

# Sheriff granted felons furloughs

GRANBURY (AP) — Hood County Sheriff Edwin Tomlinson granted unsupervised furloughs several times to at least three felons serving sentences for violent crimes, a newspaper reported Sunday.

The furloughs, granted for inmates convicted of crimes such as attempted murder, aggravated assault and burglary, ranged from a few

mates in Hood County did not commit additional crimes while free. But convicted burglar Billy Ray Ratliff failed to return to jail as scheduled in January 1989 — prompting a widespread manhunt and a stern rebuke to the sheriff from a state district judge.

"I seriously question the wisdom of any policy that allows a four-time loser to be released from jail on furloughs," former state District Judge Ralph Walton wrote Tomlinson Jan. 5, 1989, the same day Ratliff surrendered to a Hood County district attorney's investigator.

Six months earlier Walton had sentenced Ratliff to 25 years in prison for burglary. It was Ratliff's fourth felony conviction since 1984.

Walton told Tomlinson that any additional furlough of prisoners without court permission would be considered a "direct act of contempt of court."

"Until Judge Walton wrote me the letter, I thought when (the Texas prison system) kept prisoners up here under my supervision, that I had the right to do this," Tomlinson said last week. "Evidently, I don't have the right."

Unauthorized furloughs were discontinued after Ratliff's disappearance, Tomlinson said. "It's not good policy," he said.

Two of the three prisoners released apparently would not have qualified for furloughs once they reached state custody under guidelines used by officials in the Texas Department of Corrections.

Texas prison system furloughs must be approved by a prison warden and by a three-person committee that assesses community risk. State guidelines require that furloughed prisoners be within a year of parole eligibility.

One of the prisoners who benefited from Tomlinson's generosity questioned the sheriff's practice of furloughing inmates.

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— Ralph Walton, former district judge

hours to a weekend, the Fort Worth Star-Telegram reported.

The furloughed inmates were awaiting transfer from the Hood County Jail to the Texas prison system, the newspaper said.

Although county authorities said records of the furloughs were either unavailable or non-existent, two inmates told the newspaper they had been freed several times without supervision in 1988 and January 1989.

One inmate also said he spent several furloughs at the home of a female Hood County jail supervisor, the newspaper said.

Last week, Tomlinson said he had granted two furloughs to a third inmate in January but said those were authorized by a state judge.

Texas furlough policies were tightened last year after abuses were found.

Authorities say the furloughed in-

## All wet



Texas A&M pitching coach Jim Lawler turns off the sprinklers that came on during Friday's game against LSU. The Aggies won 4-2 and finished the weekend series 2-1. See baseball/Page 9

Photo by Phelan M. Ebenhack

# SWT tries to clean up party image

SAN MARCOS (AP) — Southwest Texas State University is using the most federal dollars for drug abuse research and prevention among schools in Texas, and officials say the college is trying to shed the party school image.

SWT is using some of the \$3.5 million in federal grants awarded since 1988 for anti-drug programs to promote such natural highs as skydiving, massage and bicycle racing.

SWT administrators say the college, which has a 20-year reputation for on-campus revelry, is addressing its image "like a recovering alcoholic."

"As long as you deny you've got a problem, you're going to keep that problem," said H.H. "Pancho" Howze, director of the SWT Alcohol and Drug Education Prevention and Training Center.

"I hope the 'party school' image is beginning to change," he told the Austin American-Statesman. "It's like being an alcoholic — it's hard to live down a reputation."

Drug Awareness Week at the university began Sunday, touting the distinction pointed out by U.S. Sen. Phil Gramm recently, that the school gets more money for drug programs than any other in the state.

# Killer bees could cost Rio Grande Valley millions

DALLAS (AP) — Africanized honeybees — so-called killer bees — could pose a threat to the \$800 million Rio Grande Valley crops dependent on bees for pollination, agricultural researchers say.

The Africanized bees, now about 150 miles south of Brownsville, are due to arrive some time this month.

More aggressive than their U.S. cousins, the honeybees are rarely deadly, but could cost be-

tween \$85 million and \$135 million annually in the first five to eight years, say Texas A&M University researchers.

As many as 12 deaths in Mexico have been attributed to the Africanized bee in the past three years, but Texas health officials don't foresee a threat here.

"This is not a panic situation," said Dr. Anita Collins, research leader at the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Honey Bee Research Lab at

Weslaco.

"But at the same time, we want to inform people that at some time, we are going to have Africanized honeybees, a small but real threat to people and livestock," she said.

Collins is leading research along the border, where crews have set up a line of about 300 traps from Brownsville to just west of Mission to detect the arrival of Africanized bees.

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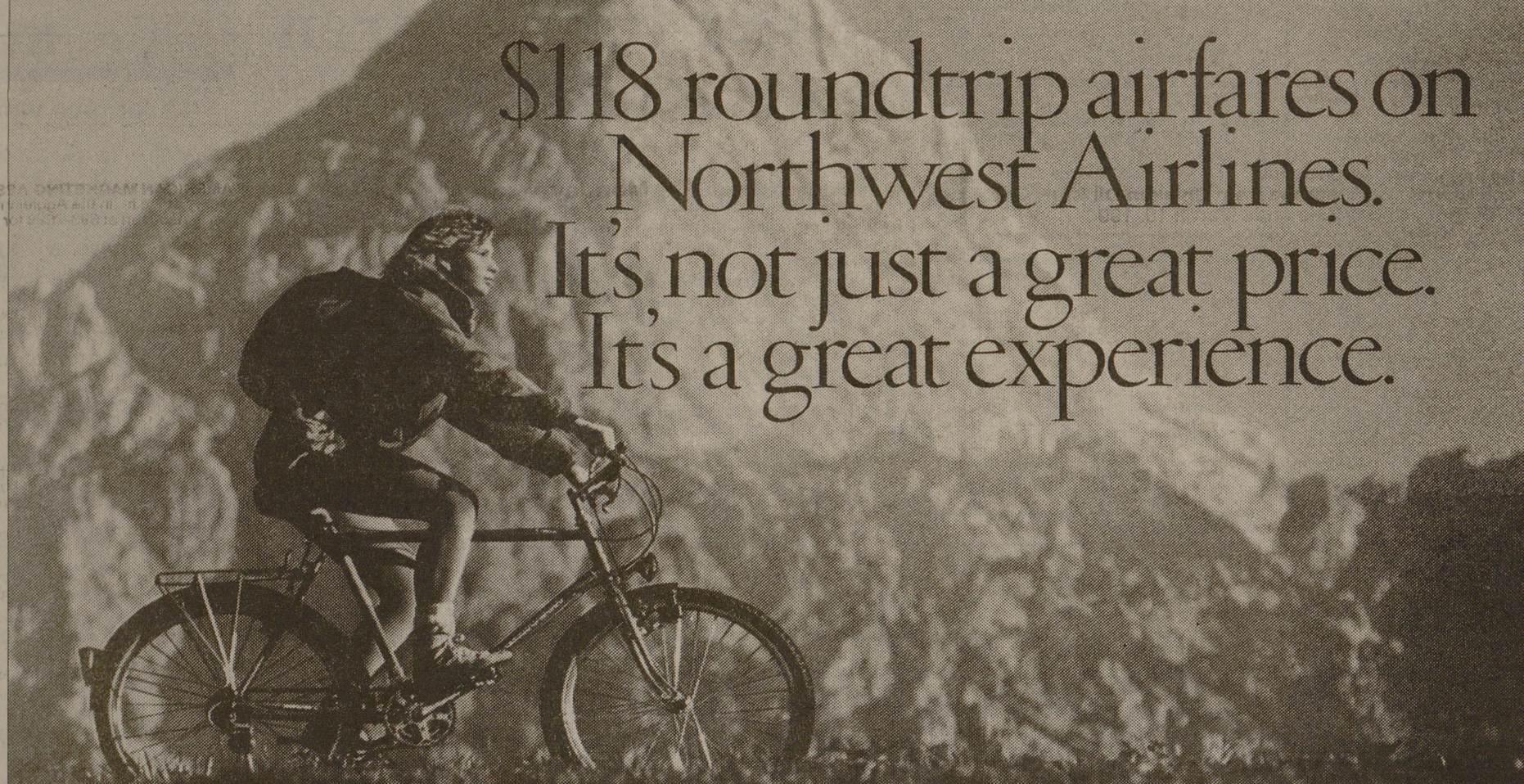
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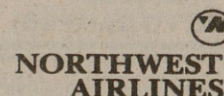
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