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Tuesday, April 8, 1997

Halogen lamp causes blaze

Four apartment units were destroyed in yesterday's blaze

BY JOEY JEANETTE SCHLUETER
THE BATTALION

When James Westbrook came home from work yesterday, he had to wade through water and ashes to get to his apartment, which was spared by the fire that engulfed 12 apartments in the Travis House apartment complex.

At 10:18 a.m., the College Station Fire Department received a call to extinguish a fire at the complex on 505 Harvey Road. Four apartments were destroyed by the blaze, and eight others sustained smoke and water damage.

Westbrook, a junior management major, said he was shocked after coming home to the fire.

"I feel angry it happened," he said. "But there's nothing you can do about it."

The Travis House Apartments' fire is the second fire in the area this year. Kensington Place Apartments had a similar fire which resulted in the death of a Texas A&M student in January.

Two residents were injured in the Travis House fire and taken to Columbia Medical Hospital. They were released with minor injuries related to smoke inhalation and minor burns.

Fire Marshall Raymond Olsen said the fire was

caused by a halogen lamp which fell onto a couch in apartment No. 97.

"Halogen lamps get extremely hot," Olsen said. "If you put a piece of paper near one, it will burn up immediately."

Black smoke and soot poured out of vents along the top of the apartment building from the back. In the apartment where the fire began, the exterior kitchen wall is gone, and the stove and refrigerator are charred.

Olsen said the apartments were equipped with smoke detectors which all functioned properly.

David Anspach, head of maintenance for Travis House, said the fire spread quickly.

"All I heard was a bunch of smoke alarms going off," he said, "and then I saw the blaze."

Anspach said his first reaction was to get the people out of the burning building.

"I had to kick in the door to see if anyone was inside one of the units," he said. "One guy jumped off the back balcony, and the others were forced to go down a ladder. In five minutes the fire engulfed the apartments."

Jason Rolf, a freshman microbiology major, lives at the end of the building that caught fire. He said he was sleeping and was awakened around 10 a.m.

"I woke up to someone yelling 'fire,'" he said.

The fire burned for approximately two hours. Resi-



Pat James, THE BATTALION

A College Station firefighter goes into a burning unit at Travis House Apartments.



Pat James, THE BATTALION

A College Station firefighter sprays water on yesterday's fire at Travis House Apartments on Harvey Road.

dents of Travis House stood near the pool and watched as firefighters attempted to control the fire.

Nicole Merritt, a resident of Kensington Place, said she could see the fire from her apartment.

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Teaching Tolerance

Speaker focuses on stereotypes

BY MELISSA NUNNERY
THE BATTALION

"A battle is going on over whose America this is," Morris Dees, a known civil rights activist, said last night in Rudder Theatre.

Dees, founder of the Southern Poverty Law Center in Montgomery, Ala., addressed racial, social, economic and sexual stereotypes and divisions in his Teaching Tolerance Program sponsored by MSC Great Issues. About 400 people attended the event which was followed by a question-and-answer session.

Rebecca Skomal, chair of the MSC Great Issues committee and a junior genetic biochemistry major, said she was glad to see so many different people attend the program.

"[When I heard about Dees] I thought 'what an incredible program,' especially in conjunction with Whoopstock because this is Unity Week," Skomal said. "[It is] an incredible opportunity to hear someone like Morris Dees, to hear the progress that's been made and the things that still need to be done."

Dees has won precedent-setting lawsuits against the Ku Klux Klan, skinheads and other racist groups. His life has been threatened and his offices have been burned by his opponents.

He said the deepest divide in the United States today is along racial lines. The riots resulting from the Rodney King verdict will pale in comparison to the consequences of Americans not learning tolerance, he said.

"As our country moves into the next millennium ... unless we learn to get along with each other, unless we learn to live together, those riots will look like a Sunday picnic," he said.

Dees told the audience that America is great because of its diversity, not in spite of it.

Americans of all backgrounds are angry and frustrated with the division in the country, he said.

"[Whites say] the civil rights movement is over and 'they' have had plenty of time to catch up," Dees said. "What I have found out ... is we have much more in common than separates us."

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Pastor: Homosexuality is genetic, uncontrollable

Rev. Piazza equated homophobia to racism.

BY BENJAMIN CHENG
THE BATTALION

The homosexuality of God and the plight of gays and lesbians in society were discussed by Rev. Michael S. Piazza at Friends Congregational Church yesterday as Gay Awareness Week continued.

Piazza is the senior pastor at the Cathedral of Hope Metropolitan Community Church in Dallas, which is the largest gay and lesbian church in the nation. He is the author of the book *Holy Homosexuals: The Truth About Being Gay or Lesbian and Christian*.

Piazza said fundamental Christians frequently misuse text in the Bible that condemns homosexuality. He said research has shown that homosexuality is genetic.

"We cannot control who we love," he said.

Piazza said Jesus had both heterosexual and homosexual feelings and that he struggled with ways to live with his sexuality. He said Christians should embrace God as both a man and a woman.

"Humans aren't comfortable living in ambiguity," Piazza said. "We want rigid roles."

Piazza said homophobia is comparable to racism in that people tend to create an image of God in relation to the image of the people in power.

"Pat Robertson prays to a God that looks amazingly like Pat," he said.



Tim Moog, THE BATTALION

Rev. Michael S. Piazza speaks at the Friends Congregational Church in College Station Monday night.

Rev. Charles Stark, pastor of Friends Congregational Church, said sexual orientation is not a choice and Jesus never condemned homosexuality.

"God doesn't close the door on the people he created," Stark said.

Phyllis Frederiksen, a member of the church, said homosexuality is not a sin. "We accept people the way they are," she said, "the way God made them."

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Rogge Heflin, THE BATTALION

Computer Wiz

Greg Hubenak, a senior engineering technology major, updates software in the control computers in a College Station ALERT vehicle.

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Plains residents expect more flooding

Crews continue to stack sandbags in the wake of spring blizzard.

GRANITE FALLS, Minn. (AP) — Volunteers raced to stack more sandbags Monday, afraid that the meltdown from a spring blizzard could worsen what is already some of the most severe flooding on the northern Plains in years.

Across the Plains, fields were sheets of white stretching to the horizon after a storm over the weekend left more than 2 feet of snow in places.

In northwestern Minnesota, along the Red River that forms the state line with North Dakota, bright sunshine melted a little snow, but the real thaw is expected Thursday or Friday, said Mark Seeley, climatologist with the University of Minnesota Extension Service.

"Everything predicted for the

Red is a flood of historic proportions," he said.

The National Weather Service issued a flood warning extending for the next two weeks along parts of three rivers in other parts of Minnesota — the Minnesota, Mississippi and St. Croix.

There is no quick way to gauge how bad the flooding might become once the snow melts, but 4 to 5 inches of heavy, late-season snow could be equal to 1 inch of rain, Seeley said.

In Granite Falls, wind-blown snow stung the faces of workers stacking sandbags on the levees as they worked to protect about 40 homes along the Minnesota River.

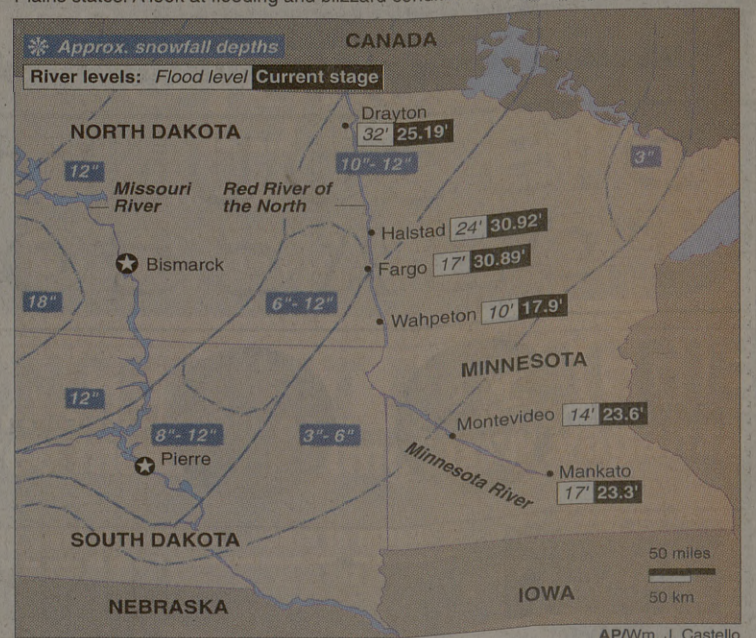
Flood victims and weary out-of-town volunteers trapped by the snowstorm stuck it out in a shelter at a high school gym.

Residents were told to drink bottled water after sewage backed up into the Granite Falls water supply.

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Flooding in the northern plains

A weekend blizzard compounded weather woes in the Plains states. A look at flooding and blizzard conditions:



Drill instructor pleads guilty to sexual acts

ABERDEEN PROVING GROUND, Md. (AP) — A former drill instructor pleaded guilty Monday to having sex with 11 trainees in violation of Army rules but denied charges he raped eight women under his command.

Staff Sgt. Delmar Simpson, 32, said he had sex with subordinates in his office, his home and at a hotel on another military base. In most cases, he said, the sex was initiated either by the

woman or by both partners.

"She would come to my office and we would engage in conversation and one thing would just lead to another, sir," he told a military judge, describing one encounter.

The 13-year enlisted man pleaded guilty to a total of 16 counts alleging he had sex or otherwise engaged in improper conduct toward a subordinate at the Ordinance Center and School at

Aberdeen Proving Ground.

Each of the charges carries up to two years in prison and dishonorable discharge.

He pleaded innocent to 21 counts of rape and to 57 other counts, including forcible sodomy, robbery and extortion. He could get life in prison if convicted of a single count of rape. His trial could begin this week.

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