Dressed for success

Photo by Mike C. Mulvey

Second Platoon Sargeant Adam Coe, a junior from San Antonio studying environmental design, inspects the uniform fitting of fresh-man general studies major Brandon Davis of San Antonio. Both are members of Company K-2.

Sesame Street makes ready for 20th year on TV

LOS ANGELES (AP) — The 20th season of PBS' "Sesame Street," beginning this November, will lead up to the birth of a baby for Maria and Luis, two of the characters who married last season.

This season will also mark the 20th anniversary of two of the show's charter cast members — singer-actor Bob McGrath and Caroll Spinney, the man inside Big Bird.

They recalled their beginnings on the now historic PBS children's series at a recent news conference.

"When I first heard about it, I didn't think I wanted to be involved with a new children's show, because there was nothing that exciting in terms of children's shows at that point," said McGrath, who had been featured on the Mitch Miller show and joined "Sesame Street" in 1969. "But when I saw some of the film and animation that Jim Henson and some of the other people had done, quite out of the ordinary from what had been on television before."

The producers of the show expect to add more graphics and use more films, including ones by director Jonathan Demme and photographer-artist William Wegman, this season, a likely response to the trend toward multimedia kids' shows like "Pee-wee's Playhouse."

One of the major episodes last season was the wedding of characters Luis and Maria. This season's finale will be the birth of their baby. The producers hope to see the baby grow up on the show. Producer-director Lisa Simon said a search is on for expectant parents who would be willing to let the show follow their child's growth.

Big Bird has become the show's biggest star, but he didn't start out that way, Spinney said.

A peripheral character in the early episodes, he was sort of "the village idiot," Spinney said.

"One day, I realized he was really a child," said Spinney. "One of the scripts said he had to go to day care or something. So I said, we really should play him as a child."

Big Bird came to embody "all the

fears of children and things have to learn — a wide-eyed look at the world," Spinney said. "He actually learned to read and write, so he grew from 4, which I felt was the beginning, to 6½, where he stays.

Spinney carefully protects Big Bird's real identity from little children, but admits when he sees a child toting one of the big Bird dolls, "I keep wanting to say, you know, (he goes into Big Bird voice) 'Hey, I do that!'"

Spinney had been into puppetry since he was a child. McGrath...

"He (Big Bird) graduate learned to read and write and so he grew from ... which I felt he was the beginning, to 6½, which where he stays."
— Caroll Spinney, inside Big Bird

intended to have a career entertaining adults as a singer, but when music began to take over the business, he decided he would take another path.

Both said the rewards of working for children are great, but the job sometimes exasperating.

McGrath does a lot of concerts and benefits as his "Sesame Street" character. Children, he said, "they're very, very honest. For a little girl in Vancouver some time ago, I was shaking hands after a concert. She had me lean over and said (he drops to a stage whisper), 'You know something.' And I said, 'No, what?' 'Up close you don't look too good.'"
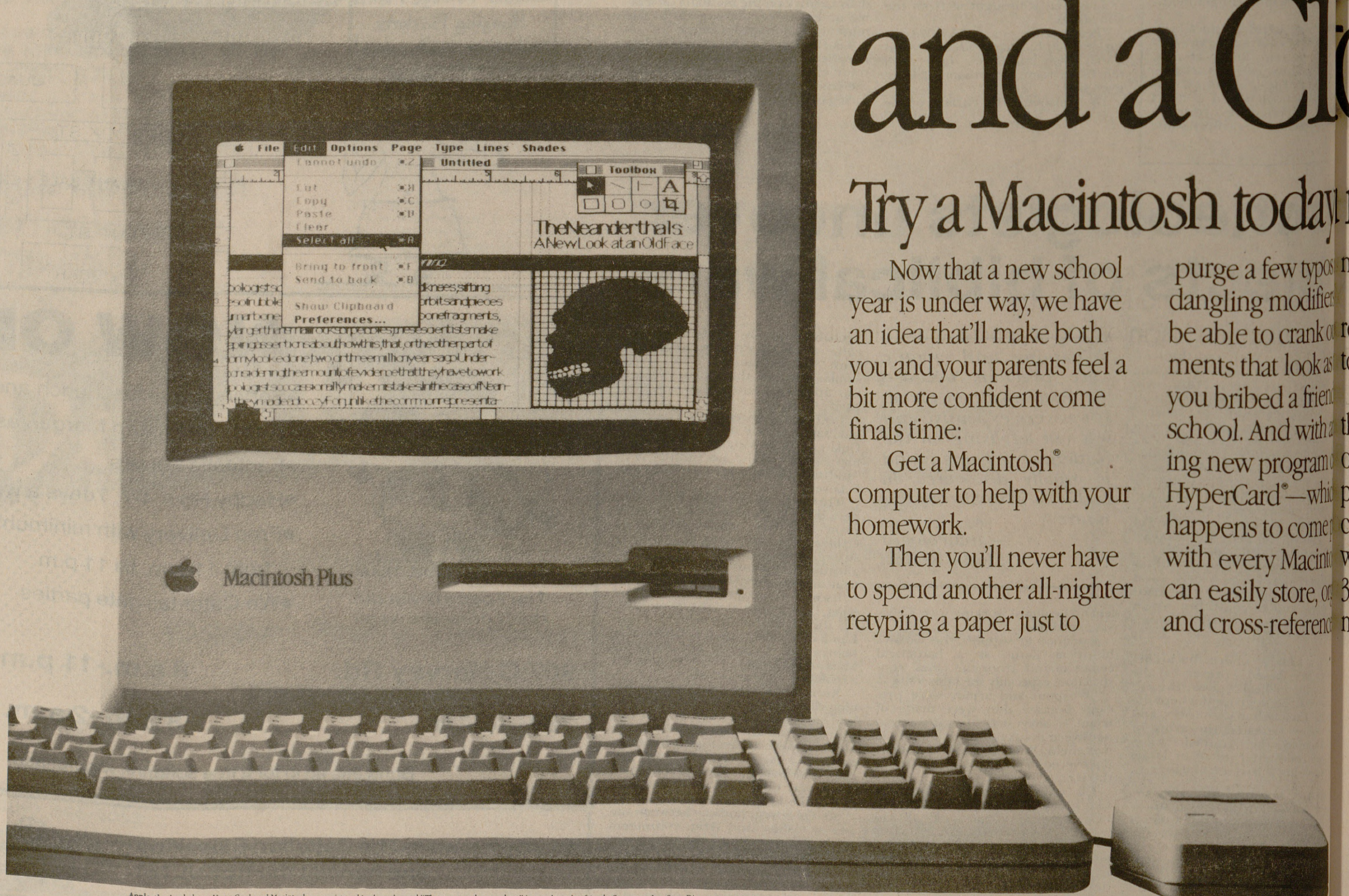
Family's collection of Disney items expands to slowly take over home

RICHMOND, Ky. (AP) — Willie and Tobie Hislope's obsessive hobby is slowly taking over their home.

The Hislopes said they started collecting Disney characters for their son Will when he was born three years ago.

Since then, the collection has grown to more than a thousand pieces.

"We never really knew we'd get that involved with it," Hislope said.

"Now, everywhere I go that's the first thing I look for," he said.

The collection includes banks, small figures, matchbox cars, games, cameras, socks, lamps, rattles, bubble pipes and also a menagerie of stuffed animals.

The couple said they display most of the collection in their son's room, but they have already had to move the boy to bigger quarters. Even so, there is still not enough space to display everything.

"We built shelves all the way around his bedroom and covered them," Mrs. Hislope said.

"And we've got a china cabinet full of it," her husband added.

Hislope said they look for the Disney items everywhere, from yard sales to antique malls.

His wife added that lots of people collect Disney items.

"We're not really serious about it, but it's one of the main things you look for when you go anywhere," Hislope said.

"We didn't go out and spend hundreds of dollars on stuff," he said.

Mrs. Hislope said the most expensive item they purchased was the Mickey Mouse 60th birthday plate they bought on their recent trip to Disney World.

The plate cost about $35.

They know that while many of the items in their collection are only worth what they paid for them, the collection's value will increase with time.

"By the time he's older and has kids, it will really be worth something," Mrs. Hislope said. "It's kind of a fun thing we started to do that one day may be worth something to him."