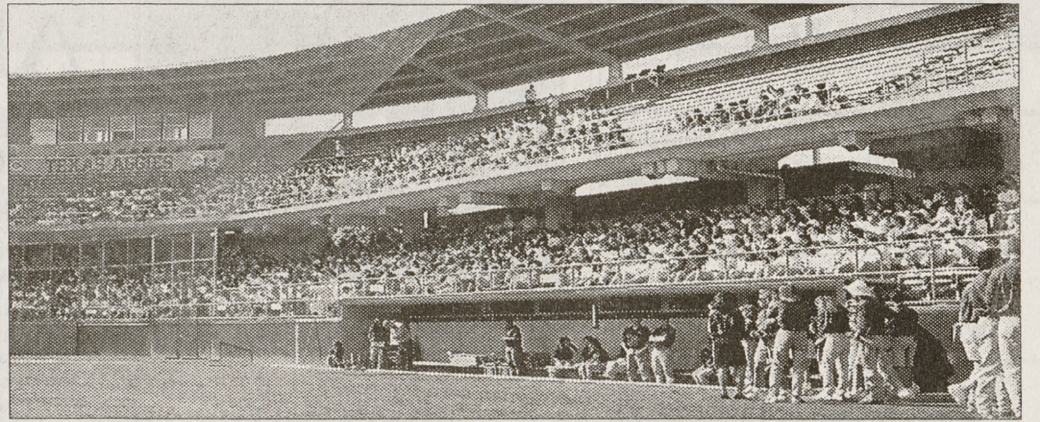


THE BIG EVENT

More than 4,800 A&M students helped out in the Bryan-College Station community Saturday in the 13th annual Big Event.



Big Event participants gather at Olsen Field for a pep rally before going to work.

By Gretchen Perrenot
THE BATTALION

The Bryan-College Station community had more than 4,800 pairs of helping hands Saturday as A&M students gave back to the community in the 13th annual Big Event.

Two hundred organizations did chores and odd jobs for those who could not do the work themselves, or who just needed a helping hand.

Help was available to anyone who requested it during the Big Event. Recipients had students wash windows, mow lawns, fix porch railings, plant flowers and just about anything else that needed to be done.

Scott Satterwhite, director for Big Event, said students worked at more than 400 different sites throughout the day.

"Everything went really smoothly and there wasn't a single problem all day," Satterwhite said. "The weather was also perfect."

The clear, sunny weather on Saturday allowed participants to do much outdoor work, such as yardwork and roofing.

Nora Rabe of College Station said the work done on her roof was very much appreciated.

"We've been trying to replace the roof on our house that was damaged during a storm," Rabe said. "The students came in and tore off the old shingles and carried the new ones up to the roof."

Rabe said she was told Tuesday that a group was not going to be able to come because the Big Event did not have any students familiar with roofing, but to her delight, they found a group.

"My husband and I were outside and a truck pulled up, and then another, and then another," she said. "We were so thrilled because we didn't expect them to be there."

Rabe said she has never used Big Event before, but did so this year because they could not have done all the work on the roof by themselves.

The 11 students who worked on the Rabes' roof had all worked on Bonfire. Rabe said she had wanted the students who helped her to be Bonfire workers because of her past experience with them.

"We had helped restack after Bonfire fell, and we really liked the people we worked with," she said. "If we could get that caliber of guys again we wanted to have them help."

"We specifically asked for guys from Bonfire because they know how to take orders and give orders."

Cheba Rodriguez of Bryan also enjoyed her Big Event experience and said the event is a chance for the community to work together.

"I think it is important for everyone to pull together and be united," Rodriguez said.

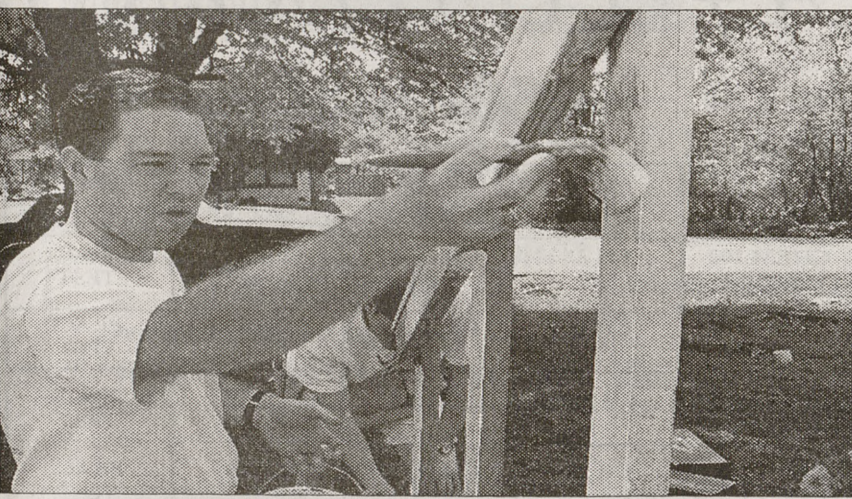
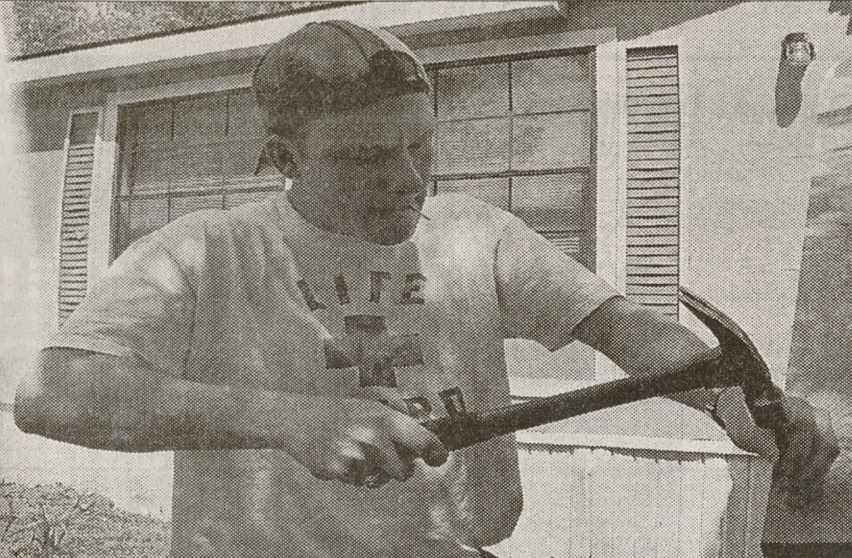
This was the first year for Rodriguez to receive help from Big Event and she learned about the event from her daughter, who works at A&M. Her daughter suggested she have someone put a porch on her trailer, because all she had were some steps leading to the door.

Unfortunately, Big Event did not have the supplies to build a porch for Rodriguez this year. The Crocker Hall residents and their friends who helped Rodriguez did some lawn work instead.

"I'm sure sorry I missed out on them building a porch," she said. "But they did a beautiful job on the yard."



Photos by Nick Rodnicki/THE BATTALION



From top: (top) Kyle King, a senior construction science major, puts the last nail in a porch he built with other National Association of Homebuilders members; (middle) David Gunn, a senior construction science major, puts a coat of paint on the porch; and (above) Jeremy Marshall, a freshman business administration major, helps Mrs. Mainer install a window screen after workers cleaned her windows.

"My neighbor almost called the police on them because I wasn't home when they were there and she thought they were trying to hit my house."

John Franz, a resident of Crocker Hall who worked on Rodriguez's house, said his group made her house look really nice and enjoyed the work they did.

Crocker Hall had two assignments, the other one was at an abandoned church off Highway 21.

"We cleaned out the back room," Franz said. "There were some old refrigerators, box springs, rusted cans, things that had accumulated over the years."

Franz said his group met a lady and her children while working at the church and the group is going back on Wednesday to do some more work and bring the children Easter baskets.

Big Event was not only about doing work for people, it was about spending time with the people in the community. Some of the recipients of the Big Event were elderly people who lived alone and could not do the work themselves.

Four members from Eta Kappa Nu, Texas A&M's Electrical Engineering Honor Society, helped Cecelia Heinrich of Bryan put together her lawn mower.

"They put together a push mower for me because I can't pull the string on the other mower and they mowed the lawn," Heinrich said. "It's been hard to find anyone to mow the lawn lately."

The group also moved a dog house for Heinrich that she could not move herself. "We had a smaller mobile home before and when we got the double-wide trailer the dog house was right up against the house," she said. "We couldn't budge it ourselves."

The Texas A&M Management Society spent the day with Ira Mae Abbs of Bryan, visiting with her and cleaning up her yard. Like Crocker Hall, the Management Society was also supposed to build a porch but did not have the materials.

Shelly Page, Big Event coordinator for the Management Society, said the group wished they could have built the porch.

Page said about 15 people from her group worked at Abbs' house for five hours.

"We did some yard work, hung some drapes and put together a party for her," Page said. "The grass was two-and-a-half to three feet high. We had to chop it down

first before we could mow it.

Page said there was a tremendous amount of work to be done in the yard. They had 20 bags of trash and grass when they were finished.

"I was afraid they would see the yard and not want to do it, but everyone jumped right in and we got it all done," she said.

Page said this is the first time she has participated in the Big Event.

"What we did for her was great," she said. "Just for her to have us there to visit with her and to do the things she wanted done was great."

"As a group, it was wonderful to get everyone together and work as a team. It wasn't about being rewarded or getting our name out, but doing something for someone else."



Above: Shannon Jistel, a sophomore chemical engineering major, dumps soil into a compost pile at Sul Ross Elementary School in Bryan.

Below: Members of Alpha Phi Omega turn over composting piles at the school.



A day working in the Big Event ...

8:30 a.m. The alarm jolts me out of sleep. I rue the fact that I got to sleep a mere six hours. I slip on some clothes, brush my teeth and head downstairs to meet the others.



WES SWIFT
STAFF WRITER

8:38 a.m. I hit the benches outside the dorm. The weather is perfect. I'm the first one down, so I head across the street to buy a fruit punch slurpee.

9:03 a.m. Everyone finally arrives, semi-alert and ready to go. There are about 20 of us. We sit at the benches and go over the jobs we're doing and the places we're going. Our projects will include trimming trees, washing windows and cutting grass.

9:24 a.m. We finally head out to the first site. The 20 of us pile into two trucks and two cars and hit the road. Heading south on Well-born Road, we pass Olsen Field, which is packed. We wonder if there is a baseball tournament - later, we find out that it was the pre-Big Event rally at Olsen Field, which we missed. Oops.

9:33 a.m. Our caravan arrives at the first house. It's an old white house with a chain link fence surrounding a yard with "Beware of Dog" signs. The yard has several large trees that need trimming.

Next to the front yard is another plot of land conquered by an overgrowth of weeds and a chicken coop in the back corner. The

chickens are scattered between the front yard and the neighboring jungle.

Because of the "Beware of Dog" signs, we are hesitant to go past the fence, even though we can't see a trace of a dog.

A neighbor comes over and volunteers to go to the door. He knocks a few times, and an elderly man answers.

We tell the homeowner that we are here to do some lawn work. He says that he wouldn't mind having some of the trees trimmed and the lot next door mowed. We gladly agree.

Seeing that there's not enough work for 20 people, we leave four to do the job while the rest of us head to the next site.

9:46 a.m. We arrive at the second site, a red house with two trucks in the driveway. The house belongs to a middle-aged man, his father and their pets. They're expecting us.

The weather is still nice and the trees in the yard offer some shade. We begin washing the house's 15 windows, both inside and out.

10:47 a.m. We finish the work and clean up. We are about to leave when the owners of the house offer us sodas and pralines for our effort. We agree to the snacks and take a little break from working.

10:50 a.m. Our friends from the first site arrive. They say the work went off without a hitch. We get together and head out to the final work site.

10:54 a.m. We decide to grab something to eat before going to the final house. While we eat, a group heads back to campus to pick up some supplies we'll need.

11:34 a.m. Back to work. We pile into the trucks, complaining that we all ate too much,

and head to the final house.

11:40 a.m. We arrive at the house. It's a black-and-white duplex owned by a woman, her daughter and mother. Our friends who had gone for the supplies are already here.

There are several things to do.

Both the back and front yards need to be mowed and edged, trees need to be trimmed and some holes in the backyard need to be filled. We're also going to build a concrete path spanning from the duplex's front doors around the to the driveway.

After an hour, the women in the house bring us sodas. They're a nice family and we enjoy their company.

As each piece of work is finished, we begin to clean up.

The grass that has been mowed and edged is swept up. We dispose of the dirt that we dug up while installing the concrete paths.

Eventually, everything is finished and we all take a break in the shade. While we are resting, a couple of people notice a dismantled swing. In a few minutes, we put the swing back together. The women thank us, saying that they didn't expect the swing to be fixed.

1:21 p.m. We thank the ladies for the refreshments. Our work is finished and we prepare to leave.

We give the house a final look-over to make sure we haven't left anything. Finding nothing, we say goodbye, pile back into the cars and head back home.

1:30 p.m. We arrive home sweaty and tired. Even though we're all exhausted, we agree that the experience was fun and worthwhile.