

A&M and the wheelchair

Campus, buildings leave some things to be desired

By Staci Finch

WANTED: Electric doors, modified elevators and no cobblestones.

These may not sound like everyone's top priorities in life, but for handicapped students at Texas A&M, they are quite important.

You may not give a thought to getting to and from class, but try doing it in a wheelchair some time. Several handicapped students say the A&M campus is easy enough to get around on, but it has some flaws that need to be fixed.

Carolyn Murray, a sophomore education major, has been in a wheelchair since birth.

"I have cerebral palsy, which is a birth defect," she says. "So I've gotten around in a wheelchair for quite some time."

Murray came to A&M because she liked the school, and it seemed pretty friendly. She says her brother, a recent A&M graduate, and her sisters who attend now influenced her decision.

Even though she didn't choose A&M on the basis of its accessibility to handicapped students, she doesn't find it too difficult to go from place to place.

"I get around fine, but I do have problems sometimes," Murray says. "With all the construction going on, it's really hard to get around."

"But one of the biggest things here is the lack of electric doors," she says. "The doors to most buildings are really heavy and are hard to open."

Murray also says several buildings could use ramps and elevators.

"I had a class in Francis Hall, which wasn't equipped for handicapped students," she says. "Luckily, my counselor found another section that met in Blocker, so I got into that one. Otherwise I don't know what they would have done, because I had to have the class."

Murray's favorite building on campus is the A.P. Beutel Health Center because they have electric doors.

Michael Morris, a freshman biology major, has been confined to a wheelchair since he suffered a broken neck in a car wreck three years ago. He agrees that some buildings on campus are a problem for people in wheelchairs.

"The only door I can go into at the Harrington Classroom Building is on the side, because all the other doors have steps leading to them," he says. "So I have to wait until someone comes along to open the door for me."

Also, Morris says the elevators all



Photo by Dean Saito

These steps may as well be Mount Everest for people such as freshman biology major Michael Morris, who is confined to a wheelchair.

over campus are difficult to operate.

"Most of the time the buttons are too high or placed wrong and I can't get to them," he says. "Also, the doors never stay open long enough and I always get caught in the middle."

But wait, there's more. To get into Zachry Engineering Center, disabled students must enter through the basement. And the elevators in the Academic Building are off to the side

where not many students pass by to help. The only way to get into the psychology building is through a lift and then an elevator, and the lift was broken the first day of classes. Also, the only way into Reed McDonald is through the back door or the printing center. Not very convenient.

Murray sees another problem with the ramp in front of the post office by Sbis.

"There is a big hump on it," she says. "You are already on an incline, and the only way to get over it to pop a wheelie. Coming down is a problem, too. I don't know if anything can be done about it, but it isn't easy getting to mail a letter at all."

Morris says the problem with getting around doesn't stop at campus.

"The other day I went to get some things from Sarge's, and I couldn't get in," he says. "There was a curb break, but there were steps there and there was no way around them. That gets aggravating."

But not everything at A&M is difficult to maneuver around. Murray says she loves having the handicapped section in Kyle Field.

"I have been to every home game since I've been here," she says. "It's great sitting in that section because no one stands in front of you and you can see really well."

A&M has also solved the problem of scattered classes.

"Once I had a class across the tracks in Kleberg," Murray says. "But I just used the handicapped shuttle. You just call them and tell them your schedule, and they are there when you need to be picked up or dropped off."

Shane Landry is a quadriplegic who suffered injuries nine years ago playing football in Wichita Falls. He lives off campus and drives his own vehicle. He says he has hardly any trouble getting to his classes.

"I drive back and forth to school in my van," he says. "It's all run by remote control, and in place of the pedals most people use, I have hand controls."

After arriving on campus, Landry rarely runs into problems.

"There are only a few buildings that are not accessible to handicapped students, and, on the whole, everything is really set up well," he says. "The only thing I would like to see would be a bigger facility for the handicapped and veteran services."

"We only have about three rooms allotted to us right now, and it is in those rooms that everyone takes tests from their classes," Landry says. "When we are all in there taking tests it gets pretty crowded. It would be nice to have our own building."

Landry says off campus isn't too bad either, but when it gets crowded he would just as soon be somewhere else.

"I rarely go inside the Chicken," he says. "It gets so crowded and I always get beer spilled on me. So we usually stay outside. But it isn't bad."

Obviously, there are problems for