

## THE PLAGUE OF GANGS

B-C'S NOT IMMUNE FROM YOUTH VIOLENCE, DRUG USE, EXPERTS SAY.

By MICHAEL SCHAUB  
THE BATTALION

The images saturate television, cinema and music: children not even old enough to drive a car are carrying guns to school and are slain in their neighborhoods by rival gangs.

The epidemic of youth violence in Texas might have started in big cities like Houston, Dallas and San Antonio, but Patrol Sgt. Charles Fleeger of the College Station Police Department said the problem is not limited to urban areas.

"Youth violence is a problem everywhere," Fleeger said. "It's something we're not immune from, although sometimes we'd like to think so."

Although not all youth violence is gang-related, the presence of gangs is palpable in College Station, Fleeger said.

"We do have some gang activity, the extent of which is not really known," he said. "By their very nature, gangs are criminal offenders."

Ronnie Jackson, youth services

coordinator for Bryan, said the city suffers from the effect of youth and gang violence. "The problem still exists, though not as much as it used to," Jackson said. "Drive-bys and incidents of physical violence have gone down tremendously."

Youth violence came to the forefront in Bryan three years ago, he said, when two children were slain in separate incidents.

"We lost one in a stabbing incident at a school, one in a drive-by," Jackson said.

Although the rate of physical violence among youths has fallen, other forms of youth crime still exist in and out of schools.

"There's still a huge problem with substance abuse, primarily marijuana and alcohol," Jackson said. "Our kids are engaging in much more than I'm comfortable with."

Fleeger said narcotics also are present among youth in College Station.

After the 1994 murders in Bryan, the cities, schools and police departments began to develop new ways to prevent other occurrences of violence among Bryan-College Station youth.

"There's a concerted effort among school officials and nonprofit organizations," Jackson said. "We've tried to focus on the youth."

Evan Stein, an official at Twin City Mission Inc., works with troubled youth at Sheltering Arms, a Bryan youth services organization.

"I think Bryan-College Station is doing an incredible job," Stein said. "There's a lot of collaboration here. Politics don't get in the way like it does in the big cities."

Counselors at Sheltering Arms work with runaways, truants and first-time criminal offenders, Stein said.

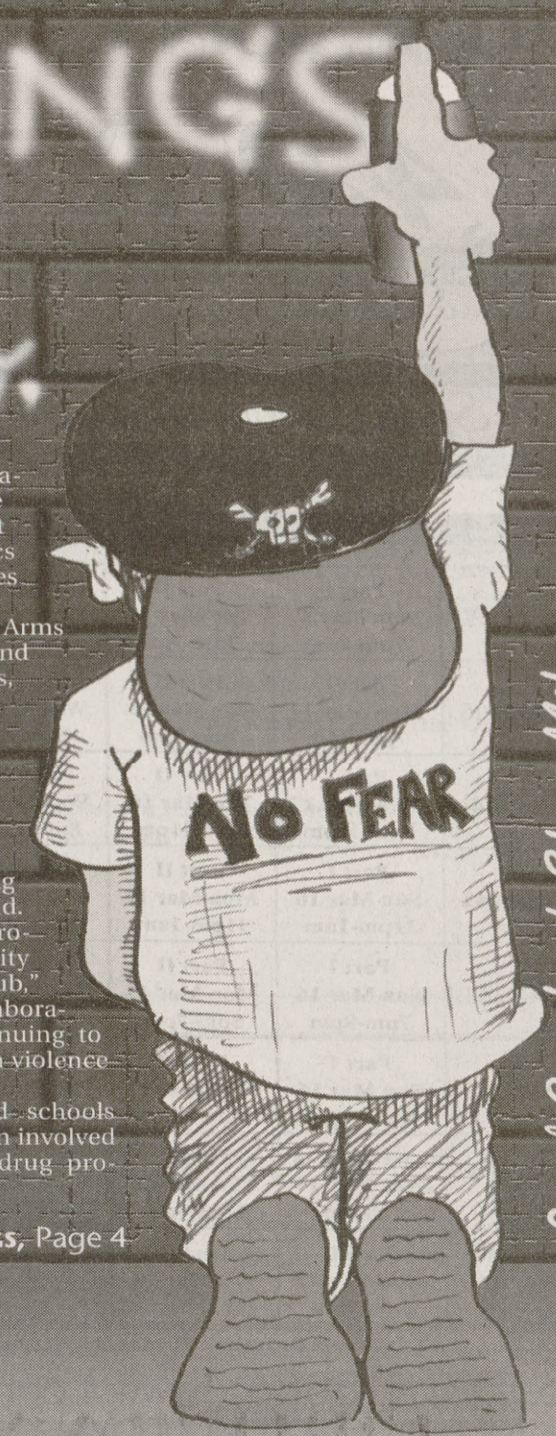
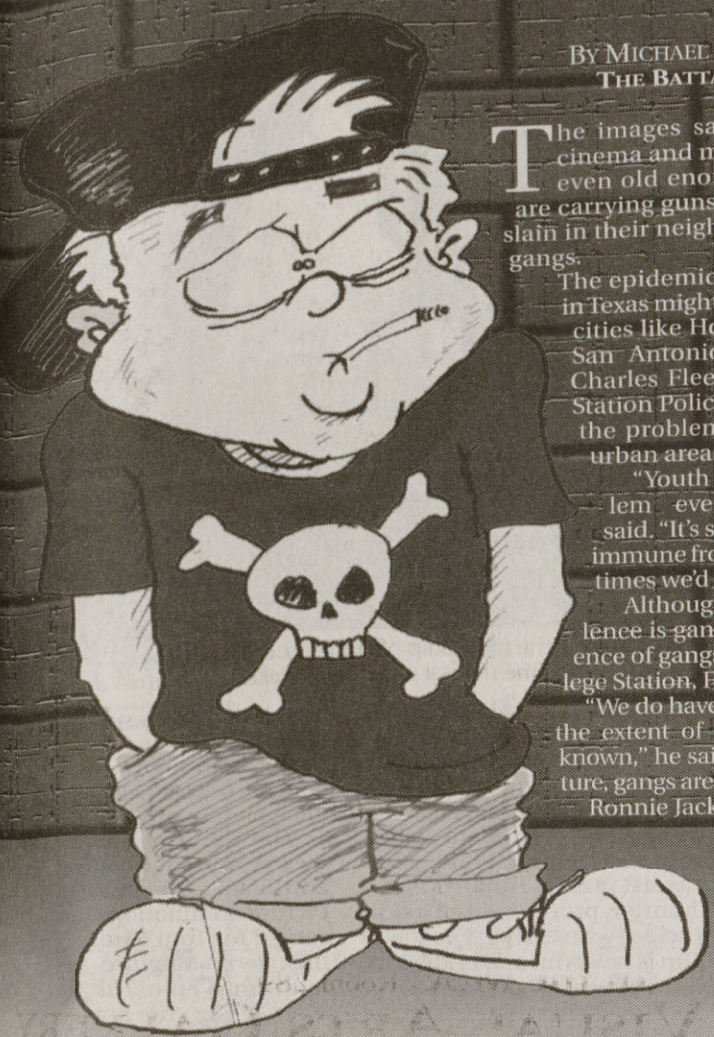
"We work on role-playing, on appropriate ways to deal with anger," he said.

Sheltering Arms is one of many charitable organizations in Bryan-College Station which is dedicated to dealing with at-risk youth, Jackson said.

"We have prevention programs through Project Unity and the Boys' and Girls' Club," Jackson said. "Through collaborative programs, we're continuing to curtail the problem of youth violence in the Brazos Valley."

Police departments and schools work together to get children involved in anti-violence and anti-drug programs, he said.

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To the staff of the Plasma Center,

I would like to start by saying thank you to each and every employee for making the past three years enjoyable in a professional, efficient and courteous environment. As a donor since 1993, I have been more than satisfied with every aspect of your operation, which allows myself and others to contribute what we can to community service, all the while being serviced by diligent, but relaxed, workers. Everyone at the Plasma Center, from those behind the front counter to the phlebotomists to the supervisors, have made great efforts to insure that each donor feels hygienically safe, as well as keeping the atmosphere light.

Like most, I started coming to the Plasma Center for monetary reasons, but I soon developed acquaintances that appealed to me almost as much as the original need for money, enabling me to look forward to each donation, not only for my wallet's sake but also to see my friends. Like I commented to someone recently, talking to people at the Plasma Center was like getting mail from a far-off friend that you don't get to do much with, but who you can talk to as often as you write. For those acquaintances and for your continual services. I would like to thank all of those I've come to know and appreciate over the past three years - Emily, and Tracy, Heath, and Marty, Ada and Josie, etc... more I can't remember or those who have gone on to better things.

So, as I graduate from this great University, I bid you all a fond farewell and strong commendations on such a successful blend of quality medical practice and friendly service. Thank you all and have a great summer. Thanks, C.F.

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