

Tuesday, February 14, 1989

Center tries to eradicate illiteracy

By Melissa Naumann

REPORTER

A Texas A&M program has undertaken the task of making the word "illiterate" synonymous with "archaic."

The Adult Literacy Center is working to organize and improve the adult education programs used to fight illiteracy across Texas.

While many programs exist to combat illiteracy, no method of evaluation of the programs and the materials they use is available. In fact, many programs remain relatively unrecognized, Dr. Mike McCallister, coordinator of the center, said.

"We just received a list of 300 literacy agencies across Texas," he said. "My guess is that there's at least 150 more."

Without a method of organization, the effectiveness of various programs is uncertain, McCallister said.

"We're trying to find out exactly who is doing what in adult education," he said. "We're always hearing of new people but no one's ever pulled them together before."

Through research, the center has determined ways to improve literacy programs.

One area needing attention is the relationship between adult educators and the people they teach.

"There's light years of difference between the two," McCallister said.

While the teachers are often from middle-class families and have good memories of school experiences, students are likely to be lower on the socioeconomic scale and less enthusiastic about school.

McCallister said his project hopes to bridge this gap by designing multicultural sensitivity training for teachers.

"If you don't know where someone's coming from, you can't meet them halfway," he said.

Another effort is geared toward program accountability. While this involves studying how many people actually participate in the programs and receive GEDs, the equivalent to a high school degree, it will also measure the personal growth of the participants.

This personal aspect is necessary because literacy programs involve more than reading and math.

"Generally, the longer a person is in an adult education program and the more success they have in the program, the more their

behavior changes," McCallister said.

The behavior change results from exposure to different ideas, philosophies and other adult education students.

"Most illiterates think they're the only one around who can't read or write," McCallister said. "Then when they find a group that is like them, the group becomes powerful."

"Plus the teachers are like mentors to the students. The situation provides a fertile ground for change in students."

Since teachers and their methods are vital to the success of adult education programs, the center also evaluates and catalogs classroom materials.

"Adult education teachers are generally part-time teachers and aren't trained as adult educators," McCallister said. "We want to help teachers and tell them the best way to approach something."

The center recently finished evaluating a computer assistance program at Houston Community College.

Learning how to attract students to literacy programs is another goal of the center. This is especially difficult because illiterate people are frequently hard to identify.

"They become actors," he said. "They learn

how to hide their illiteracy and spend a lot of time developing strategies to disguise it."

Then, once a potential student is attracted to literacy training, the class must be worth his time for him to continue with it. Since the students are adults, many have full schedules and can not afford to rearrange their lifestyles around a class.

Another obstacle is admitting illiteracy. "You have to recognize the emotional and psychological risk people take when they admit that they can't read or write," McCallister said.

While the center was established in the early 1970s, it moved to A&M from Austin only last semester. Located on the Riverside campus on Hwy. 21, it is staffed by McCallister, three graduate students and a part-time secretary and funded by the Texas Education Agency.

Working at the Adult Literacy Center is rewarding, but McCallister said he could give it up.

"Nothing would make me happier than to go out of business in the literacy racket," he said. "That would mean the quality of public education has gotten better and they wouldn't need me anymore."

Bryan resident decries zoning to City Council

By Chuck Squatriglia

CORRESPONDENT

Just when the Bryan City Council thought it was time to finish the meeting and go home to dinner, Jo Ann Zaeske decided to make a stand against the city's proposal to consider zoning the community.

At the conclusion of regular business at Monday night's meeting, Bryan Mayor Marvin Tate opened the floor to visitor comments, and Zaeske made a desperate plea against the city's plan to consider zoning the city.

"Zoning is not what makes our community a better place to live," Zaeske told the board. "An inherent pride in our property and our city make for a better Bryan."

Zaeske is a member of Bryan Citizens for Progress and Equity. The group believes zoning gives power to people who shouldn't have power and takes away rights from people who spend money to have those certain rights, she said.

"Zoning has been defined as government control of privately owned land," she said. "The committee feels government governs best which governs least."

Bryan Citizens for Progress and Equity's main goal is to have the zoning issue put to a referendum on the May 6 general election ballot, Zaeske said.

Because many of the council members are in the real estate business and may receive financial benefits from zoning, the zoning issue should be voted upon by the citizens, she said.

After the meeting, Tate said the council has taken no action on the zoning issue, only appointing a committee that in turn hired a contractor to look into the best method of city planning.

"No vote has been taken," he said. "We haven't voted to go to zoning."

"At the proper time, if we move forward with it, we will have public hearings and people will have the opportunity to come speak their peace."

In other action, the council:

- Formed a committee to determine where sidewalk construction is needed most and how it would be financed.

- Approved the adoption of an ordinance establishing the rate schedules for water and sewage services for the city.

- Unanimously approved formation of a centralized 911 dispatching system and will pass the recommendation to the 911 District Board.

Accusations against PUC spark Senate response

AUSTIN (AP) — Responding to charges that the Public Utility Commission has "ripped off" hundreds of millions of dollars from Texas customers, the Senate directed the agency Monday to review promptly the impact of a 1986 federal tax reduction on utility rates.

Sen. Carlos Truan, D-Corpus Christi, broadened his accusations to include the State Board of Insurance and other unnamed regulatory agencies, which he said "are not just a disgrace. They are a menace."

Truan also said he opposes utility commissioners Marta Greytok of Taylor Lake Village and William Cassin of Houston, who were appointed to the PUC last year by Gov. Bill Clements.

Both nominees must be confirmed by the Senate.

Truan's resolution, which was approved on voice vote, sought a prompt hearing "on matters of public interest."

Specifically, Truan said he was concerned over the delay in reviewing a 13-month-old petition to ad-

dress the 12 percent federal corporate tax reduction, which he maintains should be reflected in lower utility bills.

The PUC on a 3-0 vote Wednesday ordered the petition be placed on its docket, with a hearing expected after March 1.

Truan said until a Senate committee last Wednesday forced the PUC's hand, it had been "asleep at the wheel" in failing to save Texas consumers hundreds of millions of dollars.

He referred in a Senate speech to "regulatory rot" and "philosophical corruption" among state agencies that "have made a public mockery of the concept of impartial enforcement of the law and a decent concern for the public interest."

The Senate, in other action Monday, approved proposals that would:

- Authorize the issuance of special \$3 license plates for veterans of the attack on Pearl Harbor. Truan said there are 519 Pearl Harbor survivors in Texas.

- Designate April 9 of each year as "Former Prisoners of War Recognition Day" in Texas. April 9 marks the anniversary of the day in 1942 when the remaining U.S. forces on Bataan in the Philippines were captured.

- Authorize all county commissioner courts to pay an automobile allowance for district judges in their county.

- Authorize a commissioners court to meet in a county building other than the courthouse.

MSC Forum speaker explains American views on Nicaragua

By Fiona Soltes

STAFF WRITER

MSC Political Forum's "Nicaragua: Myth or Reality," became a forum in the true sense Monday night when comments from the featured speaker sparked a rebuttal from a native of Nicaragua.

Albert L. Michaels, professor of history at the State University of New York at Buffalo, addressed an audience of about 30 people concerning U.S. foreign policy toward Nicaragua.

Reading excerpts from a book he wrote to be published in April, Michaels categorized opposition to former President Reagan's Central American policy into three groups, saying these groups helped the Marxist-Leninist party strengthen its grip on Nicaragua.

During a question-and-answer session after the speech, Angel Navarro, a Nicaragua native, approached the podium and gave his views concerning his country and Michaels' speech.

Navarro said as an economist in Nicaragua, he was a part of the government and involved in the Nicaraguan revolution. He has lived in the United States since 1982.

"It is not a Sandinista revolution," he said, "but rather a country's revolution."

Michaels elaborated on the three groups he said opposed Reagan's Central American policy.

"The first comprised the 'true believers' of the Nicaragua Network,

the political tourists and their left-wing allies in the Democratic congressional delegation," Michaels said.

He discussed these 'political tourists' and how they were influenced by the amounts of money spent by Nicaraguans to impress them, while many in the country are left starving.

"(The true believers) either deliberately lied about Nicaragua in order to strengthen the appeal of international socialism or deceived themselves because they so badly wanted to see that which was not there," he said.

The second group involved sincere pacifists, or religious people who believed Reagan's promotion of violence was immoral. Also included are those who feared Nicaragua would become another Vietnam, he said.

"The third category," he said, "consisted of those Democratic politicians who clearly understood the nature of Sandinismo but voted against the Contras either to embarrass the President or win the approval of radical constituents."

Michaels cited many examples and statistics, discussing subjects such as American support for the Contras, which is about 60 percent. He also said 61 percent of respondents to a survey believed the Soviet Union is supporting a Communist revolution against the Nicaraguan government.

Questions following the speech from the audience concerned American foreign policy toward Guatemala, the future economic trend of

Nicaragua, President Bush's administrative policy to Latin America as a whole and Fidel Castro's attitude toward Mikhail Gorbachev.

Navarra, in his rebuttal, said he was not trying to defend the Sandinista regime.

"But I feel the audience is being presented an unfairly black-and-white and quite simplistic view of the whole situation," he said. "I think you've all been told who the good or bad guys are."

Navarra and Michaels also disagreed over Reagan's intentions toward overthrowing the Nicaraguan government.

"As for President Reagan saying he wanted to overthrow the government, I strongly believe that he wanted to do it," Michaels said. "But when or where did he actually say it? ... If he had said that, it would have totally destroyed his policy ... his policy would have been indefensible."

After the debate, Navarro said, "Knowing the millions of dollars spent on arms, it would be foolish to say Reagan has not admitted to wanting to overthrow the government."

Michaels is an expert on foreign policy, Latin America and mass media and foreign policy. He has done extensive research in Mexico, Bolivia, Peru and Costa Rica, but said he has never been to Nicaragua. He also said he wanted the crowd to know he is a registered Democrat.

Correction

In a story in last week's Battalion, the Ross Volunteers were identified as the honor guard for Mardi Gras King Rex. The RVs, who are the honor guard for the governor, actually lead the King Rex parade.

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