HOW THE NORTH WAS WON

From humble beginnings, Northgate became social center of College Station

By Anne Hoar
The Battalion

In 1928, Texas A&M President T.O. Walton changed after-school activities for Aggies for generations to come. Walton ordered all commercial buildings off campus, thus creating the area known today as Northgate.

The name Northgate comes from when the college actually had four gates. Northgate included cafes, tailor shops and a photo supply store attached to Boyett's, the first commercial store in Northgate. Planked walkways, instead of sidewalks, provided a place for shoppers to avoid the mud of the unpaved road. The buildings were completely wooden.

The tailor shops were especially important to students at that time because all uniforms were custom-made. A grocery store where the Texas Aggie Bookstore currently is located provided students with an easily accessible way to buy food. Restaurants and a drugstore-pool hall provided a place for Aggies to relax on the weekends.

College Station was incorporated in 1938, and Northgate became the downtown area. A city hall and numerous churches were built during that time.

Carolyn Holick Matheson, of Holick's, a Northgate business that specializes in making Corps boots, said that the store has been in Northgate since the '20s.

"We started making senior boots in the late '20s when they became part of the uniform," Matheson said. "We weren't as specialized then as we are today. We made shoes and anything you wanted out of leather."

Don Ganter, owner of the Dixie Chicken, Dry Bean and Shadow Canyon, said the buildings have had many different uses since he bought them in 1974.

"The Dixie Chicken was originally just one building," Ganter said. "It was built in 1968 and known as the Aggie Den. ... It was a pool hall and game room from 1968 to 1974. The other side was Loupot's until the mid '70s when it moved to its current location. ... Then it became Farkleberry's Pool and Domino Parlor. In 1978 it became Miranda's Rock 'n' Roll Whiskey Joint, and in 1979 I shut it down and then expanded the Dixie Chicken."

Ganter said the Dry Bean opened in the 1940s and was a laundermat, bike shop and ice cream parlor before he converted it in the '80s.

"Aggies like whiskey more than ice cream," Ganter said. "So I opened it (Dry Bean) as a saloon."

Ganter said the building that currently houses Shadow Canyon was built in 1939 and operated as a movie theater called the Campus Theater until the late '70s.

"If you peel off the wood, you can still see the theater," Ganter said. "Towards the end, it only showed the Rocky Horror Picture Show."

Ganter bought the building in the early '80s and converted it to Shadow Canyon five years ago.

Amid the restaurants, bars and stores in Northgate, there are many different religious centers and places of worship. Meeting places for Baptists, Christian Scientists, Presbyterians, Methodists, Lutherans and Roman Catholics have existed in the area for many years. A mosque is the most recent addition to the religious community of Northgate.

Mike Sis, a priest at St. Mary's Catholic Church, said that a Catholic ministry at A&M has existed since 1904 and the goal of the ministry is to serve the students.

"We are located here to be close to the University because we want students to be able to walk to our services," Sis said. "A city planner asked us if we intended to stay in Northgate. ... We will because we are not a neighborhood church. We focus on the University, and our location in Northgate makes us closer to the University."

Sis said that having a church in the middle of an area populated with nightclubs and bars does not bother him. In fact, he sees the location as an advantage to the mission of the ministry.

"The church needs to be where the people are, and this is where lots of the students are," Sis said. "A campus ministry should not isolate itself. It should be in the middle of the action."

Sis said he thinks there always will be a religious presence in the area.

"We will always have a role to play in this neighborhood," he said.

Throughout the years, some Northgate traditions have lived on while others died out.

One tradition that would be easy to reinstate is the Northgate Back to School Party. In the mid '70s, the Northgate merchants hosted a party to celebrate the beginning of school. Merchants hired bands and closed off the surrounding streets for dancing.

Some things about Northgate will probably never change. A Battalion article from Aug. 28, 1978 compares getting a table at the Dixie Chicken to getting football tickets. Both still are hard to come by.

Parking has been a problem since the beginning, and both Matheson and Sis said that parking is one of the things that they would like to change most about the area.

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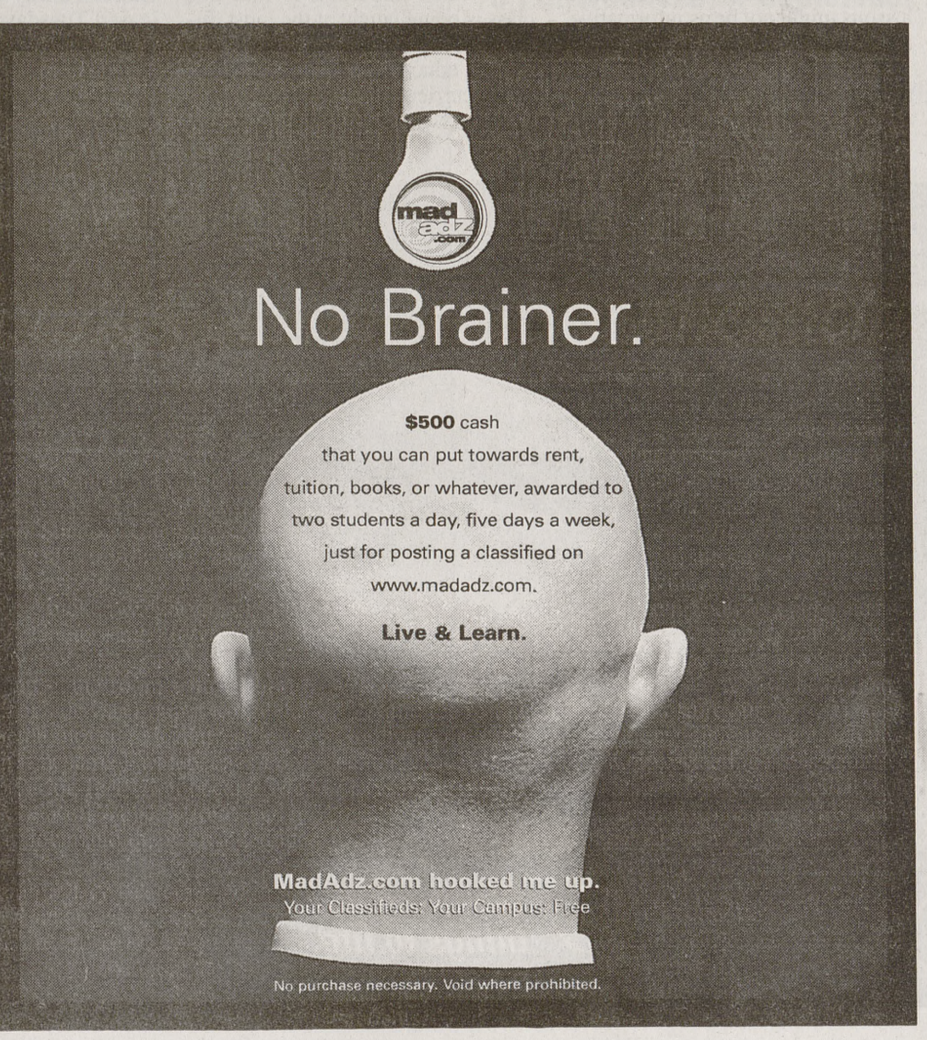

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