



WHOOPTOCK

The 1995 unity festival brought over 1,000 students together Saturday afternoon to celebrate the diverse groups and cultures that make up the Texas A&M community.



By Gretchen Perrenot
THE BATTALION

Many hearts, hands and minds came together for one purpose Saturday at Whoopstock Unity Fest '95.

Over 1,000 people gathered on Simpson Drill Field to celebrate unity while learning about the diverse cultures represented by the A&M student body. This year had the largest turnout for Whoopstock yet.

The theme for the third annual festival was "Unity: Today Our Campus, Tomorrow Our World." The programs lasted from noon to 6 p.m. and offered a variety of musical acts, dance performances, sports and foods.

Whoopstock Unity Fest was originally celebrated in 1992 in response to a Ku Klux Klan demonstration that was held in College Station. The event was organized to draw attention away from the KKK rally and discourage protesters from contributing to the publicity of the KKK.

Veselin Skendzic, a former A&M student, said holding Whoopstock in response to the KKK was a good idea.

"No other measure would have worked," he said. Elizabeth and Veselin Skendzic, both class of 1994, are examples of unity among A&M cultures on campus. Elizabeth is originally from Mexico and Veselin is originally from Croatia.

The Skendzics met each other while studying at A&M and later married. They now live in Wisconsin and attended Whoopstock Unity Fest as a part of revisiting A&M.

Abby Cook, chair of the Whoopstock Council, has been on the Whoopstock staff all three years and said Whoopstock was successful overall and without any disappointments.

This is the first year for Whoopstock to be an official student organization, she said.

"We really don't have any outdoor celebrations or 'spring flings' here," Cook said. "People kept wanting another Whoopstock every year and this fills that void."

Cook said the main purpose of Whoopstock is to promote unity on campus.

"Our immediate goal is to promote unity among the different groups and organizations on campus," she said. "We have a lot of people who have a 'my group, your group' attitude. This may give them the chance to see groups they haven't seen before."

"We want to break the stereotypes people have of different organizations. Taking into account what makes us different and appreciating it is important."

Cook said the 30 people on the committee contributed greatly to the success and no last-minute problems came up.

"We're all really excited. It helps that we're all here to have fun and that there is no stress," Cook said. "We had the number of people show up that we had hoped for."

Some of the other major attractions during the fest

were the bands and dance performances.

The International Music Club performed "Arabian Nights." The group encouraged the audience to dance.

About 35 people, many of whom had never heard Arabic music before, stood up and danced in front of the stage in belly dancer style.

Sleiman Hamaoui, president of the International Music Club, said this is the group's second year to perform at Whoopstock.

"The first time we came to show support for the community as a whole when the KKK was here," Hamaoui said. "We're all the same, no matter what our differences."

Bobby Hall, of Bobby Hall's Ice Cold Blues Band, said his group enjoys performing for special events.

"This is a good chance to celebrate diversity," Allen said. "The Department of Multicultural Services has always been a supporter of our endeavors and we wanted to give back to them."

Allen said Texas A&M University should support and promote this type of cultural experience more often.

Germaine Hawkins, programs chair for Kappa Alpha Psi, said Whoopstock was the perfect opportunity to show the campus the diversity and talent that the African-American culture has to offer.

Sharla Vaughn, member of the Aggie Wranglers, said this is the Aggie Wranglers' third year to perform at Whoopstock.

"We do this every year to support the diversity of the university," Vaughn said.

Ballet Folklorico Celestial, a Latin American folk dance group, performed a series of dances with sombreros and full, fluttering skirts. Each song and dance represented a state in Mexico.

Maricela Ortiz, member of Ballet Folklorico Celestial, said they wanted to help out by performing.

"We wanted to add to the cultural experience," Ortiz said. "We're also selling pan de polvo cookies, which are traditional Mexican wedding cookies."

Participants in Whoopstock had a variety of foods to choose from including crawfish, sold by King of the Roadhouse, an Aggie student-owned bar on Northgate.

Ray Prewitt, co-owner of the bar, said he was encouraged to participate by friends on the Whoopstock staff. Prewitt said he believes the turnout would have been even larger if there were not so many other programs going on around campus and the town.

Another Whoopstock attraction with many participants was the volleyball tournament sponsored by Evian and Texas A&M Recreational Sports. The three volleyball courts were in constant use throughout the day.

Many people at Whoopstock took advantage of the sunny and breezy weather by playing all sorts of sports: Frisbee, hackey sack, football and baseball.

Some people took off their shirts to catch some rays and others brought their dogs and ferrets along with them. At times over the course of the afternoon, people stood up and danced or went on stage and did impressions of *Forrest Gump*.

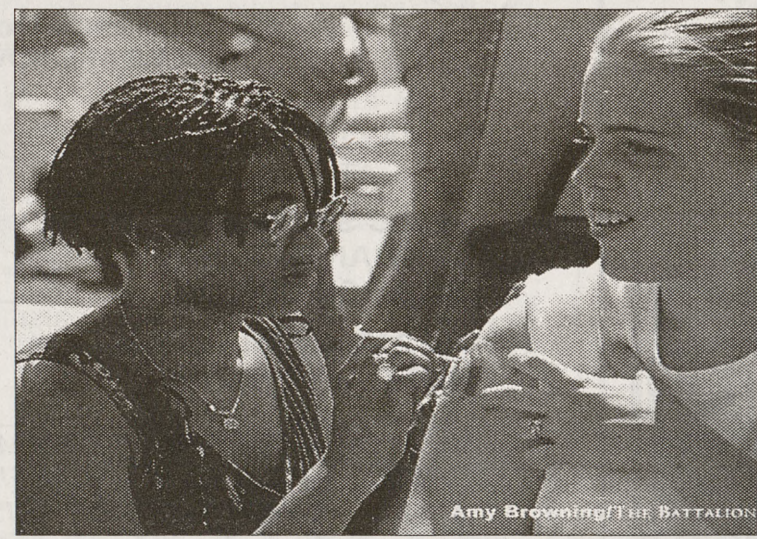
To boost the bonding spirit, the Whoopstock emcees had the audience members turn to the left and right and give the person next to them a hug, even if they did not know the person.

Heidi Feller, a sophomore community health major, said Whoopstock is a good way to bring the campus together and unite everyone.

"It doesn't matter who you are," Feller said. "Everyone can come out and be themselves."

Louis Migliaccio, a sophomore biomedical science major, said he came to Whoopstock to see all the different events.

"Most of the major organizations are represented here," Migliaccio said. "There are many different types of food, music and people."



Amy Browning/THE BATTALION

Top: The crowd gathers to celebrate unity Saturday at Whoopstock.

Above: Angela Hinojosa of Ballet Folklorico Celestial performs the jarabe tapatio.

At right: Erica Bell, a junior Biochemistry major, paints a rainbow on the arm of Margaret Gordon, a junior genetics major.



Roger Hsieh/THE BATTALION



Photo courtesy of the organization



Roger Hsieh/THE BATTALION

The groups that performed at Whoopstock Unity Fest '95 included the Aggie Wranglers (above), Fade to Black (right) and Bobby Hall's Ice Cold Blues Band (far right).