

B-C-S to get brand new area code

BY DANA JAMUS
The Battalion

The Bryan-College Station area code will be changing from 409 to 979 Feb. 19.

Between Feb. 19 and Aug. 4, callers can use either the 409 or new 979 code to place calls, but those who dial 409 will receive a voice message indicating that the code will be changing and will give the new code for the region.

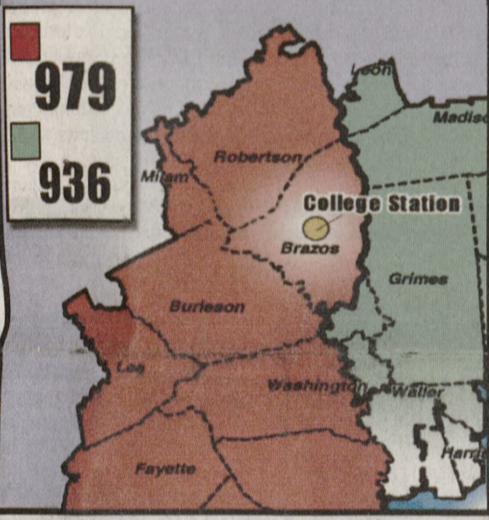
Starting Aug. 5, calls dialed without the new area code will not be completed, according to the Public Utilities Commission (PUC) Website.

The change is part of a three-way split of the 409 area code region which was experiencing a shortage of available numbers, said Betsy Tyson, information specialist at PUC Texas.

The western area of the original 409 region which includes Bryan-College Station will be assigned 979, 936 will be designated for the central region and the eastern region will retain the 409 code.

"Nothing changes," Tyson said. Calls that were previously considered local will remain local and those that were considered long distance will still be charged at the original long distance rates.

AREA CODE CHANGES effective FEB 19



RUBEN DELUNA/THE BATTALION

9-1-1 calls will also remain the same. The system will be re-programmed so people still only dial 9-1-1, according to the PUC Website.

The PUC site also states that PUC is requesting companies to issue numbers sequentially.

Tyson said the shortage is caused by increasing communications options such as cell phones, fax machines, modems and pagers. She said telecommunications companies improperly assigning telephone numbers to these devices has contributed to the speed at which the shortage has progressed.

A single area code has just under eight million usable numbers. Tyson said telecommunications companies receive numbers in blocks of 10,000 numbers at a time.

These numbers are then permanently out of circulation whether or not the company uses them.

PUC has been encouraging companies to take numbers in smaller chunks—such as 1,000 at a time in order to conserve numbers, Tyson said.

Grass fires



JP BEATO/THE BATTALION

Ronda Carter of the South Brazos County Fire Department puts out a grass fire near Highway 6 and FM 2151. Train sparks caused the fire, one of eight that spanned from Navasota to College Station Thursday afternoon.

College Station Police make Northgate safer

Four emergency phones are placed along the highly trafficked area for safety purposes

BY MATT LOFTIS
The Battalion

Northgate's proximity to campus makes it convenient for students to grab a quick bite to eat or buy books in between classes — but Northgate may be better known for its nightlife.

The numerous bars bring hundreds of students to Northgate, prompting the College Station Police Department to make the area safer.

Four emergency phones were installed in neighborhoods behind Northgate Thursday, as a preventive step and also as a response to reported harassment in the area.

Rhonda Seaton, an officer with the College Station Police Department, said there have been no major crime problems at Northgate recently. Seaton said in the past, there have been problems with harassment and violence that led to an initiative to improve safety and the availability of police assistance in the Northgate area.

International students, specifically, have in the past year, been the target of harassment, whether by intention or coincidence, leading to activism on the part of the International Student Association (ISA) in the past year.

Tatsuki Ohashi, Class of '99 and president of ISA for the 1998-99 academic year, said while he was at A&M there were problems involving international students and others being harassed on Northgate.

The problems drew the ISA into a coalition of campus organizations and local groups to advocate positive change on Northgate, including the Resident Hall Association, Muslim



SUSAN REDDING/THE BATTALION

Felling a little safer as she walks home, sophomore speech communication major, Joanna Parker notices the new red emergency phones in the Northgate area. The phones were installed Thursday.

Students Association, Northgate Merchant Association, Student Government, College Station Police Department and University Police Department.

The group formed the Northgate Safety Awareness Committee, which later became Aggies for a Safe Community.

Ohashi said the group first organized to raise awareness about the issue of Northgate safety, but eventually evolved into an organization working for the improvement of the entire community.

"It was amazing, once we started, how quick it moved," Ohashi said.

Seaton said the phones were a step the city had been working toward for the prevention of future incidents similar to some of the major problems on Northgate in the past.

"I think it's going to be a lot of peace of mind for people living in that area," Seaton said. "It's a safety blanket."

Josh Liggin, a sophomore biomedical science major, said that he visits Northgate from time to time, but has never heard of any accidents or problems.

Liggin said women or people by themselves should be concerned with being harassed in the area, but he has the same chance of being beaten up on campus as at Northgate.

"You need them [emergency phones] there for the same reason you need them on campus," Liggin said. "That should be an extension."

Allison Snyder, a freshman mechanical engineering major, said she has heard about problems at Northgate more through word of mouth than in the news. Snyder said she has been to Northgate with large groups of people and felt safe, but when in small groups or with other girls she has been concerned about safety.

"There's so many things that can happen over there," Snyder said. "I think the phones are a great thing for anyone over there, especially girls."

A&M System to allot over \$75 million in 3 years

BY ROLANDO GARCIA
The Battalion

More than \$75 million is up for grabs in the Texas A&M University System as a result of a constitutional amendment passed in November, which made more money available from Permanent University Fund (PUF).

The PUF is an endowment funded by state-owned land and minerals to help support certain schools affiliated with the Texas A&M and University of Texas systems.

Tom Kale, vice chancellor for business services, said the money will be divided between Texas A&M University, Prairie View A&M University and Tarleton State University, the three system schools that benefit from the PUF.

Previously, only the interest earnings and dividends resulting from investments made with PUF money could be spent, but with the passage of Proposition 17, any investment earnings from the PUF may be used by the universities.

Over the next three years, this will be up to \$75 million for the Texas A&M System, but the distribution of this money to each university will not be decided

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— Tom Kale
vice chancellor for business services

by Chancellor Howard Graves for another month, Kale said.

"We're still reviewing and analyzing the funding requests we've received from the institutions," Kale said. "Most of them deal with new facilities they'd like to build."

Detailed funding requests were due Feb. 10, and William Krumm, vice president for fi-

"They asked us how we might spend the funds," Krumm said.

"So we submitted our wish list."

Items on A&M's list include a \$50 million Biotechnology and Life Sciences building and an extra \$10 million for the proposed Chemical Engineering building. Additional funding for faculty and graduate students is also included.

Since it is highly unlikely A&M will get its wish list, it will become necessary to prioritize the projects once the University knows how much money it will get, Krumm added.

Graves' recommendations on how to spend the additional PUF money will go to the Board of Regents for approval along other system budgets, and will be allocated for the next fiscal year which begins in September.

Peace corps volunteers look to Aggies to join their program

BY BROOKE HODGES
The Battalion

Upon graduating from Kansas State University, Jamie Skalsky's first step was not to register at Kansas State's career center or to circle help wanted ads with a red pen in the local newspaper.

Instead, she chose to join the United States Peace Corps for a two year assignment in the Dominican Republic.

Her assignment was to build a tree nursery in the Dominican Republic, to help with the deforestation the country is experiencing after years of slash-and-burn agriculture.

As a volunteer, she provided families with free saplings that could be planted and grown to use as a source of food, fuel or income, Skalsky said.

"They could either eat the fruit or sell it," she said. "Or they could use the firewood to cook with or sell it, too."

Skalsky said setting an example as an American woman was the most important thing she accomplished.

"I was probably the first educated woman they had ever seen," she said. "All the schools, roads and outhouses we built helped, but the understanding [between the cultures] helps more."

A recent press release issued by the Peace Corps listed the top 25

universities for volunteers. The University of Texas tied for fourth, with 72 volunteers currently serving. Texas A&M was not ranked.

From January 1999 until January 2000, Texas A&M had 45 students sign up for the Peace Corps. After the interviewing, medical and legal screening processes, only eleven students left for their respective assignments after graduation.

"I don't think [the University of Texas] is doing anything differently in recruitment," said Patrick Niemeyer, Texas A&M Peace Corps recruiter.

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