

A&M students creating economic boom for area merchants

Disposable income rising for collegians, store owners seeing increase in sales

By Amy Lee
THE BATTALION

Bryan-College Station merchants are depending on Texas A&M students for their happy holidays.

Local businessmen said the school's students have a major impact on local businesses in the area and help increase sales during the holiday season.

Dr. Thomas Saving, director of the private enterprise center at Texas A&M, said in 1990, the average student spent around \$3,100 per year on non-housing expenditures.

Saving estimated that, with inflation, students spend an average of \$3,400 in the community.

Gary Spearow, general manager of the MSC Bookstore, said that the store has an increase in business before the holidays.

"We see an impact right before (book) buy back," he said. "I think that sometimes the students will have cash in hand, and instead of buying more books they'll buy other items."

Cavender's Boot City has a holiday rush of students, but manager Scott Hamill said the store does not usually notice a second rush on the store right before the holidays.

"We notice about 150 to 200 percent increase around the holidays," Hamill said. "The first half of the month is students and the second half of the month are late Christmas shoppers. We actually don't notice a drop off when stu-

dents go home at Christmas time but we don't get the big second rush. Business just stays steady."

Carolyn Patterson, manager of Things Remembered at Post Oak Mall, said that the store sees an increase in business around the holidays, but also for other special occasions.

"We are an engraving store so we get a lot of students in buying gifts all through the year," she said. "We get fraternities and sororities in around big sis, lil' brother time. We do a lot of things for bonfire buddies, and now it's close to graduation. Our major business is students."

Patterson said that his store has steady business throughout the holidays.

"There still are so many students that stay here during the holidays that we don't notice a tremendous drop off," she said. "The ones that are still here still buy."

Target's manager, James Haverland, said that he notices an impact toward the end of the semester.

"I see a huge increase when finals are done," he said. "That's when they have time to think about it and taking care of their holiday shopping. I think students like to go home ready, so they shop here instead of at home."

Spearow said the MSC Bookstore usually has special sales to draw students in to buy before they go home for the holidays.

"We do a focus sale on seasonal items



Lynda Ruffino, a graduate student in marketing, does some Christmas shopping at the Post Oak Mall.

and we put special items on sale from each department," Spearow said. "It's a case where people might be with their discretionary income and they might buy their gifts before they go home."

Saving said he does not think that students buy or spend more during the

holidays.

"I think that students don't spend more money here around Christmas time," Saving said. "I think they may spend that money at home. You look at the money students are spending and there is no question that they notice a

drop off in student spending."

"You have to understand, merchants are here because the students are here," he said. "If the students weren't here it would be a different town. Not that it would be just different."

Trial

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University would pay for it.

Hitt said he did not think it was against the law to buy alcohol with local funds as long as it was used for legitimate purposes.

"I didn't feel it was illegal or immoral," Hitt said. "I was told it was common practice through the University and I would not be able to change it."

Hitt's wife, Frankie Hitt, who had originally created an account at J.J.'s Package Stores for the department, said she had many parties at her home for the management department where alcohol was served.

Mrs. Hitt said she had purchased alcohol from J.J.'s Package Stores several times for the department because J.J. Ruffino, owner of the liquor store, told her many A&M departments had accounts.

"J.J. asked me if I would like to set up an account for the department, so I did," Hitt said. "I told him I couldn't purchase alcohol for A&M but he told me it was no problem because he would handle it."

Dr. A. Benton Cocanougher, dean of the College of Business Administration and former interim senior vice president and provost, testified Wednesday that he did not understand why Hellriegel was charged.

"It's beyond my ability to understand," he said.

Bowen said the indictments and charges against the A&M employees were a concern to him because they were having an impact on valuable members of his staff.

"We felt it was appropriate for us to make a statement," Bowen said. "This institutional policy was the problem, it was not the administration."

Bowen, several department heads and administrators wrote a letter in support of the employees who were indicted or charged. The letter also stated that the misrepresentation of alcohol purchases were common practice at the University for many years.

Bowen said he would not be surprised if about 80 of A&M's departments were at one time involved with Ruffino Catering.

He said he did not think it was possible for all of these departments to know how to handle the Ruffino Catering account without authorization.

"The leadership of this University was responsible for this practice," Bowen said, "but we do not know when this started."

Bowen said he had not tried to find the person ultimately responsible for the practice because he did not think it was an important enough issue to deal with at the time.

Hellriegel has worked for Texas A&M since 1975. He has served as interim dean of the College of Business and served as chair of the search committee that selected Bowen as A&M president.

Two Texas A&M administrators, A&M Athletic Director Wally Groff and Associate Athletic Director Penny King, each were placed on three months probation and ordered to pay a \$250 fine after pleading no contest in October to the same charge.

Both were given deferred adjudication, a form of probation that means no conviction will appear on their record if the three-month term is successfully completed.

All of the charges and indictments were the result of an ongoing investigation by the Texas Rangers and the FBI into questionable business practices at A&M.

Employees

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Gaston to determine their futures at the University," Rife said. "Depending upon what is discussed during the meeting, we may be filing a

lawsuit against the University."

Margaret Freeman, a former Mom president who met with administrators to oppose the resignments, said she has always been concerned about why the men were given an explanation.

"All we asked for was a reason," Freeman said. "I never thought they would be reinstated because if they would have already happened."

Housing

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reservations or did not show up to move in, Ron Sasse, director of student affairs, said.

The housing office conducted an investigation to find what caused the extensive vacancies, but was unable to determine any unusual reasons.

Off-campus housing also has vacancies, and Smith said off campus residences, like apartments and duplexes, may be affected by allowing part-time

students to live on campus.

Smith said the group who will most be affected by the housing search will be students who are wanting to sublease their homes.

She said the OSPL has about 100 cards on file for subleases.

"Students who want to sublease their apartments may have a hard time finding someone to lease the place," she said.

Smith said the OSPL is directing students who come to their office sublease, but it is difficult to place where students will want to live.

"So much of this is based on the individual students' preferences," she said.

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The Battalion (USPS 045-360) is published daily, Monday through Friday during the fall and spring semesters and Monday through Thursday during the summer sessions (except University holiday exam periods), at Texas A&M University. Second class postage paid at College Station, TX 77843.
POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Battalion, 230 Reed McDonald Building, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX 77843.
News: The Battalion news department is managed by students at Texas A&M University at the Division of Student Publication, a unit of the Department of Journalism. Editorial offices are 013 Reed McDonald Building. E-mail: BATT@TAMVM1.TAMU.EDU. Newsroom phone number is 845-3313. Fax: 845-2647.
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