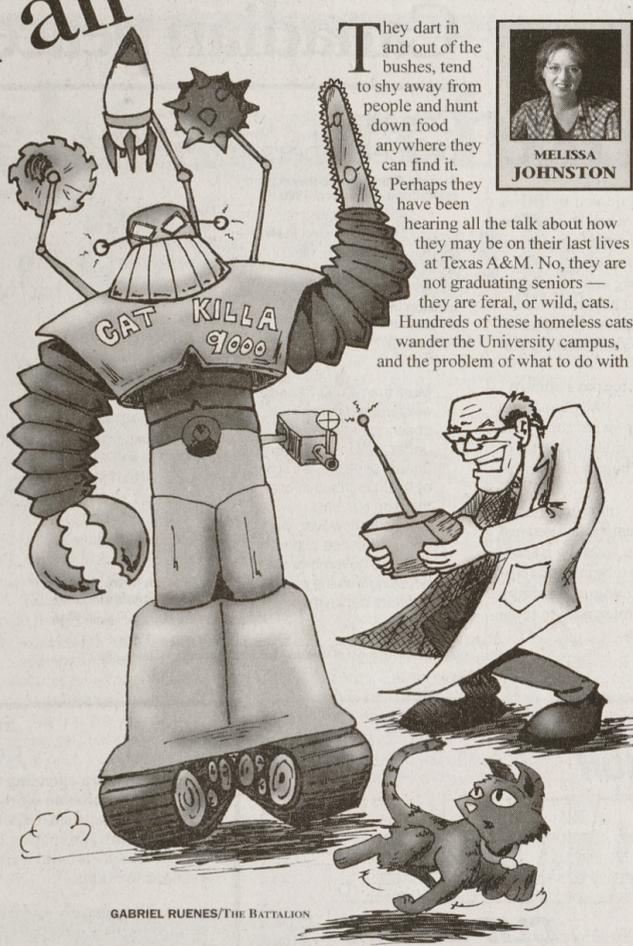


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Kill 'em all

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GABRIEL RUENES/THE BATTALION



MELISSA JOHNSTON

They dart in and out of the bushes, tend to shy away from people and hunt down food anywhere they can find it. Perhaps they have been hearing all the talk about how they may be on their last lives at Texas A&M. No, they are not graduating seniors — they are feral, or wild, cats. Hundreds of these homeless cats wander the University campus, and the problem of what to do with

them has continued to be an issue for the administration and pest control. Just a few weeks ago, some wildlife experts gathered to discuss the feasibility of one solution — kill 'em all.

According to these experts, two of whom are faculty at A&M, euthanasia is a viable way to keep the campus cat population down. They believe that feral cats are unnatural predators who are wreaking havoc on other wildlife in the community. Thankfully, this feline euthanasia plan has not been officially proposed to University administrators. And there is no reason that administrators should ever hear the proposal — it is clearly not the best solution to the problem.

A better solution is already in action — one that is not even funded by the University. In 1998, students, staff and faculty at A&M started a group called the Aggie Feral Cat Alliance of Texas (AFCAT). The intent of this group is not only to help control and provide care for the feral cat population on campus, but also to educate the Bryan-College Station community on the responsibility of caring for pets. The origin of this so-called problem is not the cats that roam the campus, but the irresponsible pet owners who allowed them to wander off into the community, or worse, deserted them. Many of the cats currently on campus may have been born in the wild, but they are offspring of cats that were deserted. They should not be punished for what is essentially the fault of someone too preoccupied to take care of a pet.

AFCAT, however, is willing to care for those cats that are left behind by irresponsible owners. In August 1998, the volunteers of AFCAT implemented a formal management program funded by a private grant called Trap, Test, Vaccinate, Alter and Release (TTVAR). Designed to help them learn more about feral cats and monitor the cat population on campus, the program involves testing the trapped cats for diseases, vaccinating and spaying or neutering them, and then releasing them to their capture spot. By August 1999, 126 cats had been trapped and managed by the project. Twenty-one were adopted by loving families, and 17 were euthanized due to feline leukemia or feline immunodeficiency virus. The remaining cats were released back on campus to be tracked and given daily care by AFCAT volunteers. Through this program, the cats are prevented from

contributing to campus overpopulation and are kept from unnecessary extermination.

In a report released by AFCAT in August 1999, Bill Shepherd, the supervisor of A&M's Physical Plant - Pest Control stated he was pleased with the TTVAR program and its results. He also stated he had received "significantly fewer" calls about cats than he had in the year prior to TTVAR's initiation. The program is evidently successful to some extent, and perhaps it should be under consideration for University funding before a euthanasia plan is even considered. If administrators are having trouble rationalizing this expense, they should think about the benefit they would be providing the cats as well as the benefit to students and staff at the College of Veterinary Medicine. Students have the opportunity to gain clinical and surgical experience by helping with the TTVAR program, and they also continue to learn about the habits and interactions of feral cat populations. If all these cats were to be exterminated, students would lose this opportunity to extend their learning beyond the classroom.

AFCAT is modeled after a renowned program at Stanford, which was founded in 1989 as a humane alternative to the proposed eradication of about 500 campus cats. Since the start of the program, the Stanford feral cat population has steadily declined, and is now less than one-third its original size. There is also a similar group at the University of Texas called the Campus Cat Coalition, which emerged from the outrage of the university community after 14 cats were captured and exterminated over the 1994 Christmas holidays.

It is obvious by the interest in, and continuing growth of, groups like AFCAT that programs like TTVAR should be given every opportunity to continue. In the meantime, residents of the University and surrounding community should keep in mind that owning pets is a big responsibility that must be taken seriously, lest their cute new kittens become the most recent additions to A&M's cat population. AFCAT can only do so much with private funding, and with influential experts beginning to consider ideas like euthanasia, programs like AFCAT — and even the cats themselves — might really be on their last lives.

Melissa Johnston is a senior English major.

RHA cell phone proposal waste of time



DAVID LEE

For the Aggie who is constantly on the go, owning a cellular phone is a godsend. After all, cell phones today are the embodiment of convenience and efficiency.

However, it is pretty obvious that many cell phone owners do not fully recognize the responsibilities of ownership — in particular, being discrete and respectful to others when using their cell phone.

This irresponsibility is only one of the many reasons the proposal by the Residence Hall Association (RHA) to implement a "wireless campus" is seriously flawed.

Finally, the proposal fails to settle many unresolved issues that a "wireless campus" would raise.

"Although cell phones would be convenient, there are far too many unseen complications to consider a proposal yes," said Thomas Coubourne, a sophomore English major and resident of Hotard Hall.

"Problems [include] time in setting it up, limitations on usage, course registration and interruption during class and events. ... There are too many things up in the air. ... We want something more definite."

Other unaddressed issues include how the project will be specifically funded, how students who already have cell phones can be exempted from the program and how the system can be tested on a trial basis.

Although it is full of admirable intentions, the proposal before the RHA is laced with potential land mines. There are simply too many complications and unanswered questions for a "wireless campus" to be possible at this point.

Basically, any student who absolutely has to make a phone call on-campus would have little trouble locating a toll-free phone — therefore nullifying a major concern of the proposal.

Center, Evans Library and the Student Computing Center have toll-free phones on their grounds.

In addition, Texas A&M University Police have a system of 41 "blue-light" emergency phones placed at strategic locations throughout campus. These toll-free phones are easily identified by their 12-foot poles and blue lights.

Basically, any student who absolutely has to make a phone call on campus would have little trouble finding a toll-free phone — therefore nullifying one of the major concerns of the proposal.

Furthermore, most students living in a dormitory have no practical need for a cell phone. Think about it — phone lines, answering ma-

chines and email accounts are already at their disposal. The few students who do need a cell phone usually have a compelling reason — whether it be keeping in constant touch with their jobs, their student organizations, their significant others or their parents.

Accordingly, these students have probably already purchased cell phones and wireless accounts on their own. Thanks to the explosion of digital wireless networks in recent years, the cost of owning a cell phone has plummeted to an affordable level — therefore explaining the abundance of cell phones already being used on campus.

Considering this, the proposal becomes moot because the students who most need cell phones already have them.

David Lee is a junior economics and journalism major.



State needs authority over child-care centers



JESSICA CRUTCHER

Thanks to the efforts of George W. Bush, a 1997 Texas law gave church-run child-care centers a separate licensing procedure from other businesses.

Under the 1997 law, the Texas Association of Christian Child-Care Agencies Inc. was given authority to license faith-based child-care providers. This law took away authority from the Texas Department of Protective and Regulatory Services when dealing with faith-oriented centers.

However, a problem has arisen. Two people were recently arrested because of abuse allegations at Roloff Homes, a facility for troubled youths run by People's Baptist Church in Corpus Christi. The facility is one of six religious youth centers that have been approved under the 1997 law.

There is something very wrong when troubled children have to deal with potential child abuse. Although it is impossible to completely eliminate such problems, applying two different sets of standards to children's homes simply based on religion is asking for trouble. All children's homes should be licensed by the state; to approach the situation any other way is blatantly hypocritical. In addition, the lack of accountability measures for faith-based centers is dangerous for the children in question.

It is interesting to note that People's Baptist Church closed Roloff Homes in the 1980s after being faced with the choice of coming under state license or shutting down. Roloff Homes reopened after Bush helped pass the 1997 law. Roloff Homes' apparent problem with state investigation should have warned all officials involved that it had problems with strict regulation.

Mike Jones, Bush spokesperson, argues, "There's strict scrutiny and accountability. The faith-based organizations have to meet

the same high standards as any other organization." If this is true, then why did Roloff Homes reopen only after it was removed from state jurisdiction? Apparently, someone was led to believe standards and inspections would be more lax.

The Texas Department of Protective and Regulatory Services is currently investigating Roloff Homes. However, there is really not much more the department can do. Spokesperson Josh Allen stated, "We have investigative authority, but we don't have regulatory authority." Allen was not sure whether the agency could shut down Roloff Homes, although it can make recommendations for improvements.

There is something seriously flawed about this scenario. The state has little power to protect its youngest citizens — the children in these church-run homes. Making recommendations does absolutely no good without authority to back up the suggestions.

Roloff Homes has a history of disliking government authority, as illustrated by the past closing and reopening. It is highly unlikely it will abide by any suggestions the Texas Department of Protective and Regulatory Services decides to make.

The Texas Association of Christian Child-Care Agencies showed irresponsibility in relicensing Roloff Homes. Licensing children's homes that have a history of closing rather than submitting to state authority is not a step in the right direction for any association. In this action alone, the Texas Association of Christian Child-Care Agencies showed greater leniency than a state organization might have.

Although most children's homes, faith-based or otherwise, are well-run organizations, there will always be exceptions. A strong central authority that applies the same set of rules to everyone is needed for the system to be fully functional.

Jessica Crutcher is a sophomore journalism major.

Chinese weapon purchases logical

It makes no sense for other nations not to buy new defense technology while Uncle Sam keeps on building its high-tech weapon arsenal.

It is a fact the Chinese and the Americans are similar in the sense that they both can experience an emotional state known as fear. Our superior weapons are the very reason why China wants to acquire a more sophisticated weapons and defense technology, like the one they purchased from Israel.

"Slapping Israel's face" because they "are willing to sell weapons systems that may lead to the deaths of many Americans" will not prevent other nations from buying and selling weapons in order to match the US military power. If we don't want many Americans to die, than stop building weapons that can intimidate or kill many non-Americans.

David Hendrawirawan Class of '01

AOC disrespectful to student views

On April 18, I went to a forum on the proposal of dropping early registration for students who work. Members from the Academic Operations Committee spoke of their support of the proposal.

I was disappointed in their attitude towards our need as students to work. Early registration is a benefit for those who juggle work and school. Whether the AOC supported this action or not, I feel that their

MAIL CALL

The Battalion encourages letters to the editor. Letters must be 300 words or less and include the author's name, class and phone number.

The opinion editor reserves the right to edit letters for length, style, and accuracy. Letters may be submitted in person at 013 Reed McDonald with a valid student ID. Letters may also be mailed to:

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