

Friday, June 30, 1989

B-CS merchants cash in big on Batman craze

By Richard Tijerina

STAFF WRITER

"Batman" completes its first-week run at a local theater today, but the sale of Batman-related items has been going on much longer for some Bryan-College Station retailers.

The movie opened at the Cineplex Odeon Post Oak Three last Friday. The manager, who wouldn't reveal his name, would not comment on how local ticket sales have been.

Nationally, "Batman," which stars Michael Keaton as Batman and Jack Nicholson as the Joker, broke a U.S. box-office record last weekend by taking in \$42.7 million, Warner Brothers Inc. studio reported Monday.

That broke the previous three-day record set by another summer sequel, "Ghostbusters II," which garnered weekend sales of \$29.4 million.

But along with ticket sales to the movie, "Batman" also has invested in a huge merchandising campaign. Warner Bros. has issued licenses to 130 firms to sell everything from T-shirts and toothbrushes with the "Batman" insignia to \$150 toy Batmobiles.

Bryan-College Station merchants dealing in Bat-paraphernalia have seen a dramatic rise in business since

news of the "Batman" movie came out last year.

Local book dealers, record stores and comic book shops have seen business increase dramatically since last week's movie release.

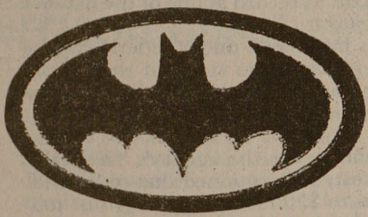
Guy Jones, owner of Bobbi's Books, a Bryan bookshop that concentrates in selling comic books, said collectors have been buying all Batman-related items at a record pace.

"My distributor told me Monday that all the Batman stuff he had — Batman trade paperbacks, T-shirts, etc., were things he thought he had enough of to last the whole summer. Somebody came in Monday and took it all."

Jones said the increase in sales of Batman-related items started well before the movie was released.

He credits the enormous renewal of interest in the Batman character — first created in 1939 by Detective Comics as a dark, mysterious avenging hero — to last year's decision by the comic book company to get rid of Robin or the Joker — Batman's longtime arch rival, Robin lost by a small number of votes, and soon after the comic-book character was

In a nationwide poll D.C. Comics conducted last year, readers called in to a special 900 number to vote whether the company should get rid of Robin or the Joker — Batman's longtime arch rival, Robin lost by a small number of votes, and soon after the comic-book character was



killed in an explosion.

"I think it started last year when there was so much media attention to the fact that they killed off Robin," Jones said.

"That got nationwide media attention. All of a sudden you had

people buying comics who usually didn't buy comics."

Jones said the hype surrounding "Batman" is not comparable to that which surrounded the release of "Superman." He said he thinks Batman has now surpassed Superman as D.C. Comics' most popular hero.

"We have noticed an upswing on Batman items," he said. "Part of it is that D.C. Comics has really pushed it. They didn't push Superman. Superman came out and it did well, but it's nothing compared to this. Superman was the biggie and Batman was more like a number two. Right now I would have to say it's no contest

though. Batman's bigger."

He said the character of Batman became more interesting to readers when D.C. Comics changed the hero from the "caped crusader" to more of a mysterious figure similar to the original Batman.

"It also became popular because the comic book had undergone a change — it had gotten a little bit more involved with the 'Dark Knight' type of thing. It was a completely different character than from the 1960s, where it was a campy character like the TV show.

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Affirmative action officer says Texas Plan falls short of goals

By Richard Tijerina

STAFF WRITER

In 1983, Texas implemented the Texas Plan — a five-year program to integrate minorities into the state's higher education system. But six years later, Texas A&M System Affirmative Action Officer George

Wharton says minorities still have a long way to go.

Wharton said Thursday the Texas Plan was a success, but after five years, all of its goals haven't been realized.

The Texas Plan was created in 1983 through an agreement with the Office of Civil Rights to correct racial inequalities in the Texas higher

education systems. Wharton said most universities in the nation now have their own versions of the program.

A&M's plan had four long-term goals: increase minority first-year enrollment, improve the minority retention rate, increase the number of minority faculty members and improve the representation of minorities on the A&M Board of Regents.

Wharton said that although some of the goals of the Texas Plan have been achieved, progress still needs to be made.

Wharton said A&M's retention rate for blacks is 86 percent and 87 percent for Hispanics. Those figures were close to the retention rates of white students, he said.

"Once we get (minority students) here, we can pretty much retain them," Wharton said. "We've got programs here, the Multicultural Services Center and some new things we're developing now that

tend to make them want to stay here at A&M."

The plan's goal to hire 38 black faculty members on the tenure track fell a bit short, Wharton said. Thirty-two have been hired.

"It's a tougher job to get them than it is for students," he said. "The numbers are smaller out there for faculty. The area where we're located has an impact on recruitment. Other institutions are willing to pay more than we are, and that's a disadvantage to come here."

He also said A&M is sorely lacking in the area of hiring blacks and Hispanics at the department-head level.

"To my mind, we're still not where we should be," Wharton said. "It's important because they're role models. When you're in school you want to emulate those you look up to. You need someone like that."

Wharton said the United States has done so much to overcome racism and has made great strides to eradicate it, but the most important thing the country has yet to do is "face it" and realize a problem still exists.

"We need to face our past," he said. "I don't want whites to feel they're being dumped on — like you have to feel guilty about racism or slavery. You have to recognize it and say, 'I'm going to take a stand.'"

Police charge 1 for poisoning of Treaty Oak

AUSTIN (AP) — Police arrested a 45-year-old man Thursday on charges of felony criminal mischief in the poisoning of the historic Treaty Oak during what authorities said may have been a ritual.

Paul Stedman Cullen of Elroy was arrested about mid-morning, police said.

Austin Police Sgt. John Jones said in the arrest warrant signed by a state district judge Thursday morning that the suspect poisoned the Treaty Oak "in a ritual" with the herbicide Velpar.

Earlier, the *Austin-American Statesman* reported an unidentified suspect was trying to cast a spell to protect a woman or because of a rivalry over a woman.

The warrant said Cullen acquired the herbicide through his employment at a local farm and ranch supply business.

Judge Jon Wisser said that before he signed a warrant for Cullen's arrest, investigators told him Cullen had checked out books from the public library on black magic and the occult.

The judge also said police told him that Cullen had a prison record for burglary, was known to carry a pistol and was believed to have mental problems. Elroy is located just south of Austin.

Wisser said he set bond for Cullen at \$20,000 "because he sounded like he was a fairly unstable, dangerous individual."

The arrest warrant prepared by Jones said the investigation indicated Cullen drove around west Austin looking for a live oak tree on which to apply the Velpar.

Wisser said Jones told him he had listened to a tape on which Cullen said he poisoned the tree.

Jones said last week that several callers identified the same suspect and that the man supposedly had told others about the attack.

If convicted, Cullen could face a maximum of 20 years in prison and a \$10,000 fine.

Chief warns of B-CS fireworks laws

By Holly Beeson

STAFF WRITER

As the sky lights up across the nation in celebration of Independence Day, people should be aware of the dangers of fireworks as well as laws regarding their use.

The use and possession of fireworks is outlawed in Bryan-College Station, as in many other cities, because of the high number of injuries they cause.

More than 10,500 firework-related injuries occur nationwide each year. The number of injuries has doubled since 1974.

College Station Fire Marshal Harry Davis said people have many



Graphic by Kathy Haveman

misconceptions about fireworks.

"People take fireworks for granted," he said. "They think they're not dangerous. Fireworks are inconsistent, undependable and their manufacturing is shoddy."

Sparklers, as harmless as they appear, can easily ignite clothing on contact, Davis said.

If fireworks are brought within the Bryan or College Station city limits, he said, people should be prepared to pay the price.

"The police chief has ordered his officers to be on the lookout for fireworks and to enforce the law strictly," he said. "If people are going to buy fireworks to use at Lake Somerville, they need to wait and buy them on the way out of town."

The possession or use of fireworks within the city limits is a misdemeanor offense. The fine is \$82 in College Station and \$114 in Bryan.

To avoid citations or firework-related injuries, Post Oak Mall will present a firework display Monday at dusk, and the Lion's Club will present games, speeches by local officials and a fireworks display at Olsen Field starting at 6 p.m. Tuesday.

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