

A great place to live (for some)

Enhancing lives of all Bryan citizens should take priority over plans to build tourism center



CALEB MCDANIEL

Bryan's many recent attempts to court grandeur and glory are a sad case of putting the cart before the horse.

It all began, of course, with Bryan's Cinderella dance through the All-America City competition earlier this summer. The pageant ended without Bryan in its court, but nevertheless, loyal residents took their chance to compete in the contest as an opportunity to congratulate themselves.

At the first meeting of the Bryan City Council after the competition, plaques and pats on the back were in abundance.

In fact, at that July 13 meeting, Bryanites were so invigorated by the excitement of their performance that they cheerfully listened to a proposal for a shiny new visitors' center to showcase Bryan's many wonders. Currently, city officials are drafting an application to a reimbursement program through the Texas Department of Transportation to get funding for the tourist trap. The multimillion dollar proposal would erect a museum possibly

featuring an exhibit of classic cars and would spotlight various local attractions like Texas A&M University and the George Bush Presidential Library and Museum, which are curiously located outside of Bryan.

Now, Bryan pride is nothing new to residents of the Twin City area. After all, drivers entering the city from College Station are greeted with signs dubbing Bryan "a great place to live."

Not that Bryan pride is necessarily bad.

Recognizing the need for improvement is the first step toward making healthy, wealthy communities.

However, the visitors' center is a monument to well-intentioned civic pride gone awry. In their rush to wear some well-deserved laurels, the Bryan City Council must be careful not to rest on them.

An expensive tourism center would be too much, too soon.

First of all, the idea of the visitors' center begs the question of what there is to visit in Bryan. The proposal to build the museum would mainly direct people to tourist attractions in College Station, not in Bryan.

One wonders at the logic of building a visitors' center to direct visitors to another city. All of the

economic incentives of cultivating tourism are lost if tourists are told the real sights to see are beyond the city limits.

More importantly, though, the proposal begs the question of whether Bryan has more urgent needs. The answer to that question is an emphatic yes.

Even the casual participant in Texas A&M's volunteer extravaganza, Big Event, knows there are parts of Bryan in desperate need of attention.

The Twin City Mission has its hands full ministering to disadvantaged people in Bryan who desperately need assistance.

And then there are basic questions hanging perpetually in the stratosphere just over Bryan, such as, why are there more frequent electricity blackouts in the city than there are in a lead box?

Indeed, it is hard to find any well-developed reason for a multi-million dollar tourism center in Bryan (about tourist attractions in College Station) beyond the untapped zeal of a city enamored with itself.

But before expending energy and money on finding money to build a visitors' center without a significant return on its investment, Bryan should continue to direct its attention where attention is due — on the many Bryan



GABRIEL RUENES/THE BATTALION

residents who are still impoverished, on the many areas of the city that are still imperiled and on the many civic issues that more directly impact citizens.

It should be granted that Bryan has done an extraordinary amount of improvement in each

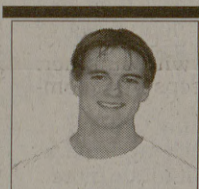
of these areas. Programs like Project Unity and the Health for All clinic are shining examples of civic projects which are worth something.

But to leave these achievements in the shadow of a lavish tourist center would grossly ignore

the work that must still be done. Before rejoicing in its rags-to-riches story, the city must first rid itself of every last one of its rags.

Caleb McDaniel is a junior history major.

Virginity testing in Africa echoes elitist attitude of A&M students



CHRIS HUFFINES

In the country of South Africa, there is a new and somewhat dangerous phenomenon at work which should dissuade Aggies from being elitist.

Young men and women are undergoing virginity tests in an effort to stop the spread of disease, especially HIV/AIDS.

However, there is one tiny problem with this. This testing is leading to an unhealthy, elitist attitude that does more harm than good.

But what can be unhealthy about any practice that not only prevents the spread of disease, but also leads to increased morality? Nothing per se.

But it is the peripherals, like pork on a congressional bill, which are causing the problems.

The test is, for the female half, a rather private but straightforward physical exam.

For the menfolk, however, the exam tests the patient's ability to urinate, without using his hands, over a wire stretched three feet off the ground.

Those who can are dubbed virgins. Those who cannot are not.

Many of these tests are taking place in public buildings like churches, school, and community centers.

Those who pass the tests are feted and celebrated in traditional Zulu fashion, although the testing is not limited to Zulus. They are treated like hometown heroes.

Girls and women, especially, who pass the test, are looked on as being special, a status that is signified with decorative marks on their foreheads.

Those who do not pass the test are shunned.

Because of this one test, friendships have been broken, classes have been formed and lines have been drawn.

Without debating the scientific validity of the test (especially the guys' exam), it is painfully obvious that this new movement is based on two, completely wrong, assumptions.

The first is that virginity makes a person inherently

better and disease-free. The second is that making a certain choice gives one the right to feel better than others.

The first assumption is, quite frankly, a morality question and better suited for a midnight-to-dawn discussion than an opinion column.

However, the second assumption is both very important to discuss and very vital to the interests of Texas A&M.

A&M, the University that both prides itself on being different than everyone else — and better — is beginning the exact same slide into elitism that these South Africans have completed. It is something that can and will have extraordinarily bad consequences in the future if it is left unchecked.

Aggies are known for believing they are better than every other university in the world, which is entirely true.

Why are Aggies better? Aggies will quickly respond they are better because of Texas A&M's traditions, atmosphere, academics and the 10,000 other things the recruiters make a point of mentioning.

There is an attitude at this University that upon going to Fish Camp and Midnight Yell, a sort of divine mandate settles upon freshmen, an attitude which leads some Aggies to brag who have not yet earned bragging rights.

These Aggies have bought into the general myth that Aggies are better without going to the trouble of actually bettering themselves. Sadly enough, these shams are usually found inhabiting the ranks of the most vocal of A&M's supporters, alongside real Aggies who have reason to be proud.

Fortunately, most Aggies are smart enough to root out the man from the myth. Before long, though, the two will be hopelessly entwined.

And then it will be too late to save the University from really becoming just like every other school in the country — and even a bit like certain Zulu tribes in South Africa.

Chris Huffines is a senior speech communication major.

MAIL CALL

Stereotype unfair, not all Southern whites are racists

In response to Beverly Mireles' Aug. 2 column.

Mireles' column on cyberhate was well-intentioned, but I was thoroughly annoyed by this comment: "When you have such a large population of Southern white people, there are going to be racists." This implies a stereotype that Southern whites, or at least a good number of them, are racist.

I don't deny that the South, particularly in the past, has had its share of racial incidents, but it is unfair and wrong to characterize Southern whites as racists. Other regions of the country also suffer from racial troubles. Illinois, for example, where the so-called World Church of the Creator is located, is only in the South if you are from Minnesota.

Most Southern whites, such as myself, are not racist and view the Confederate flag as a symbol of regional pride and heritage, not racial oppression.

Quit letting a few bad apples spoil the whole barrel. These kinds of stereotypes that lead to the kind of hatred that is on hate sites.

David C. McCaughrin
Class of '99

University should inform parents of alcohol violations

In response to Aaron Meier's July 15 column.

Most students at A&M are there to learn and make use of the money their parents are spending. However, there are those who go on late-night drinking binges, and they get hurt, kill someone or get killed themselves.

Then it is the responsibility of the campus police and the administration to call parents and tell them their beloved son or daughter is either in jail or in the morgue because they went out drinking.

How would you prefer for your parents to find out you used drugs or consumed alcohol?

From a ticket and a phone call or a visit to the jail?

There is a reason the University wants to implement a parent-notification rule.

It is because students are not there to binge drink; they are there to learn and be a part of society.

I would rather have someone be a "tattletale" than a pall bearer.

Christianne Mendenhall
Mothers Against Drunk Driving

Reform Party must transcend conflict between Ventura, Perot

As was the case in 1996, the Reform Party is trying to convince the media that it is about more than personalities. News reports of the recent Reform Party convention focused on the conflict between Ross Perot and Jesse Ventura.

Meanwhile, the party delegates and grassroots workers are screaming, "We are more than Jesse Ventura and Ross Perot."

But their message is not getting through.

If their message does not get through soon, the Reform Party will fall to pieces much like Teddy Roosevelt's Bull Moose Party and George Wallace's American Independent Party did.

The media, fairly or not, is captivated by the power struggle seemingly going on in the upper echelons of the party and has paid little attention to other Reform Party issues.

Because of this, Reform Party's call for fiscal responsibility and political accountability are not being conveyed to the public.

Much of the blame for this lies with the Reform Party itself. In 1996, many Reformers tried to distance the group from Ross Perot. They believed in the principles the party was founded on and knew the party needed to shift away from Perot.



MARC GREETHER

Perot himself urged Richard Lamm, a former governor of Colorado, to campaign for the party's presidential nomination. However, Perot eventually decided to run for the nomination and then won it, further giving the impression that the party is nothing but a cult of personality.

Had the party delegates elected Lamm or anyone other than Perot, the media might have been more open to the idea that the party had worthwhile goals or interesting ideas and reported them accordingly.

"The Reform Party is ... not a party of two people."

As it stands, Perot is still the name most thought of when the Reform Party is mentioned. Although Jesse Ventura's surprising win in the Minnesota governor's race has garnered plenty of attention and has kept the party in the news.

Because many in the media think the party belongs to Perot, Ventura's entrance into the spotlight caused them to question the Texan's hold on the party.

When the two supported different candidates for chairman of the party, the media reported signs of a rift growing within the party.

Those making such reports are completely off base.

The Reform Party is made up of thousands of people with the common belief that politics in this country are seriously screwed up. It is not a party of two people.

But if the Reform Party is going to survive, it must follow the lead of other successful non-mainstream parties, such as the Libertarian Party. Otherwise, the Reform Party will soon cease to exist.

The Libertarians have set a good example of how to build grassroots organization. They have slowly built up the party since 1971.

More than 200 members currently hold office around the country, most serving in local offices. The Libertarians have held ballot access in all 50 states for the last two presidential elections — no small feat for a third party. Their membership rolls are growing and party leaders see no end to the growth in sight.

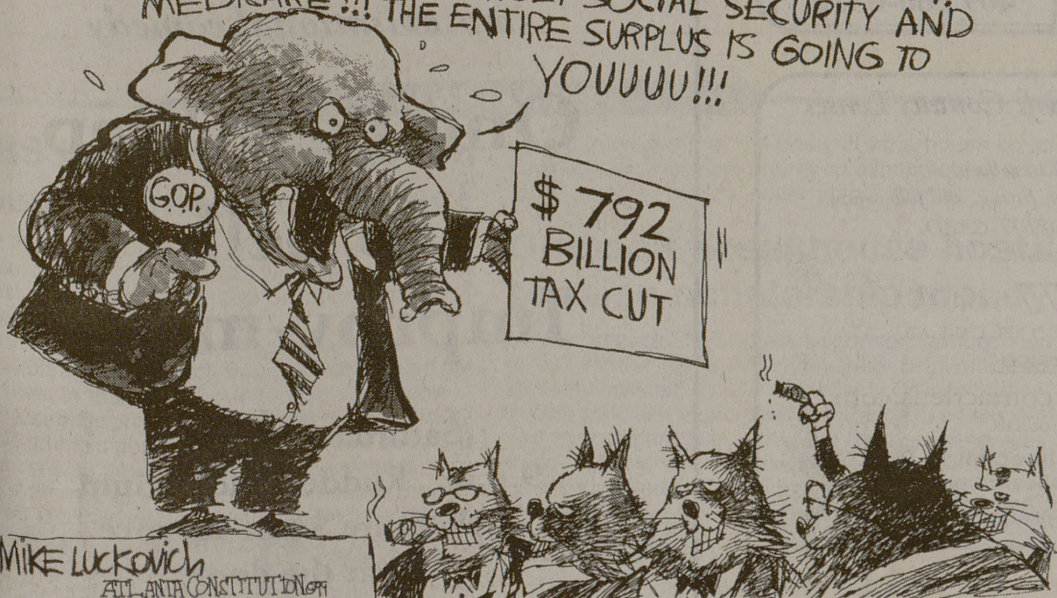
The reasons for the Libertarian Party's success are clear. They have focused their efforts on a local level and their recruitment is always based on their message, not the appeal of a star candidate or two.

Unless the Reform Party learns to build this way from the bottom up, it will perish.

Both successful computer companies and wrestling careers can be built using star power, but political parties cannot.

Marc Grether is a mathematics graduate student.

TO SAY THANKS, I'M LIQUIDATING THE SURPLUS! YOU HEARD ME, IT'S ALL GOING!! FORGET THE DEBT! FORGET SOCIAL SECURITY AND MEDICARE!!! THE ENTIRE SURPLUS IS GOING TO YOUUUU!!!



MIKE LUCKOVICH
ALL-STAR CONSTITUTIONALIST