

THE BATTALION

106 YEARS AT TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY

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College Station, Texas

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Fall 1999 in review



FILE PHOTOS/THE BATTALION, BREWER/AP

Texas A&M, Bryan-College Station face trials, tragedies over course of year

BY JEANETTE SIMPSON
The Battalion

Texas A&M University and the Bryan-College area have seen many changes and tragedies this semester. Stories from lowering of the legal blood-alcohol level to the conviction and death sentence of a Jasper man to the deaths of students and former students have affected attitudes on this campus and in the community.

Most recently, media throughout the nation have turned toward A&M, questioning procedures, asking tough questions and, like many, demanding answers. Yet, it was not just the tragic incidents that moved the media to continue to focus on the campus.

Lower-blood-alcohol-content law goes into effect

A law passed by the Texas State Legisla-

ture lowered the legal limit of blood-alcohol content (BAC) from 0.10 to 0.08 early this semester. Lowering of allowed blood-alcohol levels means that with one drink, 1 ounce of 80-proof liquor, a 12-ounce beer, an 8-ounce wine cooler or a 4-ounce glass of wine — a 175-pound male would be legally intoxicated after three drinks in one sitting. A 125-pound female would be legally intoxicated after two drinks. The lowering is an effort by the Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission to decrease the number of deaths caused by people driving under the influence of alcohol.

Jasper Trial

Lawrence Russell Brewer, the second of three men tried for the dragging death of James Byrd, Jr., was sentenced to death following a first capital murder conviction. A change of venue brought the trial to Bryan; not only did media flock to the

area, but the trial also brought many controversial groups to the area. The trial moved groups at A&M to speak out about racial diversity and sensitivity.

Plane crash kills 5

Not long after classes resumed for the fall, the A&M family suffered the loss of several Aggies. A Cessna model 182A plane owned by Ags Over Texas crashed onto a private pasture by Coulter Field in Bryan, killing five people. Authorities speculated that the plane, commonly called "Duct Tape," ascended 300 to 400 feet, then "stalled" and plunged nose-first into the field.

Those who died were Mark Woodings, owner of Ags Over Texas and former A&M student, former students Jonathan Warden and Lela Futch, and current students Robert Puryear, the pilot and a senior, and freshman Sarah Miller.

Car accident claims 6 lives

Another tragedy struck A&M in mid-October when Brandon Kallmeyer, a freshman animal science major, fell asleep while driving on FM 60.

Maj. Mike Patterson of the College Station Police Department said Kallmeyer's Ford Ranger veered onto the shoulder and struck eight student pedestrians. The accident occurred near the Tau Kappa Epsilon (TKE) fraternity house. Six students were killed and two were injured.

Those killed were Ted W. Bruton, a 21-year-old A&M agriculture and life sciences major, and Baylor students Tricia Calp, Emily Hollister, Erika Lanham and Dolan Wastel and William Flores from Southwest Texas University.

The eight students had parked on the shoulder and were preparing to cross the road to attend a party at the TKE house.

Bonfire Collapse

Eight days prior to the biggest game of the A&M football season, Bonfire collapsed in the hours just before dawn. Within minutes, the Corps of Cadets, members of residence halls and other students gathered to help find those who were trapped within the stack.

Some helped to move the logs, most prayed, some just stared in complete disbelief of what had happened. In the end, 12 Aggies died, 27 were injured and Aggies around the world grieved. In the hours, days weeks that followed, and businesses provided support for those working on the rescue effort and the families whose children were.

Churches opened their doors to hold vigils and prayer services to help students cope

SEE 1999 ON PAGE 2.

Regents approve new passageway

BY BRADY CREEL
The Battalion

A pedestrian passageway will bridge the gap between two worlds, Main Campus and West Campus, by eliminating the barriers that now separate them — Wellborn Road and the Union Pacific railroad tracks.

Tom Williams, Parking, Traffic and Transportation Services (PTTS) director, said the \$10 million pedestrian passageway was approved by the Board of Regents last week. Construction of the passageway and new West Campus Parking Garage will begin in Fall 2000.

Alice Macfarlane, project manager for Facilities Planning for the Texas A&M University System, said many new academic and recreational buildings — including the George Bush Presidential Library — have been built on West Campus recently.

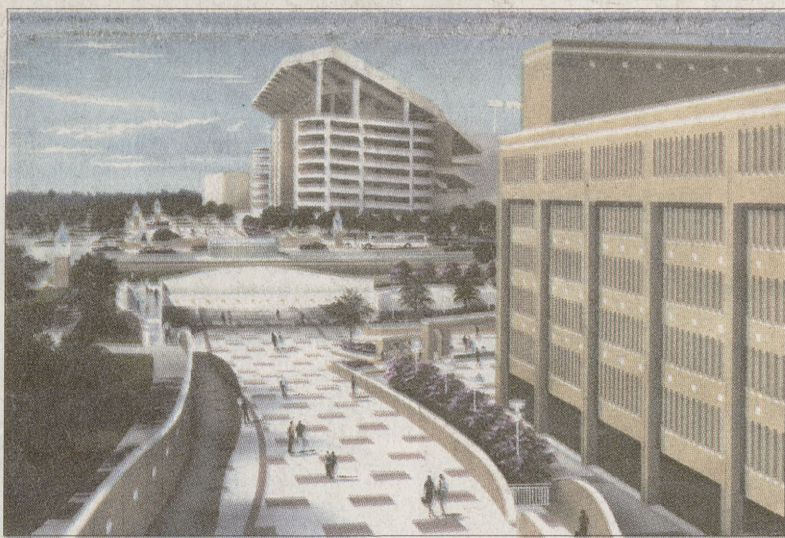
Macfarlane said Wellborn Road and the Union Pacific railroad tracks present a hazardous situation to those who need to get to West Campus.

"Safety will be a primary consideration in the design of this facility, which will be an attractive amenity for Texas A&M University," she said.

Macfarlane said pedestrian traffic across the thoroughfare has risen dramatically, and projected increases in automobile activity on Wellborn Road and Union Pacific's train activity creates a safety concern for students.

The pedestrian passageway not only will integrate Main Campus and West Campus but also will beautify the area in between.

Macfarlane said the passageway will connect the new West Campus Parking Garage to the areas surrounding it. The passageway will start at the Kyle Field plaza and will pass beneath Wellborn Road



SPECIAL TO THE BATTALION

The pedestrian passageway will link Main Campus and West Campus.

and the railroad tracks. It will come in at ground level of the new parking garage, and one ramp will continue toward the Student Recreation Center.

"On the west side, it will be integrated to the West Campus Parking Garage and recreation sports center," Macfarlane said. "On the east side, it will join the plaza in front of Kyle Field."

The passageway will span 60 feet

at its widest point. There will be a five-foot designated bicycle lane on both sides of the passageway.

Williams said there will be some diversion of both vehicular and railroad traffic during the construction project, but the tracks and Wellborn Road will remain as they currently are once the project is complete.

"The railroad tracks will remain

SEE PASSAGWAY ON PAGE 2.

Consultant: Samples from Bonfire site indicate stable ground

BY STUART HUTSON
The Battalion

The soil conditions at the Bonfire site did not contribute to the stack's collapse, according to an independent consultant hired by Texas A&M University.

Philip Buchanan, president of Buchanan-Soil Mechanics Inc. of College Station, told *The Dallas Morning News* yesterday that tests on soil samples taken the day after the collapse indicated nothing unstable about the ground at the Bonfire site.

"It was not a soil failure," Buchanan, who related the event to the collapse of a grain silo, said. "There are cases where there have been silo failures where the soil would fail under a grain silo and it would more or less capsiz. But that did not happen here."

Bill Kibler, associate vice president for student affairs and former Bonfire faculty adviser, said Buchanan's analysis of the soil's

role in the collapse may be premature.

"I don't think that it is prudent to jump to conclusions about what did or did not cause the collapse after every new piece of evidence is revealed," Kibler said. "This will be a valuable piece of information, but we won't have any sort of definite answers until the commission releases its report in March."

Kibler said the role of the ground's stability may have been more obvious after the last collapse in 1994, but it still may be an important factor in the investigation.

"In 1994, it obviously was revealed very quickly that the ground played a big role when it fell because of the extreme weather conditions, which made the soil extremely damp," Kibler said. "They were able to treat that by mixing lime and ash into the soil

SEE BONFIRE ON PAGE 2.

Eight hotels join Lupe Medina Bill travel program

BY JULIE ZUCKER
The Battalion

Within the past few weeks, eight hotels in the Dallas area have pledged to help prevent car accidents caused by drowsy driving by joining a program that offers students a place to rest when traveling.

The program formed under The Lupe Medina Bill, which passed in September 1998. The program has grown from a few hotels helping out in the Bryan-College Station area to 18 hotels throughout Texas. Super 8 Motels and Hampton Inns allow traveling students to stay overnight at discounted rates. Students who are 55 miles away from their campuses when they arrive at the hotel can qualify for the discounts with student IDs.

A year and a half ago, Rob Ferguson, a junior political science major, lost his close friend Lupe Medina, Class of '98, in a car accident caused by drowsy driving. Since then, Ferguson initiated the Lupe Medina Bill to help students arrive at their destinations safely.

"I knew I needed to start some way to combat drowsy driving," he said. "Eleven students in Texas alone died last year from drowsy driving."

Ferguson recently traveled to Baylor University and Texas Tech University to create partnerships for the program. Baylor and Tech held Drowsy Driving Aware-

Lupe Medina Bill

- 18 hotels across Texas offer discounted rates to students who are more than 55 miles away from campus
- 73 percent of students will fall asleep once behind the wheel

RUBEN DELUNA/THE BATTALION

ness Days last week and handed out lists of contributing hotels.

"It is important everyone knows the effects of drowsy driving," Ferguson said. "I am trying to get every vice president of student affairs on campuses on board because drowsy driving affects every student."

Jon Rolph, Baylor University student body president and a junior telecommunications major, said Baylor is interested in supporting the program to prevent students from harming themselves and others.

"Baylor lost seven students in seven weeks to driving accidents, and we are behind this program emotionally and passionately," he said.

Rolph said Time Warner Cable in the Waco-Killeen area recently finished filming a public service announcement about the effects of drowsy driving.

SEE MEDINA ON PAGE 2.

Aggie animal-rights group offers aid to abandoned pets

BY RICHARD BRAY
The Battalion

Aggies Animal Welfare And Rights Ethics (AWARE), an on-campus animal-rights group formed to educate people about animal-welfare issues, is offering to pick up and find homes for pets that otherwise would be abandoned.

Jennifer Gentry, president and founder of Aggies AWARE and a junior English major, said the group organized the program because it coincides with its goals.

"Our mission is to protect the rights and welfare of all animals," she said. "[This program] falls under both categories."

Gentry said she did not realize abandoned pets was a problem but heard from older members of the community that it is in the Bryan-College Station area.

"Apparently, a lot of people, when they graduate, don't want to take their pet with them," she said.

Gentry said the problem could be avoided if students recognized the responsibilities involved in pet ownership and were certain they could provide stable homes for their pets.

"Before people adopt their pets, they really need to think about what they are going to do with them when Christmas comes, when the summer comes and when they graduate," she said.

Kathy Bice, executive director of the Brazos Animal Shelter, said she is unsure how successful the program will be because she does not believe students should be singled out as the only source of the problem.

"It is not unique to students," she said. "It doesn't matter if you are young or old, rich or poor — there is a pet-ownership problem. It doesn't matter if you are a student or not."

Bice also said December is typically the slowest month of the year for finding abandoned pets.

Students interested in finding their pet a new home can email Aggie AWARE at: jag3101@labs.tamu.edu.

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