

# University officials deny lawsuit allegations

**The \$1 million lawsuit was filed by a former Physical Plant employee. It claims Don Thompson suffered wrongful termination of employment and intentional infliction of emotional distress.**

**Tara Wilkinson**  
 THE BATTALION

Texas A&M officials filed a response Friday denying all allegations in a \$1 million lawsuit filed this month by a

former Physical Plant employee. Don Thompson claimed wrongful termination of employment and intentional infliction of emotional distress in the lawsuit filed July 6.

Thompson, former Physical Plant deputy manager for utilities, said he was fired after he opposed the University's decision to terminate a contract with the Tenneco Power Generation Co.

The lawsuit brings charges against the University, the A&M System, Dr. Jerry Gaston, interim vice president for finance and administration, and Eugene Ray, interim executive director of the Physical Plant.

The lawsuit states that Thompson's dismissal is a violation of Chapter 554

of the Texas Government Code, known as the Whistleblower Claim, which protects people who report possibly illegal activities of their employers.

Included in the defendants' response is a request for a special exceptions hearing based on statements in Thompson's lawsuit that the defendants do not consider sufficiently documented.

According to the defendants' response, the plaintiff failed to identify when and to what law enforcement authorities he reported his concerns.

Thompson states in the lawsuit that Gaston and Ray pursued obscure and unreported allegations of sexual harassment against Thompson as an excuse to fire him.

However, the defendants' reply said there were "legitimate, non-discriminatory reasons" for Thompson's dismissal. "Defendants assert that the plaintiff would have been terminated regardless of any alleged reports of violations of law," the reply stated.

The lawsuit said that Gaston and Ray knowingly placed an individual who was prejudiced against Thompson on the internal review committee that was reviewing his employment.

Thompson stated in the lawsuit that he was made a public spectacle, referring specifically to an incident when he was "personally escorted off campus, in full view of his colleagues and peers" after a meeting with Gaston and Ray.

"The plaintiff was subjected to severe disappointment, indignation, wounded pride, shame, despair and public humiliation during and after his termination," the lawsuit said.

In the reply, defendants deny responsibility for emotional distress on the grounds that they acted "within the scope of their discretionary duties," and with "good faith" toward the plaintiff.

In January 1994, A&M contracted Tenneco to build a cogeneration plant that would meet electricity, steam and hot and cold water needs for West Campus until 2012.

The University decided to cancel the cogeneration project in June 1994 after

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## Creating consensus out of conflict Diversity workshop offers open forum

**The goal of Student Affairs' workshop is to begin an honest and open dialogue on race issues.**

**Gretchen Perrenot**  
 THE BATTALION

Race and diversity issues at Texas A&M will be examined during a free two-day workshop and showing of the film *The Color of Fear* July 25-26.

All students, faculty members and administration may attend the film and workshops, which are sponsored by the Division of Student Affairs.

Those interested in participating in the discussions or workshops can call Student Affairs at 45-4728 to reserve a space.

Felicia James, assistant to the vice president of student affairs, said the discussions will allow all areas of the University to come together and clear the air.

"The objective for us as a University is to begin an honest and open dialogue about diversity issues," James said. "It's not to ownplay one's beliefs. Sometimes through conflict you can create consensus."

Lee Mun Wah, producer and director of the film, will host the film's showing at 1 p.m. today in 159 Wehner. A discussion of related issues will follow the film.

James said the idea for the film came when Wah's Chinese-American mother was killed by an African-American man who was burglarizing his mother's home.

"He had a lot of anger and vented stereotypes about African-American males after that," James said. "He used the film as a way of getting the anger out."

Wah brought nine men representing African-American, Asian, Caucasian and Hispanic ethnicities together for a weekend retreat to discuss racism. The film shows a synopsis of the retreat and the conflicts between and within the different groups.

The film and workshop are a part of the Division of Student Affairs' annual staff development program, which focuses on

issues affecting students outside of the classroom.

James said diversity was chosen as this year's subject because multiculturalism has been a big topic on campus lately.

"It initially started as a way for members in the division to assess their attitudes and behavior, and to see how they relate to other races on campus," she said.

The program was expanded to include students because it is specific to student affairs. In addition to the discussion after the film, an open forum for students is scheduled at 7 p.m. in the Kyle Field Press Box.

"From a student's perspective, we haven't had a forum where they could express their concerns," James said.

Two workshops scheduled tomorrow are also open to students, faculty members and administrators.

"Conflict Assessment and Multicultural Team Building" will be in 144 Koldus from 9 a.m. to noon. The focus of this workshop is to teach participants to form effective multicultural teams within their organizations.

"Multicultural Communication" will be in 144 Koldus from 1:30 to 5 p.m. and will teach communication skills to deal with multicultural issues and conflicts.

Co-sponsoring the events are the Office of the President, Office of the Associate Provost and Dean of Faculties, Office of the Associate Provost for Undergraduate Studies and the Race and Ethnic Studies Institute.

Dr. Sallie Sheppard, associate provost for undergraduate programs and academic services, said she will attend the program because she believes diversity issues are important to everybody.

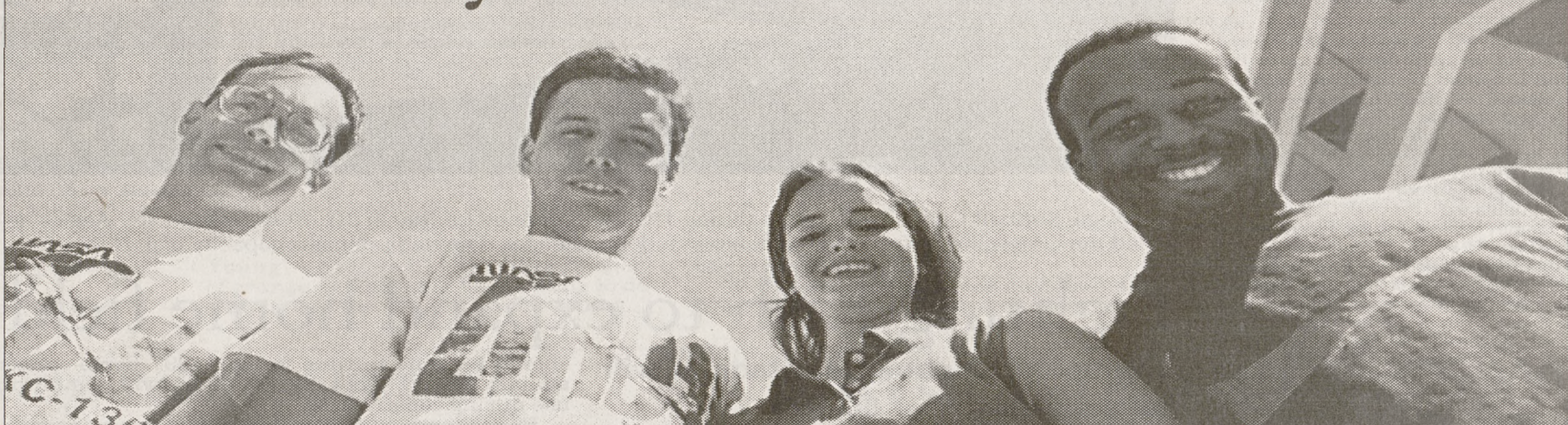
"Programs like this help us develop insight into different perspectives," Sheppard said. "I think that's always healthy."

The Division of Student Affairs encourages all workshop participants to view *The Color of Fear* to provide a basis for discussion.

James said similar workshops may be planned in the future if this one proves to be an effective means of communicating.

"Another question is, 'Where do we go from here?'" she said. "What kind of dialogue can we spark?"

## Students fly in famous Vomit Comet



Stew Milne, THE BATTALION

Don Shatto, John Aaron, Kim Renzi and Tony Morris, all engineering students, trained to fly on the KC-135A.

**Engineering students experienced weightlessness 172 times to gather information for an experiment they will present to high school students.**

**By Katherine Arnold**  
 THE BATTALION

Three Texas A&M students Friday were on board the last mission of the famous "Vomit Comet" Friday, which was used to film the weightlessness scenes in the movie *Apollo 13*.

The Air Force KC-135A flies in parabola-like patterns to create the effects of weightlessness. In three days the A&M group experienced simulated weightlessness 172 times.

The group went on four two-hour flights during the three days. The plane flew out of Ellington Field and over the Gulf of Mexico.

Participating in the program were Don Shatto, a doctoral student in mechanical engineering;

John Aaron, a senior engineering technology major; Tony Morris, a senior mechanical engineering major and Kim Renzi, a junior mechanical engineering

major, who attended all training sessions but did not fly on the KC-135A.

Aaron said he always wondered what it would be like to experience weightlessness.

"I've known about the KC-135 since I was young but never thought I'd get to fly on it," Aaron said.

The aircraft flies at about 24,000 feet, ascends at a 45-degree angle to 33,000 feet, then descends at a 45-degree angle back to 24,000 feet. At the top of the arc, passengers experience about 25 seconds of simulated weightlessness.

The sharp change in the steep angle of the plane is what causes the effects of weightlessness. This can be compared to rising to the top of a steep roller coaster hill.

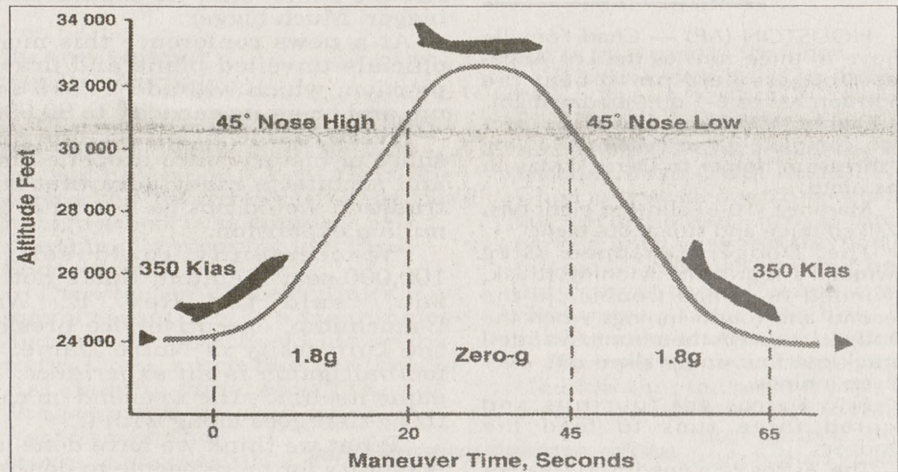
Morris, who said he chose to study engineering because of his interest in airplanes, said the experience was hard to explain.

"It's hard to put into words what it was like," he said. "This huge plane is flying up then suddenly swoops down. It was beautiful."

The students participated in a program called Students Understanding Reduced-Gravity Flight (SURF) Summer Academy. The academy was supported by a NASA-funded grant from the Texas Space Grant Consortium.

The consortium accepted proposals in Spring 1995 for experiments that could be conducted in a simulated zero-gravity environment.

Shatto said the main focus of the proposal was to design an



experiment that could be presented to middle and high school students.

"We wanted to do something relating to heat transfer but simple enough to present in outreach programs," he said. "We want them to understand the scientific components and be interested in it."

The A&M students' proposal was one of four selected. The other three groups were from Rice University. All four groups flew in the KC-135A at the same time.

A&M's experiment tested the principles of boiling water in simulated zero-gravity conditions. The students designed and built a device that consisted of a chamber which held water that was heated by a cylindrical rod.

Dr. G. P. Peterson, mechanical engineering professor and head of the mechanical engineering department who supervised the

project, said the purpose of the project was to discover where the bubbles go when water is boiled in zero-gravity.

"When you boil water, the bubbles rise to the top," Peterson said. "In simple terms, when you boil water when there is no gravity or air, where do the bubbles go?"

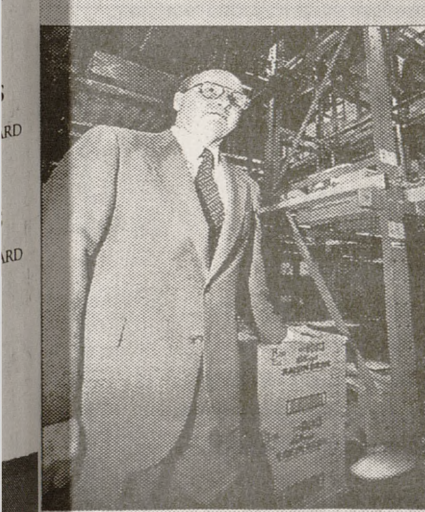
The results of the experiment were as expected, Shatto said, and the bubbles stayed close to the heating element and were larger than normal.

The group will now compile the data and results collected from the experiments and make presentations, mainly to high school science groups statewide, such as the Junior Engineering Technical Society.

Participants in the program spent three days at the Johnson Space Center in Houston and

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## Beard wants less fat in food services



Stew Milne, THE BATTALION

**A&M's new director of food services is adding vegetarian, low fat and ethnic entrees to food available on campus.**

**By Tara Wilkinson**  
 THE BATTALION

Ronald L. Beard, who recently was appointed director of Texas A&M's Department of Food Services, said his new title will solidify and give credibility to the work he started as interim director.

Beard, who became director of 800 food service employees July 13, said he is

excited to settle in and work on his ideas for improving the department.

"Not as one person, but as a team effort, I want to take A&M food services a step up," he said. "We're going to keep changing as we grow. We've got to move with the times and not be blinded by anything we've done in the past."

Beard said one of his goals is to increase the diversity and the nutritional value of foods available on campus.

"We have a lot of students looking for more nutrition and less fat," he said. "A lot of changes are going to be implemented as a result of students' demands for more options."

Beard said low-fat bread, low-fat desserts, a line of vegetarian entrees and a wider variety of ethnic foods

will be available in campus dining halls Fall 1995.

Five new meal plans will be available to students, including one which offers five lunches a week to students who live off campus.

Beard said he wants to develop a unique atmosphere for each of A&M's 19 cash food facilities, which do not accept meal plans, such as Pie Are Square and the Underground Food Court.

The Vet Med Snack Bar, which is scheduled to open on West Campus in August, will serve specialty sandwiches not available elsewhere on campus.

One of Beard's goals is to continue to refine the department's quality control system. Currently, a group of food service managers

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## Mentors give helping hands

**Faculty members provide support to students in choosing careers and majors, as well as help with family and roommate conflicts.**

**By Jill Saunders**  
 THE BATTALION

The Texas A&M Mentors program turns the table on the professor-student relationship.

A&M faculty and staff members typically lecture students. But the mentor program requires them to be listeners.

Mentors is a group of 400 A&M faculty and staff who volunteer extra office hours for A&M students seeking personal and professional guidance.

For the first time, the A&M Mentors program is hosting an information table at the New Student Conferences this

summer to become acquainted with students and parents.

Dr. Betty Milburn, associate director of counseling at the Student Counseling Service (SCS) and coordinator of the A&M Mentors program, said the program provides an outlet for students who need someone to talk to.

Milburn said the program began in 1979 to help students adjust and feel comfortable at A&M.

"It was established to keep students from getting lost in the shuffle," she said, "and to let them know they are not just a number."

A&M Mentors is supported by, but not a part of, SCS. The program is funded partially through an endowment and primarily by donations.

"Last year we received many donations from A&M Mothers' Clubs," Milburn said. "In fact, we received around \$2,000 last year in donations."

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