



Just a swingin'

Photo by Dean Saito

Danny Bennet of College Station has fun in the sun as he practices his golf swings on Wednesday afternoon. He perfects his technique as he sends grass and ball flying at the driving range by the Zachery parking lot.

Austin men's shop stands test of time with help of hats

AUSTIN (AP) — The advertisement painted long ago on the side of the building at 217 Congress Ave. has all but been erased by time and the elements. Barely discernible is the name, Joseph's Men's Shop, and the promotion of one of its principal sales items, Stetson hats.

Memories have faded, too, over the decades.

The other day, the second and third generation of the Joseph's merchant family couldn't remember the size of Lyndon Baines Johnson's head.

Julia Joseph, 77, thought it was size 7. Her son Ernest Jr., 45, argued 7 and three-eighths. Yellowed newspaper clippings confirmed Julia's memory.

"Well, it was 7," insisted Julia, whose husband, Ernest, ran the business for 47 years until his death in 1974.

Of course, she added jokingly, "His head may have gotten bigger after he came president."

Perhaps setting the record straight, the LBJ Library has a collection of Johnson's hats that are sizes 7.5 and 7 and three-eighths, Claudia Anderson, one of the museum's archivists, says.

Measured by the staying power of most family-owned Austin businesses, Joseph's Men's Shop is old enough to be a museum piece.

Unless someone stands up to dispute it, Joseph's is probably the second-oldest retailer in the city in terms of continuous operation. Cater Joseph Cater, a teenage immigrant from Roumie, Lebanon, started the family in business when he came to Austin and opened a confectionary shop on Congress Avenue in 1890. The family name was later shortened to Cater Joseph.

Quite likely, the business with the longest continuous run was started by Joseph Koen, who came to Austin from Vilna, Russia, and launched his watchmaking enterprise in the Congress Hotel in February 1884. Joe Koen & Sons, a jewelry shop, still operates downtown, right next door to Joseph's.

While history records no such meetings, there can be little doubt that Cater Joseph, born in the hills above Beirut, and Joseph Koen, a child of Czarist Russia, stopped each other many times on a street in the

New World long enough to ask, "How's business?"

That would be back when Congress Avenue was a dirt road and traffic congestion meant horse-drawn wagons bumper to bumper.

Indeed, before there was an LBJ there was his father, Samuel Ealy Johnson, who did business with Cater Joseph back at the turn of the century. The elder Johnson came from Johnson City to Austin by wagon to shop and for sessions of the Texas Legislature in which he served. He often left his wagon in the wagon yard at the foot of Congress Avenue and walked up to the 200 block where Joseph's store — then a general store — was located.

"There were no meter maids," quipped Ann Joseph, who helps run the business these days with her husband, Ernest Jr. "Back then, they would have shot them."

For sure, LBJ made the Stetson popular. And it didn't hurt business for Joseph's Men's Shop that he regularly bought his Silver Belly Open Road hat there. Photographs of Johnson's visits are prominently displayed in the store, now located at 609 Congress Ave.

Ann concedes that the Stetson has been a "lifesaver" for the business.

"Without the hats we would not be who we are," she said.

But there is also a sadder story attached to two very special Stetson hats bought at Joseph's Men's Shop.

When he was Texas governor during the early 1960s, John Connally, a customer himself of Joseph's, had ordered the hats to be presented to two honored guests of the state who were making a scheduled stop in Austin.

One Stetson was an Open Road style for a man. The other, the Sierra style for a woman.

In one hat, Connally had inscribed in delicate gold script the initials "JFK." For the other, the initials "JBK."

The inscriptions were done on the morning of Friday, Nov. 22, 1963.

That was the day President John F. Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas as he sat in a limousine with his horrified wife, Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy. They never made the trip to Austin.

The hats remained in their tan, luggage-style cases for several weeks until Secret Service agents came to the store and took them away.

Salutes

Faculty/Staff

Dr. Robert Berg, who holds the Michel T. Halbouty Chair in the Texas A&M Geology department, will be inducted into the National Academy of Engineering on Sept. 28. Election to the academy is by peer vote and is the highest professional honor an individual in an engineering or engineering-related field can achieve. Berg has been a faculty member for more than 20 years and is a past president of the American Institute of Professional Geologists. He is also a former winner of the Texas A&M Association of Former Students Distinguished Achievement Award for Teaching.

Salutes is a community service provided by The Battalion to list students, faculty and staff who have received honors and awards (such as scholarships, retirement, etc.). Space is limited and is provided on a first-come, first-served basis. There is no guarantee that your submission will run. Submissions may be refused if they contain incomplete or incorrect information. If you have any questions, please call The Battalion at 845-3315.

Senator lobbies to aid rural Texas

WASHINGTON (AP) — Rural Texas has begun to recover from the devastation of the collapse in energy prices and the depression in agriculture, but its hospitals and schools are still in critical condition, Texas Sen. Bill Sims said Wednesday on Capitol Hill.

Sims asked Congress in a hearing before the Joint Economic Committee to help rural communities retain their hospitals and to back an agriculture policy that will ensure there are enough farmers in the next 20 or 30 years.

The San Angelo Democrat, a fourth generation farmer, told the panel he was also concerned about rural schools' ability to repay bond issues passed during the wealthier days of the oil boom.

"The problem now is going to be more that the rural schools will have to raise their taxes more and more to be able to take care of their bonded indebtedness," Sims said in prepared testimony before the committee, which is examining the prospects for rural development in the 1990s.

"Rural education may end up being hurt as much or more than the farmers or the oil industry," Sims said.

Another troubling problem is the number of rural Texas hospitals being forced out of business, with as many as 50 closed in the past five years, Sims said.

"People are not going to live in small towns if there's not a doctor there," he said.

He blamed the health care problem and hospital crisis on low patient numbers because of people leaving

rural Texas, exorbitant malpractice insurance costs that in some cases have priced doctors out of such fields as obstetrics, nurse shortages and the costs of providing care to indigent patients.

Medicare and Medicaid payments to rural hospitals average 40 percent less than what is paid to city hospitals, he said in urging that reimbursements be increased for rural hospitals.

He said 43,000 farms and ranches in Texas were lost from 1982 to 1988.

Financial nightmare ends for couple

DALLAS (AP) — When Suzanne and Gordon Dean's 6-year-old daughter started a fire while playing with matches in their one-bedroom apartment last March, the family lost everything they owned.

But the financial nightmare grew worse last month when an insurance company began pressing the couple to repay nearly \$20,000 for building repairs.

"We can't pay them," Dean, 35, who is mentally retarded, said. "Right now we'd be taking food out of our mouths."

Her husband, Gordon, brings home only about \$630 a month from his janitorial job.

Fireman's Fund Insurance Cos., which insured the apartment building, told the Deans they could pay \$50 a month for the next 32 years to repay the company \$19,616 it paid out for repairs.

After several weeks of pressure from the company, the Deans were tempted to sign the promissory notes Fireman's Fund sent because the couple didn't know what else to do.

But Tuesday, the Deans learned they wouldn't have to pay. Fireman's Fund dropped all claims against the family, after inquiries from reporters.

"This is a nightmare when this

sort of thing happens," John Kozero, a Fireman's Fund public relations executive who only recently learned of the case, said.

"You wonder how things happened to get to this point."

Others have wondered, too. Susan Butler, a Los Angeles lawyer and a friend of Suzanne Dean's mother, learned of the family's plight last week. She waged a telephone war, calling Fireman's Fund executives and alerting Dallas reporters.

Lee Jones, spokesman for the State Board of Insurance, said the company had no right to demand anything from the Deans without a court order. "We're pleased that

Fireman's Fund made a decision that results in a happy ending to a situation that must have been tremendously distressing to this family," he said.

Kozero said Fireman's Fund, which has headquarters near San Francisco and last year had revenues of \$3.9 billion, is dropping its case against the Deans because of the special circumstances of the case.

He said Fireman's Fund employees who handled the claim against the Deans were not fully aware of the family's problems.

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