

## BONFIRE 1999 UPDATE

### Injured student remains hospitalized in critical condition

BY JULIE ZUCKER  
The Battalion

John Comstock, the last victim in the hospital from the Nov. 18, 1999 stack collapse and a freshman biomedical science major, remains at College Station Medical Center in critical condition, the most serious level of intensive care.

Many reports claim Comstock has progressed from critical condition, but College Station Medical Center CEO Tom Jackson said the reports unfortunately are not accurate.

"It is important to know John is still in critical condition, even though we wish his prognosis was different," he said.

"[Comstock] was brought in on Nov. 18 in critical condition, and he is still in critical condition today."

Jackson said Comstock is in better health than he was when he arrived at the hospital, but he is still "in harm's way."

### AGGIE BONFIRE

The doctors' focus is on fighting infections that could hinder Comstock's recovery from his operations.

Jackson said Comstock has undergone many surgeries because of the multiple crushes he suffered when he fell from the Bonfire stacks.

Comstock had an above-the-knee amputation, a tracheotomy and was put on dialysis.

Jackson said Comstock is no longer on long-term respiratory support.

"It is very positive that his respiratory support is waning," he said.

Comstock now breathes with the respirator only at night while sleeping, progress from when he used it around the clock to assist his breathing functions.

The tracheostomy tube extending from Comstock's throat is now capped often so he can communicate and talk.

"He is able to talk and respond completely. His first question was if Bonfire burned or not. He was upset when he found out it did-



JP BEATO/THE BATTALION

Volunteers and clean-up crew help remove logs from the fallen stack on Polo Fields. Twelve students died when the structure collapsed Nov. 18; twenty-seven students were injured and Comstock is the only one that remains hospitalized.

n't," Eric Etheridge, who went to high school with Comstock and is a freshman computer science major, said.

Etheridge said Comstock was fully aware and talking when he visited Comstock a few days ago.

Etheridge was 60 feet away from the stack when it fell, and said Comstock should have been standing next to him.

"We were about to climb down together, and when I asked him if he was coming [down] he said he was right behind me.

I got down first [only] to turn around and see him fall with the stack," he said.

Etheridge said Comstock's mom, who has been with him since he was injured, is still staying in College Station.

Etheridge said he thinks it is important for his recovery that Comstock stay in town for his recovery.

"I think he is still here for visitors' sake," he said.

"So many people—people he knows and people he doesn't—come to see him and I know he and his family are very grateful."

Etheridge said Comstock is weak, but his coloring is back and he "looks like a normal person." He also said Comstock's personality is still

the same. When a nurse attempted to get Comstock to do his exercises, he said, "No, I don't want to, not now."

"It is good to see he is still the same old John," Etheridge said.

"The situation was funny, and that is who he is."

He said he wishes this had not happened to Comstock, but people need to deal with what is handed to them.

"Bad things happen, that doesn't mean we need to stop living life," he said.

"He's a fighter, and that's the best way to describe John."



## Remembered

BY JORDAN DAVIS  
The Battalion

Though 32 years have passed since his assassination, the nation paused yesterday to celebrate the life and legacy of civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Federal and state offices were closed and parades were held in cities across America.

On the Texas A&M campus, the legacy of Martin Luther King Jr. will be celebrated with a month of events sponsored by the Memorial Student Center. Kicking off this week with a variety of activities for students "Campus with a Dream," dubbed by organizers, plans to celebrate the unity and diversity of the Aggie community.

"It was decided last semester to do something related to Martin Luther King Day, and this is what we came up with," Nathan Cray, MSC executive vice-president of programs and a senior mechanical engineering major, said. "Since we know we are all Aggies and that we can come together as one, especially in light of what happened last semester [with the Bonfire], why not expand our horizons and build a foundation of cultural unity based on that unity?"

On Wednesday, the MSC Cultural Consortium will hold a unity march beginning at noon at Rudder Fountain. The event will feature speakers and an appearance by the Aggie Yell Leaders.

On Thursday, the yearly conference of the Southwestern Black Student Leadership Conference gets underway at A&M, with a keynote address by syndicated TV talk show host and motivational speaker Bertice Berry. Prior to the opening of the conference, a film will be presented in the MSC Flag Room called "Skin Deep." It is a documentary about the experience of African-American college students.

The MSC Black Awareness Committee (BAC) will also sponsor a presentation of the play "The Meeting," a fictional account of correspondence between Dr. King and fellow civil rights leader Malcolm X, on Thursday.

The week's events culminate with the "Millennium Magic" concert in G. Rollie White Coliseum. The R&B and hip-hop concert will feature nationally renowned groups DJ Jubilee and Destiny's Child.

The local community also took time to mark the holiday.

A parade was held in Bryan yesterday, while College Station held the 16th annual MLK Day celebration at the Lincoln Community Center Saturday. The evening featured music from local church gospel choirs and a performance by a Houston-based gospel singing group James Fortune and Youth for Christ.

The main draw of the evening, however, was the performance of "Who was Martin Luther King," a one-act, one-man play based on the struggles of King and African-Americans during the '60s.

But the hallmark of the holiday which coincides with King's birthday—was personal reflection and assessment for some Texas A&M students.

"Dr. King's birthday is a time for me to assess myself and the way I treat others," Breia White, a senior journalism major, said. "It is a time to reflect on myself and to examine the content of my character."

King, who was murdered at a Memphis motel in 1968, worked for social equality for African-Americans and preached a message of nonviolence and peace, while imploring Americans to value a person's character above the color of his skin. His most famous speech, the "I Have a Dream" address delivered during a march on the nation's capital, outlined a vision for America in which people's race did not matter, and only the content of their character was important.

To one A&M student, this philosophy is a universal one.

"I would think that not just African-Americans, but everyone of our generation reaps the benefits of Dr. King's struggle," Joe Schumacher, a senior journalism major, said. "More importantly, he was willing to die for what he believed; he was one hundred percent dedicated to his mission, and anyone of any color can respect that."

"Dr. King, in particular, and the civil rights movement paid serious prices for freedom for African-Americans," added Schumacher. "It was a mission to lift ignorance, and it should be commemorated."

## Bowen says he will resign from presidency if A&M found responsible for collapse

STAFF AND WIRE

President Dr. Ray M. Bowen said he would resign his position if it was determined that the University is responsible, through inadequate official supervision, for the Nov. 18 Bonfire collapse, in a recent interview with *The Bryan-College Station Eagle*.

The collapse that caused the deaths of 12 students and injured 27 others has been the subject of much discussion in the A&M community over the past two months, and people from around the nation and world have contacted Bowen personally about the incident. The messages included condolences, praise and anger.

Bowen said that as the leader and head of Texas A&M, everything affecting the university is ultimately his responsibility.

"I would do that on a number of issues," Bowen was quoted as saying in *The Eagle*. "If, for example, there was a serious financial situation that led back to indifference, I would take the responsibility. How can I say to someone, 'I want you out of this job,' when I'm at the top of that command? I have to set the standard."



CODY WAGES/THE BATTALION

A&M president Dr. Ray M. Bowen meets with press the morning following the collapse of Aggie Bonfire stack.

Bowen declined an interview with *The Battalion* discussing his feelings on the Bonfire and his intention to resign if blame is found with the administration.

## Bonfire Commission to meet; may miss March 31 deadline

BY JULIE ZUCKER  
The Battalion

Texas A&M University's goal to have a final report from the Special Commission on the 1999 Aggie Bonfire by March 31 may not be met, Leo E. Linbeck Jr., chairman of the commission said.

Over the past month, many allegations have surfaced in the media pertaining to the Bonfire collapse on Nov. 18.

The commission will meet today for the third time to discuss an addition of a new investigative group as well as the speculation about why the stack fell.

"There is so much information, and we are hoping to add a new survey group," Linbeck said. "There is no way to tell one way or the other if the commission can have a final, comprehensive report by the deadline the University asks for."

Several suspicions about the cause of the Bonfire collapse have been raised in the national media. Reports have been released by various sources claiming the ground was unstable, the center pole was not

strong enough, the stack was leaning, and that ropes were cut (a typical step in the building process) which left the stack with no real support.

In response to these reports, Linbeck said no one should listen to these "false" or premature reports.

"No one has received interim reports. We will not accept them," he said. "There will be no final body of facts until the commission releases their final report after the case is completely solved. It is all speculation, and everyone needs to take them [reports] with a grain of salt."

Linbeck said he encourages information from others that could help with the truth, and the commission is not in a position to dismiss any new details.

Today at 1 p.m. in MSC 292, in a session open to the public, the commission will offer approval to hire a new firm to cover action of the Bonfire workers which occurred before, during and after the Bonfire collapse.

See COMMISSION on Page 10.

### FOOD ON CAMPUS

- SBISA HUT**  
Two trailers parked near fish pond offering Outbound Dining and some supplies.  
AT NORMAL MEAL TIMES, BUSES WILL RUN FROM FISH POND TO:
- MSC CAFETERIA/ 12TH MAN**  
All you can eat meals or Outbound Dining available.
- COMMONS DINING HALL**

RUBEN DELUNA/THE BATTALION

## Sbisa closes for renovations, campus prepares for changes

BY MATT LOFTIS  
The Battalion

Sean Johnson, a Moses Hall resident and sophomore general studies major, has eaten at Sbisa twice a day for the past three semesters.

However, this spring semester, Johnson said he will be putting his money into Aggie Bucks and buying groceries.

Many Northside students tell a similar story. Sbisa Dining Hall, The Underground Food Court and The Underground Market are closed for renovations and remodeling, Cindy Zawieja, Associate Director of Food Services said.

Other locations have opened to replace the services offered by Sbisa which actually improve the value of a meal plan, Zawieja said.

"Our meal plan sales are down quite a bit this semester," Zawieja said. "Basically we're very open to any comments from students on how we can improve our services to students."

All-you-can-eat meals will be offered at the 12th Man International Food Court and the Memorial Student Center cafeteria and at normal meal times, and every food-serving location will be offering "out bound" meals, she said.

Zawieja added that "Sbisa Hut," which consist of two trailers parked near the Fish Pond, will be offering "out bound" meals and some supplies from The Underground Market.

A bus line called "Wheels to Meals" will be running from Fish Pond to the MSC and the Commons during normal meal times on weekdays to carry students wanting to eat.

Many students say the bus rides and outbound meals will be an unusual hassle compared to their normal trip to Sbisa.

Ashkan Moghaddam, a resident of Moore Hall and sophomore electrical engineering major, said that he would rather eat at a restaurant and cut back his meal plan for this semester.

"Taking those bus rides to the Commons is going to take too long," Moghaddam said.

Zawieja said that although the changes in dining routine may be a hardship for both students and Food Services, the change is necessary.

She said Sbisa Dining Hall is 90 years old and is not only in need of remodeling and new food service equipment, but is also in need of new roofing, plumbing, electrical wiring and a make over.

Most of the changes being made are mandated when upgrading a building, such as removing lead

paint or asbestos insulation.

"In the long-run we're making the building more safe for students," Zawieja said.

Sbisa will also have a new look once the renovations are completed. A '50s-style themed section will serve burgers and related foods, an Italian-themed section called "Sargino's" will have pastas and related items, a world cuisine dessert section will offer desserts from around the globe and a main cafeteria area will have a market-style atmosphere.

Bernie's Place will be converted into a "out-bound" meal area and a coffee bar.

The entire project is costing approximately \$10 million dollars and is tentatively scheduled as a 10-to-11 month project.

Food services hopes to be able to open The Underground Market and The Underground Food Court and the outbound dining area by the fall 2000 semester and hopes to open the main Sbisa Dining Hall area shortly after, during the semester, Zawieja said.

"As soon as we can open, we're moving in. We'll work 24 hours to move in once that building is accepted," she said.

"The sooner we can get students back in there, the better."

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Listen to KAMU-FM 90.9 at 1:57 p.m. for details on "The Meeting," a play hosted by BAC, about a fictitious confrontation between MLK and Malcolm X.