

Friday • November 21, 1997

It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas

Winter Spirit of Aggieland agenda raises questions about spirit of the season

Bah humbug! Indeed, this is a column that some will think was written by Scrooge himself. That, however, is untrue as this column is about the true spirit of Christmas.



JOHN LEMONS
columnist

Brace yourselves Ags, Texas A&M University has yet another new tradition. This tradition is the unholy coupling of Yuletide spirit and Aggie spirit. It is called the Winter Spirit of Aggieland. The Winter Spirit of Aggieland's goal is to plaster campus with strings of lights and wreaths to celebrate the holiday season. While the well-intentioned promoters of the Winter Spirit of Aggieland have a neat idea, Aggieland needs to be decorated about as much as it needs a monorail, which is to say, not at all.

Neat ideas, seem to abound in the Student Senate — community bicycles for Aggies to ride around campus, runoff elections for yell leaders and decorating campus for Christmas. Unfortunately, two of those three ideas proved to be massive failures because they were impractical. The verdict is still out on whether or not the Winter Spirit of Aggieland will be a failure. The Winter Spirit of Aggieland, though, does have something in common with these previous Senate failures — it, too, is impractical.

According to their homepage, the Winter Spirit of Aggieland committee has estimated the cost for phase I of this enormous project at \$28,500. That amount is not an error. Student Government actually intends to spend nearly 30 grand on decorations. This obscene amount of money could pay for an undergraduate degree. This money could also be used to help build a home with Habitat for Humanity. At the very least, instead of wasting the money on temporary eye candy, 28,500 dollars could be used to benefit somebody, anybody. Surely, the Boy Scouts or the Brazos Valley Food Pantry or even the Brazos Valley Animal Shelter would better benefit from this stash than Aggies.

At least Student Government has had the sense to fund this travesty through private contributions. Indeed, the Winter Spirit of Aggieland committee has been working hard to solicit funds.

Jeremiah Williams, Vice President of Student Relations for Student Government, said the committee's 43 members have been raising funds since the summer.

"We've raised \$15,000 dollars. About \$6,000 of that is from student monies." The Winter Spirit of Aggieland com-

mittee should be commended for their diligent work in raising funds for what they believe is an important event for A&M. But, despite the committee members' good intentions, the Winter Spirit of Aggieland is still impractical.

Consider when the decorations will be gracing campus. The month of December conveniently coincides with Christmas, but inconveniently conflicts with students schedules. Finals end on Dec. 17, which means students will not even be in town to see the decorations during half the time they are on display. Furthermore, when December rolls around, students are not interested in Christmas lights, they are worried about finals. By this point in the semester, students don't need warm, fuzzy feelings of holiday spirit, they need the knowledge required to pass their finals.

Unfortunately, the Winter Spirit of Aggieland benefits students in no tangible way. It arrogantly assumes students need an infusion of winter cheer, whatever that is, to make it through finals.

There is a name for such useless, expensive projects — they're called White Elephants. This is the kind of thinking that brought to campus the Caine Victory Eagle statue and introduced to the world innovative products like Crystal Pepsi.

The worst part of Student Government's White Elephant is that in an attempt to be inclusive, it de-emphasizes the true meaning of Christmas. Unless you are a Pagan for whom the "holiday season" is a time to celebrate the winter solstice, the holiday most associated with winter is Christmas.

Christmas is about the birth of Jesus, not winter spirit. When warm, fuzzy feelings, hot cocoa and \$28,500 decoration projects replace the savior of the universe, there is a problem. For Christians, Christmas is an important devotional time. To have that fact ignored and replaced by touch-feely holiday cheer is insensitive and insulting.

Just because an idea is neat, does not mean it should be implemented. The Winter Spirit of Aggieland is a neat idea. It also is a flawed idea. The project's expense makes Aggies look decadent and wasteful. Furthermore, it is impractical and ignores the true meaning of Christmas.

Student Senate should be creating projects that actually benefit students, not wasting money.

It is time for students to remind the senate of that. To that end, I encourage you to email the Student Senate at senate-s@tamu.edu and demand they pull the plug on the Winter Spirit of Aggieland.

And to make your point, be sure you finish you note with a stirring bah humbug.

John Lemons is an electrical engineering graduate student.

The Winter Spirit of Aggieland was formed in the Student Senate in the Spring of 1997. The student body was questioned as to whether or not they would like to see the University decorated with lights for the month of December.

The majority of students agreed that the University did need to be decorated during this time of year. The title 'Winter Spirit of Aggieland,' describes our mission of hoping to keep students spirits up during the winter season.

Not only will the lights, ribbons and bows be up during December, but we also plan on having a fun run in January.

To make our committee a success, we have been dependent on donations from former students, Texas A&M supporters, campus organizations and the community.

Our major fund raiser has been a program titled 'Buy a Tree.' All of the groups listed above have been invited to purchase one of the 72 trees lining New Main Drive to be decorated with lights.

Donations are also paying for wreaths, ribbons and extra costs for decorating. The Winter Spirit of Aggieland encourages community spirit. Aggieland is the connection between area residents, students and former students.

The community is very excited that A&M is decorating the campus at this time of year.

The Winter Spirit of Aggieland is one of the numerous events featured in Holiday on the Brazos' celebration of holiday sights and sounds throughout Bryan-College Station.

Our committee is lighting the way to a new tradition, therefore all of the lights and wreaths will be stored for annual use.

We feel that this committee will have a great impact on the University and the community.

Signs that look similar to presents will sit in front of the trees that have been bought by clubs, businesses and residents. This display will enhance the relationship between A&M and the community. In future years, I see this committee expanding the decorations to allow for more decoration on campus. The committee is working very hard to make this first year a memorable one.

To kick off the Winter Spirit of Aggieland, we are having a Lighting Festival at 6:30 p.m. on December 1, with music and refreshments to start the festivities.

The ceremony will start at 7 p.m. with the Singing Cadets as part of the program. Our Silver Bell sponsor is Fred Brown who will also plug in the lights. Other entertainment will be provided by the Reveliers, the Aggie Wranglers, the Fish Band and the Bryan High Choir.

Everyone is invited to come and enjoy the evening and be part of the first-ever Winter Spirit of Aggieland Lighting Festival.

The Winter Season can get pretty dreary around Bryan and College Station. Students are preparing to go home for the Winter Break and studying for finals. There is a lot of spirit around campus during football season, and during the building of Bonfire.

Students can't wait for E-Walk and have that burning desire to beat the hell out of L.U.

Bonfire is a wonderful time, and then everyone goes home to spend some time with the family. When they return, it's nasty weather, their spirits have dropped because they know that it is time to buckle down and study, study, study.

What better way to keep students spirits up during this time than by lighting the campus.

We feel that a little bit of decoration on campus will keep students spirits up and keep them motivated knowing that the winter break is almost here.

With ribbons on lamp posts and wreaths on the entrances to campus it will be a constant reminder that the holidays are here.

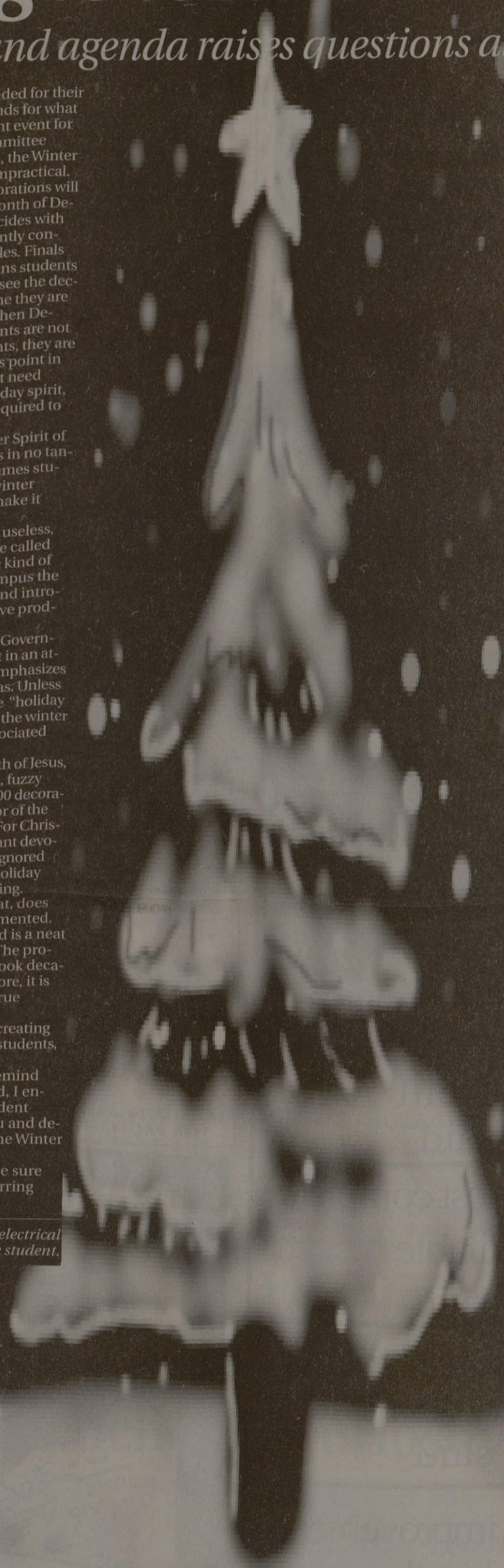
The lights will be on in the evening keeping the campus lit and hopefully students spirits lit, too.

Not only will it help lift students' spirits, but Aggieland is a major focus of Bryan and College Station, so the community will be in the holiday spirit mode also.

Suzanne Smith is a senior agricultural development major and Chair of the Winter Spirit of Aggieland Committee.



SUZANNE SMITH
guest columnist



Holiday season is time for celebrating, not ignoring cultures

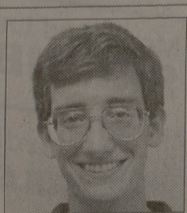
American educators insist on broadening the minds of their charges. Students must be exposed, they argue, to various cultures and foreign ideas.

In order to succeed, our young people must learn as much as they can about cultures — except for the Christian culture which must be hidden from students.

As the end of the calendar year approaches, many people begin celebrating a variety of holidays.

Hanukkah, Kwaanza, New Year's Day, the Winter Solstice and the evil Christmas all occur at the same time of the year.

Many communities, fearing the effects of the "Christmas Spirit," have taken extraordinary means to protect the innocent from this joyous holiday.



DAVID JOHNSTON
columnist

Public schools are often at the center of these anti-culture sentiments.

Some school bus drivers are warned not to wish their passengers "Merry Christmas" (but are not issued decrees about Hanukkah or any other celebration).

Many schools have banned religious Christmas songs from choir performances or allow only instrumental versions of popular carols.

Even the Christmas tree — which actually is more Druid than Christian — endures careful scrutiny. Some schools only allow the pines if the are labeled "Giving Trees," "Unity Trees" or some other "innocuous" term.

Here at A&M, the Student Senate dubbed a new committee the "Winter Spirit of Aggieland" because they feared any name which included the word "Christmas" or even "holiday" might cause problems.

They pray before every meeting, but worry that students might be offended by the word "holiday"?

At the extreme end of cultural sanitation is a Nebraska school that banned Santa Claus because of

his ties to Saint Nicholas.

The school invented a replacement — Leon, a mystical space traveler who brings presents to girls and boys everywhere.

Oddly enough, this crusade to erase all vestiges of Christianity does not stop at Christmas. A New Jersey school this year banned Halloween.

Not because witches, demons and zombies caused nightmares or hinted at association with pagan religious rituals, but rather because the holiday originates from All Hallow's Eve, a horribly Christian event.

Christmas is observed by over 90 percent of the American population, so it makes no sense to remove it from our schools.

The Supreme Court has said Christmas activities and celebrations are permissible. As long as a religion is only discussed and not promoted, there are no rights being violated.

No court has ever questioned the legality of carols, and Christmas trees have yet to cause major harm or scandal.

The attempts to ignore this major Christian holiday make no sense.

Educators hope their students will be familiar with various cultures, but neglect the prevalent culture in the United States.

These recent moves are not in response to laws or complaints, but are a result of fear and political correctness.

The removal of Christmas decorations or carols from public schools serves no beneficial purpose. Years from now students will not credit their success to the absence of Christmas trees from their classrooms.

This is a time of year to celebrate various cultures.

The proximity of so many celebrations creates a great opportunity to learn about and contrast different backgrounds and traditions. In the meantime, all Aggies should go out and have a Merry Glitter Season.

Dave Johnston is a senior mathematics major.