we'll fold our tents and steal away into the night,' " William S. Sessions said.

During a speech to the Austin Rotary Club and in a press conference, Sessions said he rejects suggestions that the illegal drug problem now is so large that legalization of some drugs might be a good idea.

"I know there are all sorts of conversations and all sorts of polls in all sorts of mediums about legalization of marijuana, legalization of other drugs. I think we are a long way from having to seriously consider that prospect," he said.

The top FBI official acknowledged that law enforcement authorities today face many similar problems in combating drug use as were faced during Prohibition in the 1920s and 1930s.

"The similarities are great," he said. "However ... with alcohol you can get just a little drunker or become an alcoholic or are an alcoholic. With drugs, the variety of them, the impact of them is so different that I fear it greatly."

"I'm just not willing to surrender our country to a drug society," he Sessions said.

Sessions, who took over the FBI late last year after being both a U.S. attorney and federal judge in Texas, said he believes that Congress will respond to public demand for increased anti-drug measures.

"I believe that we are cranked up properly. The Congress is now, I think, intent on reflecting the will of the American people that there be an even greater effort," he said.

Sessions said that while authorities seek to halt smuggling of drugs into the country and to arrest pushers in the United States, efforts also are needed to reduce demand for illegal narcotics.

That drive, he said, should "create an atmosphere under which our societies and our communities will defend themselves against the attitude that has allowed drugs to become pervasive."

Duck season may be cut short by drought

AUSTIN (AP) — Drought has reduced the expected fall duck migration to the second smallest on record and could mean a 25 percent reduction in hunting this year, federal wildlife officials say.

The migration will total about 66 million ducks, according to biologists of the Fish and Wildlife Service. Only 1985's estimated migration of 62 million was lower, and last year's was a hopeful 74 million.

All the decline will come in the Central and Mississippi flyways because of steady loss of marshy breeding areas in the northern plains states and southern Canada in the 1980s. The flight on the Atlantic and Pacific flyways should be unchanged from last year.

The service has been warning for weeks that major new restrictions probably will be needed for hunting seasons starting in October.

States are in charge of actual hunting regulations, but they must choose from possibilities set out by the service. Early-season guidelines for hunting the blue-winged teal in September call for no season at all in 13 Central and Mississippi flyway states.

Regular-season guidelines will be decided upon next week after a public hearing in Washington. Advisory committees meeting in Denver on Monday were asked to discuss a 25 percent cutback in the number of days during which duck hunting is allowed, a reduction in bag limits from the typical four to three and an early closing of the season on Jan. 1 instead of Jan. 20, Megan Durham, spokesman for the Fish and Wildlife Service, said.

It isn't just this year's drought that has reduced breeding activity in the marshes, she said. There have been many dry years in this decade, allowing farming to be extended into areas previously too wet for crops, particularly in Canada.

Surveys released last week showed record numbers of ducks in northern Canada and Alaska, with populations up 9 percent there. Those ducks couldn't find suitable areas farther south, and the longer flights may have tired them too much to breed, biologists fear.

Overall, the census by U.S. and Canadian biologists showed the breeding populations of 10 major species down 3.7 percent from last year and 17 percent from the 1955-1987 average. There were only 2.58 million Northern pintail ducks, 18 percent fewer than last year and 54 percent below average.

Mallards in southern Saskatchewan fell below 1 million for the first time.

"Biologists are beginning to worry that continued low water conditions in the areas waterfowl use for migration stopovers and wintering will concentrate the birds and make them more vulnerable to disease later this year," the service said.

Frank Dunkle, director of the service, was quoted as expecting increased emphasis on management of wetlands for waterfowl as provided for under the 1986 "North American Plan" agreement with Canada, because such areas in many cases have provided the only relief for drought-stressed waterfowl.

Some other findings from the survey:

- The Platte River in Nebraska has been turned into a "river of sand," exposing the nesting piping plover and the interior least tern to threats of predators and death of aquatic food species.
- Geese are faring better than ducks, since they nest on more permanent wetlands and are better able to protect their young from predators.
- Flows of tributaries to the Great Lakes are so low biologists cannot safely apply chemicals to control lamprey, which prey on lake trout.

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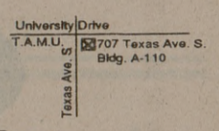

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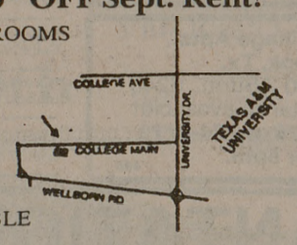

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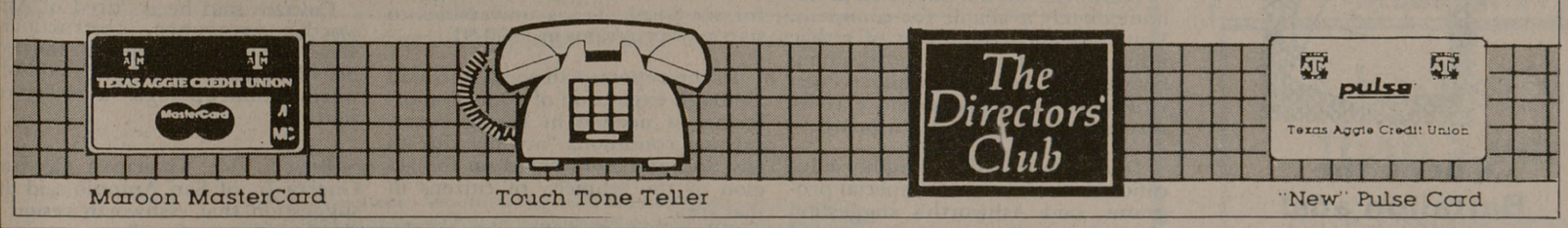

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