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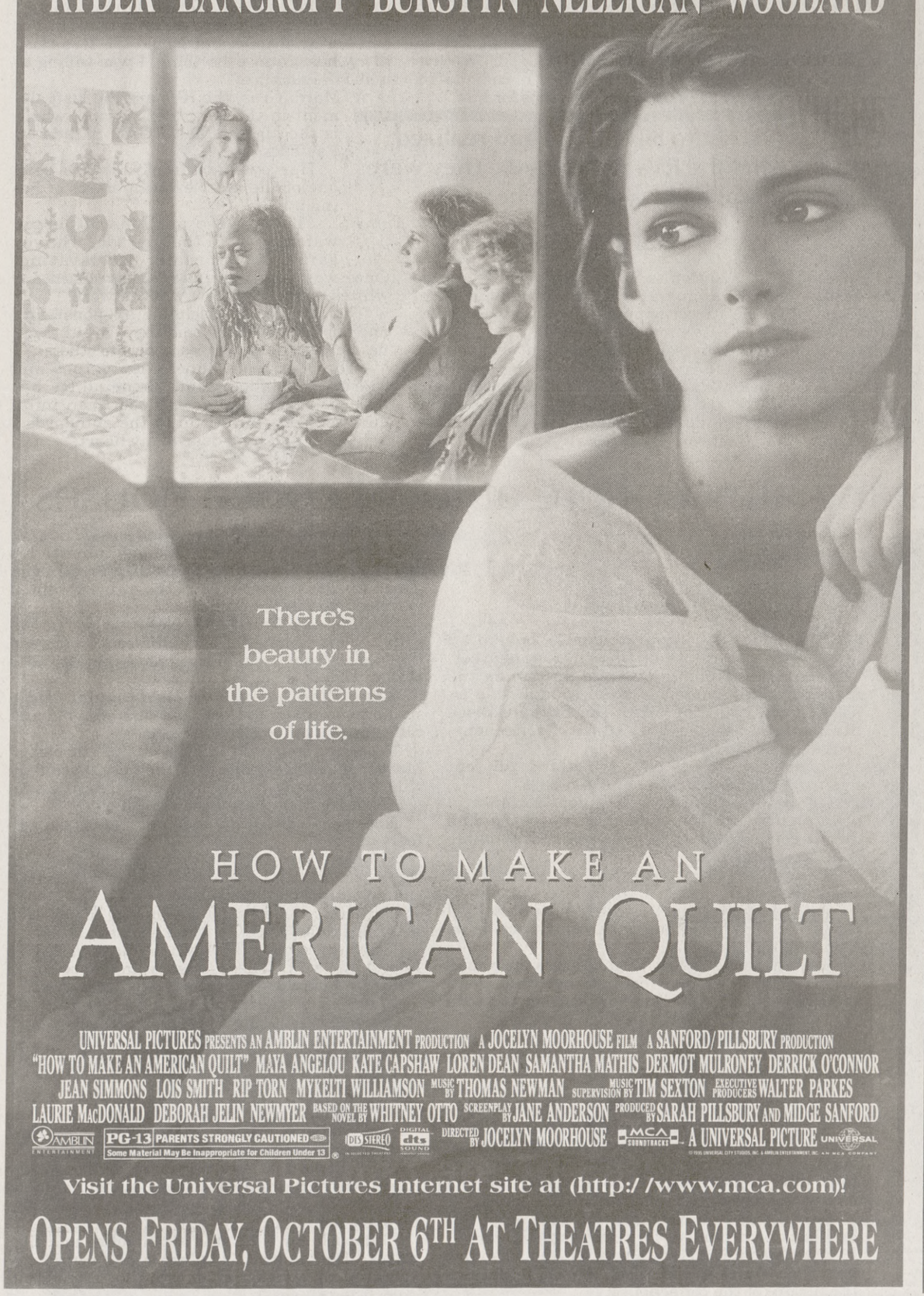

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Storm chasers

Meteorology program puts students on the hunt

By Katharine Deaton
THE BATTALION

The typical reaction of most people when notified of an oncoming storm is to seek shelter and take other precautionary measures.

But not all people react like this. The Texas A&M Student Chapter of the American Meteorological Society recently organized a storm-chasing program. The Texas A&M Mobile Severe Storm Data Acquisition (TAMMSSDA) is comprised of students who chase storms in their spare time.

Dr. Michael Biggerstaff, an adviser for the group and meteorology professor, said the storm chasers' main purpose is to verify the existence and location of storms and to notify the National Weather Service stations located in Houston, Fort Worth and New Braunfels of severe weather.

"The idea is not to be in the middle of it, but to be able to verify that severe weather occurred as soon as possible after the event," Biggerstaff said. "Sometimes the Doppler radars used by the National Weather Service issue false alarms, and TAMMSSDA can help to verify the actual weather condition."

Marion Alcorn, the group's adviser and meteorology professor at A&M, said the information collected by the storm chasers is also used in research and teaching by the meteorology department.

"TAMMSSDA wants a video recorder," Alcorn said, "so if the students see a good [storm], they can tape it. The video can be used in teaching."

Alcorn said the major step to getting organized is the acquisition of equipment such as hand radios and tape recorders. However, this can be costly.

"The storm-chasing is fairly new," Alcorn said. "For the last two to three years, they've made attempts to get organized."

Adam Houston, a senior meteorology major, is president of the student chapter of the meteorological society and is an active participant in the storm-chasing program. Houston said finding funding was difficult.

"We really didn't know where we could come up with the money," Houston said.

The Department of Student Activities approved $1,000 through the Association of Former Students.

Also, a portion of meteorology graduate students' tuition is pooled as a financial resource for programs and equipment to benefit the department. Funding was approved for the group with the provision that the collected information would benefit the meteorology department and graduate students.

Houston said the total $3200 granted to the program has allowed them to purchase hand radios, audio recorders, maps and various odds and ends.

"The most difficult task for storm-chasers is coming up with money for equipment," Houston said. "Eventually, we hope to buy a video recorder, but it costs a lot more money."

Alcorn said the students first chased storms with no equipment but soon realized they needed radios to stay in contact with the base station, the Eller Oceanography and Meteorology Building.

Some students hold radio licenses they earn with the help and training of the hand radio club.

There are no requirements students must meet to join the group. However, a student new to storm-chasing must accompany an experienced chaser before attempting it alone.

"Experience plays a big part in this," Houston said. "Inexperienced students' chances of getting hurt or killed are great."

The group and the meteorology department combat inexperience with knowledge.

Students who have an understanding of weather and forecasting have a better chance of remaining safe and collecting useful information.

"To be a good storm chaser, you have to be a good forecaster," Houston said.

Houston admits that although the storm chasers act as a means of correction and verification, they make mistakes.

"It's imperfect," Houston said. "Even if you have lots of experience and are a good forecaster, you can miss good storms. Meteorology is an imperfect science."

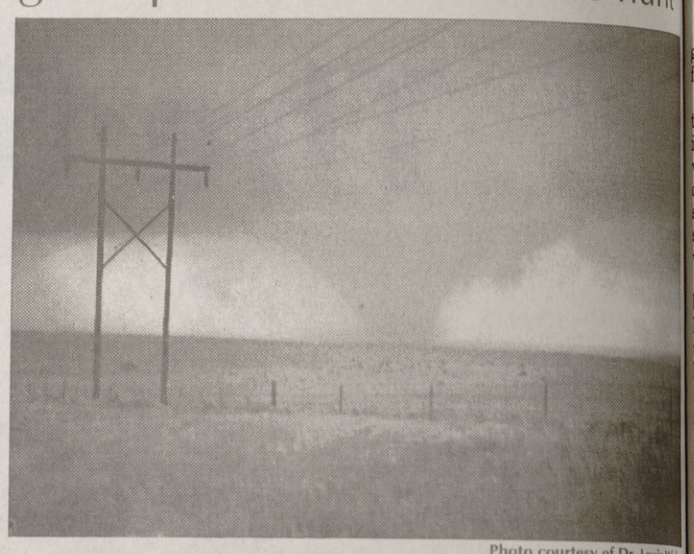
Photo courtesy of Dr. Louis Wicker

Dr. Louis Wicker, a professor of meteorology at A&M, encountered this tornado while conducting an experiment near Kellerville. **Wicker** works with students on the Texas A&M Mobile Severe Storm Data Acquisition.

PEOPLE IN THE NEWS

Stewart set to shed his Picard persona

Stewart

CHAPEL HILL, N.C. (AP) — After seven years in command of the starship Enterprise, actor Patrick Stewart has his feet firmly back on Earth.

Stewart said he's hoping to shed his better-known identity, Capt. Jean-Luc Picard, with a series of roles on film and the stage.

"I'm currently in a mode of looking for work that puts as much room between me and Capt. Picard's space suit as possible," Stewart joked before putting on a one-man show at the University of North Carolina.

The search has kept the bald, Royal Shakespeare Company-trained actor quite busy since *Star Trek: The Next Generation* ended in 1994.

Stewart is in a Broadway production of Shakespeare's "The Tempest." He completed a run of the same play in Central Park this summer.

He also has a starring role in the film *Jeffrey*, a gay love story currently in theaters, and will appear as a ballroom dance instructor in the upcoming *Let It Be Me*.

Powell says rap should be positive

Powell

HOUSTON (AP) — Colin Powell says rappers should keep in mind how their music affects children.

Rappers "should see if we can upgrade and uplift it a little bit," said Powell, who joined other black leaders in a private meeting with rap music artists and producers in New York last July.

As for the musical genre itself, Powell said: "It's not an artistry that I totally understand, but they are creative."

The former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff spoke with the Houston Chronicle Monday during a stop to promote his autobiography, *My American Journey*.

Congressional family expands

WASHINGTON (AP) — Family values are growing on Capitol Hill.

Reps. Susan Molinari and Bill Paxon, the only married couple serving in Congress, are expecting their first child in May.

"This is just another sign that the Republican Party is continuing to grow in numbers," the New York lawmakers said Tuesday.

Molinari will be the third lawmaker to give birth. Rep. Yvonne Braithwaite Burke, D-Calif., was the first 20 years ago.

Correction

An A&M student identified in a picture as Tina Harrison yesterday on page 3 in should have been identified as Anita McGauder-Johnson, a facilitator of discussion at Saturday's S.I.S.T.A.S. workshop.

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