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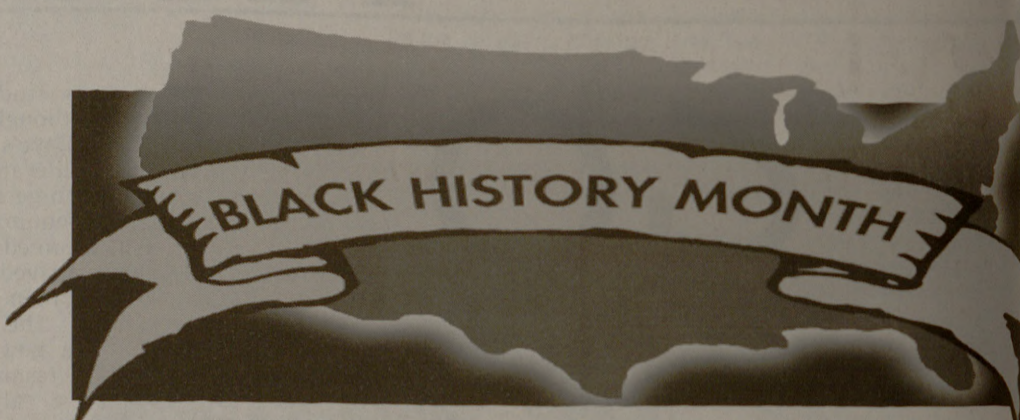
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AGGIELIFE

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McDonald reflects A&M history first African-American yell leader

BY SUSAN OVERCASH
The Battalion

As the first African-American yell leader at A&M in 1992, Ronnie McDonald set an example of strong leadership and perseverance that echoes in today's push for cultural diversity.

McDonald grew up in Bastrop, where he graduated Bastrop High School in 1989. Like many students, McDonald said he chose Texas A&M because of its distance from his parents: far enough for independence but close enough for occasional laundry services and a home-cooked meal.

A political science major, McDonald was a Fish Camp counselor and an active member of MSC Hospitality.

He ran for yell leader in spring of 1992 and was elected for the 1992-93 school year, his senior year.

"The makeup of A&M and community, but also for the whole nation," McDonald said. "This is very important for the future of A&M in becoming a great university."

After graduating from A&M, McDonald worked for five years before being elected to the position of Bastrop County Judge on January 4, 1998. He and his wife, also an Aggie, now live in Bastrop.

McDonald said his experiences as a yell leader helped develop his leadership abilities today.

"Being a yell leader prepared me for what I'm doing now, in that I interact with others constantly," McDonald said. "In both my recent election and as a yell leader, I represented many factions, all of whom came together to vote for me."

However, in the '92 yell leader election, students were not just voting for Ronnie McDonald.

It was amazing to see the many different groups



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE BATTALION
Ronnie McDonald leads a group of Aggies in practice in '93.

"I'm now a county judge in Bastrop, campaign process is much the same," McDonald said. "Our county is close to 50,000 people around 42,000."

"As you talk to people, you develop an understanding of their needs. Talking to as many individuals as possible really broadened my horizons."

Joel Garrett, president of the Black Aggie Committee, said McDonald's election to yell leader sets an excellent example for other minorities.

"I see him as a trailblazer who opened the door for anyone else of color to pursue their goals," Garrett said. "As I understand, at first he was accepted, but he stuck with it. He's an example of perseverance."

Students of all backgrounds, McDonald said, provide a growing foundation for cultural diversity at A&M.

"Through time, we all leave our mark. A&M is no longer the same," McDonald said. "We are all from different backgrounds, but we overcome these differences to reach common goals."

Watson said McDonald's election to yell leader also helped drive the movement for a diverse student body here at A&M.

"Diversity has been a number-one goal for a while," Watson said. "He has taken a step further in pursuing diversity at this university."

Brandon Neff, head yell leader and political science major, said that McDonald's election shows that race is no longer a factor in leadership positions around campus.

"There are no borders or boundaries," Neff said. "Anyone can achieve their goals and what they want to do."

After graduation, McDonald found that his former student network outside of university proved invaluable. His first campaign donation came from a former Texas A&M student.

"As a student, we all love the traditions and the spirit of Aggieland," McDonald said. "The real world, it's different; you realize you have an enormous network and extended family ties."

As the first African-American yell leader, McDonald symbolized the evolution of cultural diversity at A&M.

However, McDonald said he remains focused on the true spirit of Aggieland, the network of friends and family created in his years at this university.

"It's good to realize that the Aggie family is there when you need them."

"Through time, we all leave our mark so that A&M is no longer the same. We are all from different backgrounds, but we overcome these differences to reach common goals."

— Ronnie McDonald
Former yell leader

who came together, not just to support me but to support the spirit of Aggieland, something we believe in," McDonald said.

Eric Watson, a senior meteorology major and friend of McDonald's, said McDonald's initiative makes him an effective leader.

"Ronnie actually brought me down here and showed me around," Watson said. "He has this great leadership quality and really takes opportunities and pursues them."

McDonald said his experiences as a yell leader also allowed him to develop characteristics useful in his life today.

"As a yell leader, you're in a stadium full of folks, but you're also interacting with different individuals around campus every day," McDonald said. "That experience has allowed me to communicate without barriers or apprehension."

In particular, McDonald's campaign for yell leader helped him learn to understand and utilize the human resources present around him.



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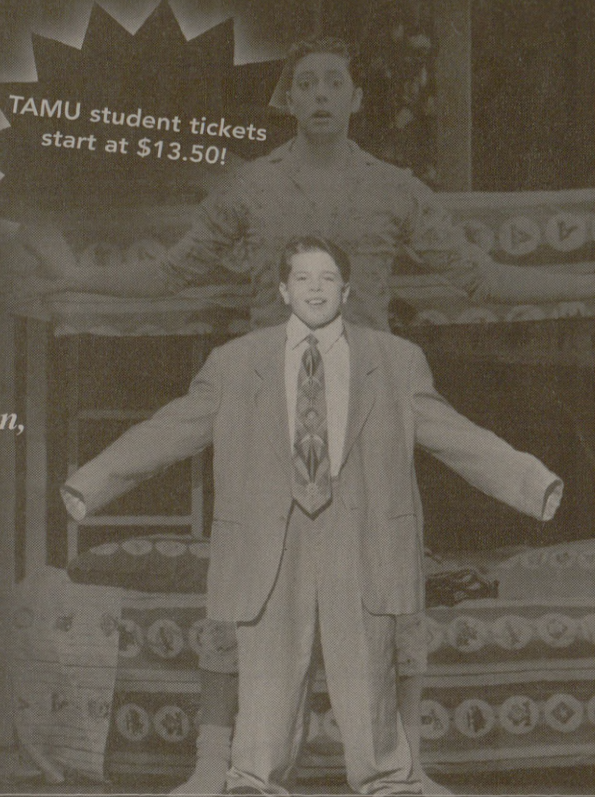
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