

From protests to profits

Ex-hippies of Ben & Jerry's sell company's image for profit



BRIANNE PORTER

Say goodbye to a counterculture icon, Ben & Jerry's Homemade Inc., and hello to just another piece of the Anglo-Dutch company Unilever's massive holdings. Ben & Jerry's, known for its social consciousness and quirky ice cream names, was sold to Unilever, the world's largest ice cream company, which owns brands such as Breyers, Popsicle and Good-Humor. Ben & Jerry's, the anti-establishment company founded by two ex-hippies, Ben Green and Jerry Greenfield, is known for its donations to charity and use of local Vermont dairy farmers who do not use growth hormones. The company was sold for \$326 million.

The sale of Ben & Jerry's could be just a sign of the times — smaller companies cannot survive in today's economy. The sale will supposedly make Ben & Jerry's a world-wide name. Yet, all their loyal customers wonder if the sale really is for the best. Ben & Jerry's has a reputation of being one of the most environmentally and community-friendly companies. For example, the company donated 7.5 percent of its profits before taxes to charities. Now, it is just another notch in Unilever's belt of acquisitions. The sellout was motivated by money. Unilever offered about 23 percent more per share than the closing price on the stock market. This especially benefits shareholders like Cohen, who will receive \$39 million. With such mega-mergers as Time Warner and America Online in the works, many wonder if America has seen the last of small-town companies. Companies that the country was built on are now a dying breed.

America should not have to settle for the loss of its heritage to faceless world-wide corporations — rather, it should encourage small businesses to become companies like Ben & Jerry's. Though Ben & Jerry's may have been a large and profitable company, it kept its roots. Unilever does not have these roots, nor does it feel the loyalty to customers that Ben & Jerry's did. Companies like Ben & Jerry's emphasized the best of both worlds — small town awareness with the prestige of a large company. Teaching larger companies to be socially aware and accountable would be in the best interest of America to prevent the growth of mega-corporations, like Unilever, that do not have contact with the communities.

The sale of Ben & Jerry's represents not only a loss of American culture, but also a loss of American



JEFF SMITH/THE BATTALION

jobs. (Unilever cannot be asked to honor the social and community ties that the Ben & Jerry's did before the sellout.)

Multinational corporations may make money, but if quality of service does not accompany that money, then international corporations are not the way to go. Ben & Jerry's had not only an image and consistent style but a strong presence in the community that is not found within the large corporations.

Though these large businesses have money, they do not have that presence and cannot create it. America does not need to augment the problem of poor customer relations by catering to giant corporations, but should instead urge the companies to become socially conscious.

One example of a community-aware company is Starbucks. Not only is it a profitable corporation, but it is also involved with programs like promotion of literacy within local communities.

Companies like Starbucks and Ben & Jerry's are the ideal, while corporations like Unilever are driven by money.

Society should demand more socially responsible companies and not accept these faceless companies. Money may be important, but it should not be the only thing. Community-aware corporations should be emphasized in the business world.

Brianne Porter is a freshman chemical engineering major.

MAIL CALL

Students take risks near railroad tracks

To stand on the side of Wellborn near the light close to the railway line (when there's a train passing) is very dangerous, yet every time I go to West Campus when a train is passing, people do it.

There may not have been many train accidents in recent memory, but the possibility of an incident occurring is a possibility, and the consequences are horrible to imagine. When a train is passing by, students need to remember to think safely.

Velaphi Msimang
Graduate Student

Church affiliated child-care law logical

Response to Jessica Crutcher's April 25 column.

I found Crutcher's argument against separate licensing procedures for church-affiliated child-care centers perplexing.

I am confused because the law seems logical and it seems to be what Ms. Crutcher was advocating in a previous article. In a previous column (Sept. 20, 1999), Crutcher addressed the issue of public school prayer and the separation of church and state. She defended the removal of prayer before football games with a strict interpretation of the First Amendment. This is a formidable argument which I only raise to point out her own belief that the state should not endorse, condemn, or otherwise control any church, religious belief or practice. Therefore, I am puzzled how Crutcher thinks the state of Texas

must have regulatory authority over the church-run child-care centers. If the state had the power to grant and revoke the license of a religious child-care center, how much control would that entail? What if the church had a paddling policy, something that many private schools still endorse? What if the children sang Christian songs and watched Biblical videos such as the popular "Veggie Tales" series?

Finally, what if the Department of Protective and Regulatory Services decided some or any of that was improper or harmful for the children's emotional well-being. What if the church refused to comply?

Since the church runs the child-care center could the state close the entire church, confiscate property or funds, arrest the resisting leadership? I realize it's a rare and extreme scenario, but Governor Bush's law prevents it from ever happening. This should be one law that both church leaders and strict interpreters of the First Amendment can agree on.

Tommy Medina
Class of '01

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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Timing of bonfire report detrimental during finals time



MELISSA BEDSOLE

After the 1999 Aggie Bonfire collapse, University officials stepped out of the bonfire investigation so that an unbiased investigation could be performed by the Special Commission of the 1999 Aggie Bonfire — which was probably the right thing to do. However, in deciding an appropriate time to release the commission's findings, the University should step back in.

The expected release date of May 2, right as finals begin, could be detrimental to students.

There are times when emotions should not be a factor — but deciding when to reveal the commission's results is not one of those times.

It is said of Aggieland that "from the outside looking in, you can't understand it," and outsiders cannot possibly understand what releasing information regarding bonfire will mean to Aggies. But those of us walking and living on A&M's campus every day understand that releasing new information near final exams is ludicrous and completely detrimental to the student body.

The main focus throughout the investigation of bonfire has been to keep the best interests of the students. However, as the decision nears, that original intent has been forgotten.

In March, the investigators reported they had a probable cause for the collapse but were not going to tell the public what they found. Instead, they said just enough to get students anxious and talking about the tragedy all over again. Students wondered what the investigation had shown, wondered when the findings would be released and wondered when a decision on the future of bonfire would be made.

The one thing that does not have to be wondered about however, is whether there will be great emotions stirred up with the release of the investigation's findings and later when a final decision about bonfire is made. The Aggie Bonfire is a part of what being a Texas Aggie is all about, and if it is not meant to burn again, then that is how it will be. In fact, it is likely that most Aggies will cry regardless of the decision.

If the fight to keep this beloved

tradition is lost, most Aggies will cry for the hole it left in their hearts. And if it is decided that there will be a day when bonfire's flames will burn again, we will cry for the 12 Ags who will watch it burn from heaven.

The emotions that go along with any discussions regarding bonfire are endless. Students relive the days surrounding the accident and remember the faces of the Ags who were lost. Maybe on some campuses, things like bonfire's collapse would have been forgotten or overlooked by the students who were not directly affected by the accident. But in Aggieland, it is not just the families, girl/boyfriends and best friends of the victims who will continue to relive this for a long time. A part of our Aggie family was lost in the 1999 Aggie Bonfire collapse, and Ags everywhere will continue to miss them each and every time bonfire is mentioned.

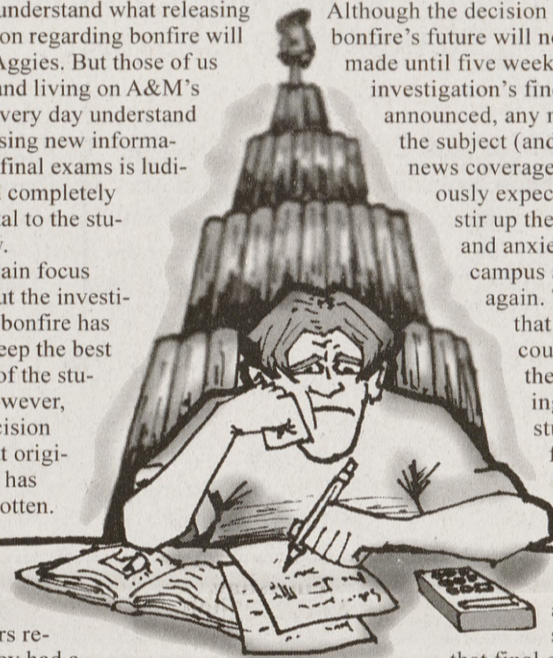
Although the decision about bonfire's future will not be made until five weeks after the investigation's findings are announced, any news on the subject (and high news coverage is obviously expected) will stir up the emotions and anxiety on campus all over again. To think that anyone could put these feelings aside to study for a final exam is ridiculous.

It does not come as any surprise that final exams are the highest time for suicide among college students. Finals are a time when most students are at incredibly high levels of stress, usually have long nights of studying and are feeling the pressures from deadlines.

Bringing up the cause of bonfire's collapse in the middle of all this will only add extra stress and distraction, which is completely disrespectful of the needs of students during such a difficult time. Studying for a history exam will seem meaningless when the future of bonfire is at risk.

There are serious emotions at stake. And with anything concerning the Texas Aggie Bonfire, it is important to honor the dead, but it is also important to honor the living.

Melissa Bedsole is a sophomore general studies major.



GABRIEL RUENES/THE BATTALION

Constant construction at Evans Library means constant headache

A brave Aggie takes a deep breath and steps from the light into darkness. The dank, moldy-smelling atmosphere is almost enough to make the student turn and run, but the thought of the daunting task at hand forces the next few steps.



SUMMER HICKS

Welcome to the Sterling C. Evans Library, possibly the most depressing place on Earth.

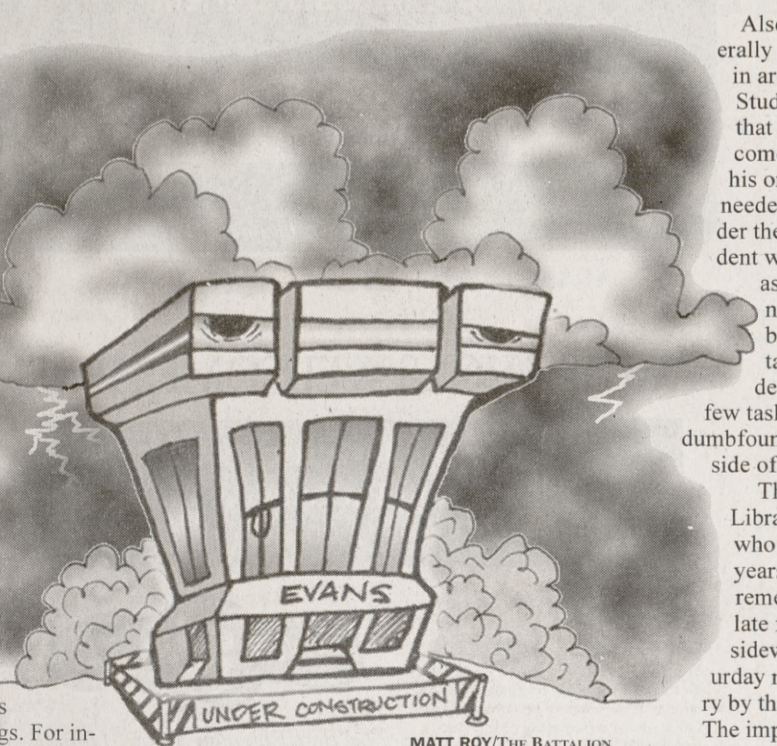
University libraries are meant to be a haven for students. They are intended to be quiet places to read, do research, meet with study groups or nap between classes. Libraries should present a bright, airy atmosphere that encourages intellectual stimulation. Evans Library on A&M's main campus is nothing of the sort.

Often students can be heard discussing where to study on campus and not surprising, Evans is rarely mentioned. The place is dismal — disheartening and a virtual death trap for anyone with allergies to dust and mold. The air vents seem to be contaminated with an airborne sleeping drug, as any student at Evans longer than half an hour has the irresistible urge to lay his or her head on the closest available study table.

The library on A&M's campus should be

designed for the utmost convenience of students. However, with only three or four computer terminals on each floor, there are often pileups of impatient students waiting in line to look up a book or journal, each wondering why there are not more computers to serve a 40,000-person student body. In addition, print stations are not located on every floor. This is a major inconvenience for students. A student working on a computer on a certain floor must go to another just to retrieve a printout.

The Sterling C. Evans Library Annex was a much-needed addition to the library system, but the renovation makes finding sources more difficult since texts are now kept in separate buildings. For instance, current periodicals are kept on the 6th floor of Evans, but the issues on microfiche are held on the 5th floor of the Annex. This



MATT ROY/THE BATTALION

separation of materials sets a student up for traveling back and forth all day.

Also, the Evans Library staff is generally helpful but not always located in areas where students are working. Student researchers may also find that a librarian is obliging when it comes to offering help from behind his or her desk, but if movement is needed, students are often left to wander the stacks until closing time. Student workers are also cooperative as their jobs allow, but often are not familiar enough with the library system to offer much assistance beyond their section. Student workers are trained to do a few tasks and then left alone to stare dumbfounded when asked a question outside of their specialty.

The ongoing renovation of Evans Library is a positive thing for those who plan on being here several more years. Many current students cannot remember a time when they were not late for class by the elimination of a sidewalk or awakened early on a Saturday morning in a Southside dormitory by the pounding of a jackhammer. The improvements to the library will surely benefit students, faculty and staff, but unfortunately for most Aggies, they are too late in coming. Current students will pos-

sibly never know a library free of construction workers, plastic walls that close off needed stacks or elevators that do not stop on every floor.

Admittedly, A&M is making an effort to improve the facility that should be the cornerstone of a university education with the new Web-based computer systems and needed, although seemingly leisurely, renovations. More needs to be done to improve Evans Library. A higher learning institution as prestigious as Texas A&M should invest more money and consideration in bettering a building that most students avoid at all costs.

Computer systems have been upgraded, but they, and the Evans staff, need to become as student-friendly as possible. Student workers should be given some credit for their intelligence by their employers and informed on more than just answering telephones or scanning a bar code.

The library must become a location that students visit regularly to study and learn, not just a quick stop-off for a nap before the next class. Evans Library needs to be a place where the only thing that annoys students is the constant voice of the elevator lady, "Fourth floor, going down ..."

Summer Hicks is a senior English major.