

A&M, state education officials reach deal on arena financing

COLLEGE STATION (AP) — Texas A&M University officials said Thursday they have settled a dispute with state education regulators over financing of the school's new arena. Texas A&M said it will use private donations to immediately create an endowment of at least \$2 million for academic scholarships. The University promised to have at least \$5 million in the endowment within five years. The school also will allot at least \$2 mil-

lion more than planned to an endowment for operations and maintenance of Reed Arena, now under construction. "I'm pleased," A&M President Ray Bowen said. "I never had any doubt from the beginning that we'd reach an understanding about it." The deal requires formal approval by the Texas A&M University System Board of Regents. The agreement came three months after the Texas Higher Education Coordinating

Board urged A&M to raise more private money for construction of the special events center when a land donation yielded \$12 million less than expected. Some board members said approval of the arena in 1994 hinged on proceeds from the tract near Katy, and that they were told it was worth \$13 million. It ultimately sold for \$1 million. They believed A&M had promised to use private money to pay for a significant portion of the construction costs.

Bowen said there had been a misunderstanding since student fees were to be used to pay for the stadium. But the university did plan to reimburse the student fund with profits from the land deal. Bowen and Leonard Rauch, the coordinating board chairman, decided Thursday on scholarships instead of putting the money into the general student fund and possibly spending it on something else in the future. "It's a more direct, very visible benefit. I think

it made everybody feel good," Bowen said. Rauch also was satisfied with the agreement. "What I didn't want is money being taken away from student use fees to pay for building," Rauch said. The \$36.8 million arena, the school's special events center, will seat 12,500, host graduation, basketball games, rodeos and ice shows for 43,000 students in the surrounding community. It is scheduled to open in spring 1998.

Lawyer indicted on ambulance chasing charges

COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP) — One of the nation's richest personal injury lawyers was indicted Thursday on ambulance-chasing charges, accused of hiring "accident runners" to recruit clients after a deadly airline crash. John M. O'Quinn, who earned an estimated \$40 million from breast implant cases, was charged along with three other Houston lawyers with illegally soliciting clients after the crash of USAir Flight 1016 in Charlotte, N.C.

"I have done nothing wrong and I am innocent of the charges," said O'Quinn, who represents the families of five victims from the crash.

"Not one client has complained about me. Nobody I represent in the USAir case has complained about me."

Flight 1016 was traveling to Columbia when it went down in a thunderstorm, killing 37 of the people aboard.

Most of the victims were from South Carolina.

Of the five families O'Quinn represents, three have settled their claims, while two others are in settlement talks with the airline.

O'Quinn and the others are accused of improperly soliciting the business of four victims' families following the USAir crash, state Attorney General Charlie Condon said.

The lawyers also face conspiracy charges in the hiring of the lawyer "accident runners."

South Carolina bars lawyers from personally soliciting accident victims.

O'Quinn also is charged with splitting fees or agreeing to split fees with non-lawyers and soliciting legal business in South Carolina without having been admitted or sworn to practice in the state.

Attorneys Carl D. Shaw and Charles Benton Musslewhite were indicted on charges of conspiracy, solicitation, splitting with non-lawyers and practicing law without being admitted or sworn. Lawyer Charles Benton Musslewhite Jr. was indicted on a solicitation charge.

The indictments end a year-long investigation prompted when Condon was contacted by U.S. District Judge Joseph Anderson, who was the trial judge in the case brought against O'Quinn by some victims' families and survivors.

A 12-member jury last month found the airline, now known as USAirways, liable for actual damages but not for potentially costly punitive damages. Several passengers and victims' families have settled with the carrier, but the amounts remain secret.

Similar civil allegations were filed against O'Quinn and others in December by the State Bar of Texas. O'Quinn — who earned an estimated \$40 million in 1994 from his work on breast implant and similar cases, according to Forbes magazine — denied any wrongdoing at that time.

The Texas Bar alleged O'Quinn paid about \$100,000 to the elder Musslewhite to help pay for lining up clients. Musslewhite allegedly signed up the attorney "runners" to contact potential clients.

Betty Edward of Houston, allegedly was a runner in the USAir case, was granted immunity from charges in exchange for information on the lawyers. Condon's spokesman Robb McElroy said.

"Basically I'm finally glad they're trying to get this done," said the elder Musslewhite.

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