



MARY MACMANUS/The Battalion

Dr. John Cairney (left), assistant professor at Texas A&M's department of forest science, A&M staff member Maria Magallanes-Cedeno and Dr. Ronald J. Newton, A&M physiologist, examine some plantlets.

STRONGER TREES

A&M researchers identify drought stress defense genes

By MARGARET CLAUGHTON

The Battalion

Approximately 250,000 Texans transport, sell or directly use wood products in their businesses. In fact, timber is one of Texas' top three cash crops.

Southern pines comprise almost 100 percent of the Texas timber crop. Each year, millions of dollars are lost when trees are damaged or killed.

A group of Texas A&M professors involved in a pine biotechnology program are working to develop southern pine trees more resistant to drought stress. About 25 percent of all pine seedlings planted in Texas die annually. Half of those seedlings die from drought alone.

The three-year-old program has generated remarkable results. Scientists have isolated a number of genes "switched on" as part of the defense and repair response in trees.

Dr. John Cairney, molecular biologist in the A&M department of forest science, explains that certain genes are "switched on" when a plant is under stress to help the plant tolerate whatever stress is experienced.

The genes that encode stress related proteins are identified, isolated and can eventually be transferred to genetically alter less tolerant trees.

"Results in our lab show it is possible to transfer genes of choice and generate a genetically altered tree with enhanced tolerance," Cairney said.

Once the preferred genes are isolated, they can be

introduced into a cell with a gene gun, thus genetically altering that particular cell. The cell then must be grown into a tree plantlet.

The program has developed a quick efficient way of growing trees to speed up the research process. Normally, cross-pollination is used to genetically alter trees. In order to successfully complete the cross-pollination process, however, trees must reach sexual maturity, which usually occurs in seven to 14 years. Scientists in the pine biotechnology program have figured out a way to grow a pine plantlet in the lab. This process takes about eight months.

The important genes have been identified and plantlets can be grown in the lab. Thus, the program is ready to combine the two achievements.

"We're at a stage right now where all the technology is developed," said Dr. Ronald Newton, physiologist in the A&M department of forest science. "Now it's a question of tying it all together."

Genes involved in drought tolerance have been found to play a role in fungal and insect resistance as well.

Fusiform rust disease and damage from the southern pine beetle are the second and third most common causes of pine tree deaths. Pine beetle damage alone cost \$50 million in 1985.

"Many stresses 'switch on' similar genes," Cairney said. "We can apply the knowledge from the drought study to other stresses such as fungus or beetles."

The pine biotechnology program was initiated by Temple Inland Company and Texas A&M. It has received three grants from USDA.

Reviews

Play

A mystery or a comedy?

StageCenter's 'Black Abbot' shows off local talent with silly script

By JACQUELINE AYOTTE

The Battalion

"Mystery of the Black Abbot"

By Tim Kelly

Starring Steve Mize, Scott Kelly, Connie Ricks and Stephen C.E.S. Wilson

Directed by Amy Elizabeth Smith

Playing at Bryan's StageCenter Community Theatre, 823-4297

Like a game of "Clue," "The Mystery of the Black Abbot" offered riddling characters, wondrous mystery and the need to ask yourself the inevitable question, "Did the butler do it?"

The only drawback to the mysteriousness was trying to figure out whether this play was a comedy or a mystery.

When the audience reacted to the bloodiest scenes of the play with a storm of laughter rather than a crash of fearful screams, I wondered if the play intended to be humorous.

If this was purposely meant to happen, I can sense the actors were picked with care. Otherwise, it would be quite a shame to see such talent wasted on a blood curdling, corny script.

The play is set in the Chelford manor, home of the very curious and very preoccupied Englishman, Harry Alford (Steve Mize). The manor is haunted by the ghost of a murdered abbot and the ghost stories interest Harry so much, he refuses to leave

his huge mansion. Obsessed with finding ancient treasure buried on the estate, Harry constantly studies maps and books to find out more.

He wants this treasure, but could care less about finding gold. Life water, a miracle medicine from the Aztec is what Harry wants - not his secretary Mary's (Aly Harding) flirtations or his fiancée Leslie's (Mauria Finley) attention. He's even too naive to realize that all his half brother Richard (Stephen C.E.S. Wilson) wants is to get his hands on the ancient treasure.

One night the abbot strikes and kills Harry, leaving a mystery to be solved and a number of new characters to lead the audience into the going on of Chelford Manor. And yes, this includes the going on of the "late" Harry.

The setting for the entire play took place in a plain English living room. I sensed the look of old money right away, with the typical grandfather clock, wooden furniture, and printed carpet. The most interesting feature of the set was a secret doorway the audience discover the same moment the characters do.

The actual playing out of Harry's death was both embarrassing and funny. The blood looked as fake as paint and the struggle was worse than a 70's western movie. The audience laughed aloud rather than screamed once the maid saw the murder and let out a deafening scream.

Luckily, the laughter turned to curiosity

as the mystery of each scene prevailed. Each character, with his/her own distinct English personality, unraveled the clues scene by scene.

The "late" Harry was played out with such wonderfully peculiar enthusiasm, Mize began to fool the audience as well as the other characters.

Richard's character started out weak, but suddenly transformed into a believable greedy English crook.

Connie Ricks plays the part of Ms. Lynwood, the estate's appraiser. Her seemingly insignificant role does not hide her impeccable talent for playing the curious yet quiet, beautiful businesswoman.

The biggest roar of laughter went for Kelly's performance of the charmingly dry, bearded English detective, Monkey Puttler. His limp adds to his roughness, his accent is utter perfection, and even his name will make you chuckle. This man can really act.

Haight played Leslie's brother Arthur with such obvious energy, everything he said and did forced out a laugh.

Despite the confusion between corn and true grit, the actors made up for it in their performance.

"The Mystery of the Black Abbot" could have been done more professionally, but with the amount of effort coming from local volunteering actors, the talent displayed was a success in itself.



NICOLE ROHRMAN/The Battalion

Richard Alford (Stephen C.E.S. Wilson, left), half brother of Harry Alford (Steve Mize) wants the treasure of Chelford Manor and will stop at nothing to get it.

Restaurants

Aggieland's piece of Chinese cuisine

Confucius offers wide range of delicacies

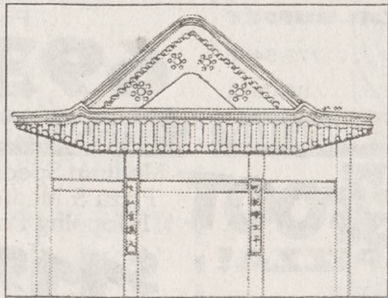
By JOHN BAYLESS

The Battalion

Confucius Chinese Cuisine Chinese Food

The owner of Confucius Chinese Cuisine and his family emigrated from Taiwan to the U.S., and brought with them their knowledge of Chinese foods. Since Taiwan is inhabited by people from many different parts of China, a wide range of cooking is practiced there. And food from many regions of China is also served at Confucius.

Inside, the restaurant is relatively spacious, with room around



ANGEL KAN/The Battalion

the tables. There are tables sized to fit any group, from two to ten people. The lights are dim, and the walls are decorated with reproductions of art by Chinese masters.

I tried several dishes at Confu-

cius, and enjoyed them all. The sub gum fried rice (a mixture of pork, shrimp, and chicken fried rice) was very tasty, and there were generous quantities of meat in it.

The second plate I sampled was Kung Po beef. Kung Po beef is labeled "hot and spicy" on the menu, and they're serious. It put the hottest Mexican food I've ever had to shame. Whoooo!

Another dish I tasted was chicken with cashew nuts. It was also excellent, if a little heavy on the cashews and light on chicken.

Soup comes with most meals at the restaurant. I had the opportunity to try two types, the egg-drop

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Cavitt Street Grill and Beer Garden offers off-beat, at ease atmosphere

No nicknames, just a good ole' hamburger

By MARGARET CLAUGHTON

The Battalion

Cavitt Street Grill and Beer Garden Burgers & fries

All right, burger lovers-you need to check out the Cavitt Street Grill and Beer Garden. This is not your average cheesy burger joint.

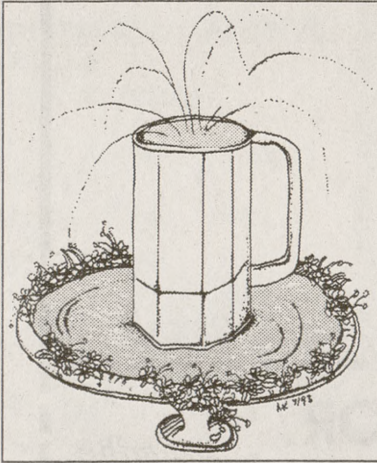
No nicknames like moo-burger deluxe or Mcburger juniors. If you want a hamburger, you ask for a hamburger. Cheeseburger? Same thing. This is an old fashioned no nonsense beef bar and grill. The patties aren't the skimpy beef pancakes served in the fast food world.

These are honest chunks of beef on a nice thick bun.

The french fries are crunchy and crinkled. These accordion-like chunks of potato are crisp, but not greasy. Don't ask for french fries though; at Cavitt Street they are potatoes by no other name.

The atmosphere of Cavitt Street is quite original. Artwork ranges anywhere from a glossy Elvis picture showing the old Elvis, the young Elvis, and the one in between, to an unknown artist's interpretations of Joe Montana, James Dean, and Randy Travis. The prize, however, must be the picture of JFK surrounded

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