

Aggies helping others

Spring break is usually heralded as a time for college students to head to the beach, but this year not every student spent the week picking their brains on South Padre Island.

Some Aggies participated in service projects, generously donating their time to help others. These students set an example everyone should follow.

Their actions prove the most important lessons in life are not learned in the classroom.

Twelve members of Aggie Habitat for Humanity spent spring break in Lynchburg, Virginia. They participated in Habitat for Humanity's Collegiate Challenge, where students from universities across the country traveled at their own expense to build homes.

These students worked alongside families who will eventually live in these homes.

Naomi Hernandez, junior environmental design, said working with the families was an eye-opening experience.

"I worry about tests and projects," Hernandez said, "but these people worry about where they're going to live, what they're going to eat."

Most college students have about as much perspective as a PTTS officer has friends. Therefore, these are the lessons students need to learn most.

The academic bubble surrounding Texas A&M obscures what is important with what is merely urgent. Grades, homework and commitments dominate students' lives while the surrounding world must deal with more important problems.

By serving the less fortunate, students put scholastic pressures in their proper perspective. The stress caused by studying for finals is insignificant when compared to the stress of not having a roof over one's head.

Ariana Henty, a freshman business major, said the trip taught her to be grateful for what she has and that students gain in giving to others.

"They (the families whose homes were being built) gave us tenfold what we could have given them," Henty said.

Perhaps the most valuable benefit for students serving is character. Many students' mothers have tried to get them to do household chores claiming it builds character. Unlike the endurance chores encourage, service teaches compassion, intelligence and gratitude.

These lessons cannot be learned in lecture halls, yet they are at least as important as a diploma.

Students do not need to travel to benefit other people. Opportunities to serve are found within our own community.

In a matter of weeks, Student Government will hold its annual Big Event, where over 5,000 students participate in service projects throughout Bryan and College Station. If manual labor doesn't suit you, organizations like Elder Aid offer the chance to visit with elderly shut-ins. The Brazos Valley Food Pantry offers a meal in the soup kitchen every day and can always use a helping hand. These charitable organizations and numerous others in this city desperately need volunteers.

When Aggies enter the public sphere to serve others, they become ambassadors for Texas A&M University. The reputation Texas A&M gains from Aggies who volunteer their time and services far exceeds any reputation created by winning on the football field.

Bryan and College Station revolve around A&M. With all of the local restaurants and business catering to students, it's sometimes easy to forget we share this community with people who have nothing to do with A&M. A&M could not exist without these people. Students must give back to those who make their education possible.

The students who spent vacation serving others deserve recognition and admiration. Their selfless example is a reminder college is more than just a time to pick up academic knowledge. It is an opportunity to build the character that can only be developed by meeting the needs of others.



John Lemons
Engineering graduate student

Smokin' in the boy's womb

Pregnant women neglect rights of children when smoking

Each year the ozone layer debilitates a little more, animal-inhabited forests become mini-malls and nature's own playing cards of droughts, floods and other disasters wreck havoc on the environment. Today, the Earth finds itself in a downward spiral of afflictions, but the land itself is not the only entity being threatened — its citizens are dying and killing themselves by delving into destructive health practices.

Moreover, there is one group of people at risk more than any other — newborns whose mothers partake in delinquent health habits. A recent Associated Press report showed children born to mothers who smoked during their pregnancy come into the world with nicotine levels akin to adult smokers.

Dr. Claude Hanet, of St. Luc University Hospital in Brussels, was quoted in the AP report as saying, "The baby of a smoking mother should be considered to be an ex-smoker."

Although smoking during pregnancy is reported to be on the decline, this occurrence is far from a relic of the past.

Dr. Laurence M. Galanti of Mont-Godinne University Hospital in Namur, Belgium, recently presented a study to a group of researchers and doctors at a meeting of the American College of Cardiology. He focused on the effects of smoking during pregnancy upon an unborn child.

The study involved 273 children, 139 which were babies one to three days old. During the project, researchers tested the infants' urine streams for cotinine, the substance which remains in the body after nicotine breaks down. Levels of co-

tinine in the newborns were found to be about 550 nanograms per milligram of urine. This is almost the exact same level of cotinine found in the mothers' body systems.

In this way, not only are pregnant women contributing to their health decline, but their children will be forced to face a life of extenuating problems stemming from smoking.

It has been proven a newborn is more likely to develop lung and respiratory problems, and possibly fall victim to Sudden Infant Death Syndrome once exposed to tobacco in the womb.

While all this information may seem disturbing and sad, the full responsibility for a newborn's health lies with the mother. It's amazing how women who smoke cannot realize the potentially dangerous situations they are placing their unborn children in when they light up a cigarette.

What's even more ridiculous is how a pregnant women can pull out a cigarette, light it up, take a drag and not even notice the mandatory health warning printed by the surgeon general. That is, unless all pregnant women are illiterate, nicotine-addicted morons, which I'm sure is not the case.

It's high time female smokers took a stand for themselves and the health of their newborn babies. For nine months these women smoke, and for every cigarette they light, for every puff they take, their unborn children are brought closer to living a life plagued with health problems.

Women may never stop smoking, and this is totally acceptable. What is not acceptable is the way pregnant women endanger the lives of children who have no choice in deciding if they wish to be born under a blanketing cloud of cancerous smoke.

Of course, prenatal smoking is not the only way mothers are harming the

health of their newborns. Although alcoholism and hard-core drug abuse statistics of pregnant women fluctuate, these problems may never cease to exist. As long as one mother drinks a liquor product or engages in illegal drug usage, the health of newborns will continue to be in danger.

But a mother has every right to smoke a cigarette or drink a whiskey sour. What she does not have the right to do is contaminate her child's future health. It's time for pregnant women smokers to wake up and take a good look into the eyes of their newborn babies, crying at the top of their lungs and twitching wildly in a glass incubator.

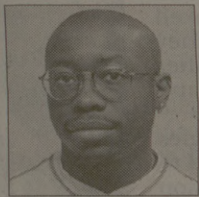
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Asst. Opinion Editor



James Francis
Sophomore English major



Campus traffic confounded by Ross Street repairs
Students' safety jeopardized by ineffectual maintainance of sinking street

As Texas A&M students have probably noticed, Ross Street has been closed for quite some time.

Ross Street is the one that runs from the Fish Pond past the Chemistry building east toward Texas Avenue. The section that is closed runs from the Bus Stop snack bar to the Petroleum Engineering building.

The closing of this street has changed the bus routes on the north side of campus and caused inconvenience to all who travel in that area.

It is frustrating enough that a street must be closed for some improvements to be made, but it is even worse in this case because it appears that nothing has been done to the street since it was closed. The University simply blocked it off and left it there apparently without a

plan for its repair.

There is no question as to whether the street should have been closed; anyone who has ever driven on it can tell that it is in desperate need of repair.

The question is why nothing is being done to fix it.

Standing on the street and looking at it, students can tell that one lane is not level. That one simple observation shows that either one half of the street is sinking, or the other half is rising.

Given the lack of seismic or volcanic activity in this area, it seems more logical to assume that it is sinking.

It is possible that there is erosion from utilities beneath the street that is weakening the foundation of the roadbed. Any time that there is talk

about subsurface erosion, though, images come to mind of 20 foot deep sinkholes in city streets swallowing large vehicles with no advance warning.

These sinkholes are caused when water gets underneath the road surface and begins to wash away the soil supporting it. The flow of water can be a mere trickle, yet over many years, can wash away enough dirt to create a large hole under the road, undetectable. This makes the road weaker and weaker until it collapses under the weight of traffic.

It certainly seems possible that erosion of sufficient magnitude could cause the entire roadbed to slowly sink, as Ross street is now doing.

The Texas A&M Physical Plant said, after a lengthy selection process, the University has recently hired an engineering firm to perform some preliminary exploration and find out why the street is sinking. While insisting that the road is safe, the Physical Plants admitted that they really don't know what it looks like beneath the asphalt until engineers do excavations. The road was closed because it is extremely

irregular and could cause damage to some vehicles. Work on the street is supposed to begin this week, although as of this deadline, there was no apparent evidence of it. When they are finished, we will all find out what is wrong, and how long it will take to fix it.

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MAIL CALL

Educated voting improves campus

I beg the students not to take the advice posed in Alex Walters' March 18 column.

By listening to him, students will become one step closer to having the same apathy on campus as other universities.

We take pride in our involvements and our organizations. Please take the time to continue to care.

I agree that we should not merely vote for the first person listed on the ballot, but instead of not voting, learn

about the candidates and cast an educated vote.

Although there are power hungry individuals in every organization, there are also people who care. The candidates are aware of the problems in Student Government, and they have proposed solutions. If students want to change SGA, we must vote for a candidate that has the greatest potential to make those drastic improvements.

I urge students to make a decision based not on the signs and pamphlets, but rather by listening to and meeting the candidates at the debate.

Tracey McAllister
Class of '96

Students must vote or face losing rights

I can honestly see why Alex Walters feels betrayed and bewildered by the Student Government Association.

However, I don't agree with the notion that the entire university should become an apathetic blob when it comes to election time.

As educated people, students should research the candidates and find the best man or woman for the job.

If the student body truly does its homework and takes an interest in student government, it can keep the unqualified out of office.

Students have a great responsibility to the University.

If they are not happy with the people on the ballot, they should write someone in that would take the job seriously and would not use it as a pillar of popularity for khaki groupies everywhere.

Keep in mind if we don't use our vote we will lose our vote.
Steven Baskerville
Class of '97

Candidates simply seeking popularity

"Express Yourself: Don't Vote." It's about time somebody said it.

Alex Walters lashing out against these campus phonies was one of the boldest and most significant statements in recent memory. Just looking at the spattering of these ridiculous signs all over campus makes me want to vomit.

The intention of these "candidates" is never to secure the students but to see how many corporate trade-marks they can parody (e.g. Coca-cola, Dallas Cowboys, Calvin Klein).

Although I know several students in elected positions across campus that are wonderful friends and leaders,

these people are scarce. It only takes a look at our less-than-illustrious senators and their childish response to something as simple as the Yell Leader runoff to see why we should not vote. Don't support the habit. Don't humor them. Don't let the cycle continue. Don't vote.

Jeffrey Cranor
Class of '97

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