

Texas A&M Dance Team showcases talent, earns national recognition

By Karen Broyles

THE BATTALION

The Texas A&M Dance Team has been building an award-winning program over the past two years, and they hope to use the team as a recruiting tool for the University.

The team placed seventh at the National Cheerleading Association's Collegiate-Level Dance Contest in January. In 1993, the team took fifth place at the same competition. These two awards are the first for the dance team in the four years the team has existed.

Keri Zelsman, president of the team and a junior international marketing major, said she hopes word of the team's success will encourage women who want to be on a college dance team to come to Texas A&M.

"We had never entered a competition before 1993," said Zelsman. "We just wanted to see what we could do."

Zelsman said the fifth place award at the 1993 competition was unexpected.

"It's hard for a new team to come out and place in the top five their first year," Zelsman said. "This year was tougher because some of the past national champions came back, so there was stiffer competition."

The dance team was started by two stu-

dents who saw there was nothing to do for women at A&M with an interest in dance. One of the founders, Marilu Amador, now coaches the team.

The all-woman team consists of 25 members, which is large for a college dance team, Zelsman said.

"We have a talented, hardworking team this year," she said. "The members all have backgrounds in everything from dance or cheerleading to competitive roller skating."

The team dances at half-time and time-outs of the men's and women's basketball games. They have also performed at the Mr. Aggie and Miss TAMU pageants. The team plans to take part in the MSC Variety Show this year as well.

The main goal of the team is to gain recognition and respect, Zelsman said.

"It seems like we get lost in the shuffle sometimes because of the number of organizations on campus," she said.

Vice President Lauren Fore said getting money for their expenses is one of the struggles of the team.

The team gets their funds from membership dues and student activity money. They also hold fundraisers to cover costs such as costumes, which can run about \$100 for each member. The members usually cover most of the costs on their own.

"The amount of money we have puts

limits on what we can do with costumes and choreography," Fore said.

Team members made their own costumes for this year's competition to save money, she said.

Fore said the best part of the being a member of the team is working through the challenges the team faces.

"Hopefully, we will gain respect and recognition from Texas A&M through our awards," Fore said.

Zelsman said she would like the team to have more funding so that they could attend more competitions. A scholarship program for the dance team is another one of Zelsman's goals for the future of the team.

Another goal is to perform at the Cotton Bowl. Fore said she talked to Head Coach R.C. Slocum about the idea, but no definite plans were made.

"The beginning of January is a busy time for us with competition," Fore said.

"If Texas A&M wanted us to perform at football games, we would, but only if they asked."

Zelsman said the team members are not trying to be cheerleaders or to take over the yell leaders' positions.

"We just want to add to the tradition at Texas A&M," Zelsman said.

Students interested in trying out for the team must have a minimum GPR of 2.0,



William Harrison/The Battalion

The Texas A&M Dance Team celebrates the women's basketball win over Hous-

ton, 92-62. The dance team performs at half-time, supporting the Aggies.

be a full-time student and have a background in dance or dance-related activities. The tryout routine is taught at a four-

day clinic with an audition following. Tryouts for next years dance team will be held in April.

Comptroller orders 'bed-check' to alleviate crowding

County jail overcrowding forces audit of prison space, possible renovation, restructuring of system

The Associated Press

AUSTIN — Comptroller John Sharp said Thursday that his auditors will conduct a bed-by-bed count to determine how many empty state prison beds might be put to use without violating court orders and the constitution.

Finding that number should take five to six weeks, Sharp said.

"We're simply trying to answer the questions that folks have," Sharp said.

"How many (empty beds) are out there? What would it take to use them?"

Sharp acknowledged that "there is a wide differ-

ence of opinion" on whether any of the empty prison beds could be used to help alleviate severe overcrowding in county jails.

More than 20,000 state inmates are being held in the jails awaiting transfer to state prisons.

Last week, the Houston Chronicle reported that Sharp's office had determined that as many as 6,000 state prison beds are empty.

Prison system officials said that's true.

However, they also said that the beds can't be filled because of a federal court settlement in which the state agreed not to use them.

In the negotiated settlement to a 20-year inmate rights lawsuit, the state agreed to limit the population of some prison units and to increase the popu-

lation of others only if showers, dining halls, medical and other support facilities were added.

Sharp said Thursday that it appears unlikely many of the beds could be put to immediate use.

He and his staff said some prisons may require renovation, construction of more facilities and additional expenses before using any empty beds.

"No one is saying, I think, that you can go in and do something immediately without this study," Sharp said.

"There is a wide difference of opinion.

"You're not going to settle that difference of opinion until you go in bed-by-bed, and count as the governor has instructed us to do," he said.

A lawyer for counties that have sued the state

over being forced to hold its prisoners said such accounting is long overdue.

"This should have been done a long time ago," said attorney Margo Frasier, a former county superintendent.

"Go out there bed by bed by bed, unit by unit . . . and figure out once and for all whether you can use these beds, how many of these beds you can use, how much it's going to cost and get with it," she said.

Frasier said that perhaps 4,000 of the beds could be used.

But even 1,000 extra beds would help ease county jail crowding, she said.

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1994 Aggieland

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