

Under your skin



BY ANNE HOAR
The Battalion

Since the days when pharaohs ruled Egypt, people have sought to adorn their bodies permanently with tattoos. Since that time, there has been a need for skilled artists.

Tattooing was a dark art for many years. The artists were not willing to answer questions, and they liked to keep the craft secret. As society became more accepting of tattoos, tattoo artists talked to everyone, from the nun getting an ichthus on her hip to a biker coming into town for the Hotter Than Hell Harley Davidson motorcycle convention.

Stephen Beekman, program manager of the Texas Department of Health, Drugs and Medical Devices Division, said the number of businesses licensed to tattoo in Texas has increased significantly this year.

"We had 550 studios licensed to do tattoos as of June," Beekman said. "There was a change in the requirements. Now studios can be licensed to do tattoo or piercing only or to do both. Now there are 650 to 700 studios in Texas that are licensed to do tattoos."

In order to be a tattoo artist, hopefuls often do an apprenticeship. The apprentice works with a tattoo artist to learn how to use equipment and the technical side of the tattoo business. Potential tattoo artists learn the human side of tattooing — how to work with different types of skin and different personalities.

Beekman said there are no formal requirements to be a tattoo artist. "There is no education requirement, no individual licensing, no formal test and no number of years that a potential tattoo artist must perform an apprenticeship in order to become a tattoo artist," he said. "The only requirement to be a tattoo artist is to work at a licensed studio."

Licensed studios require artists to take steps preventing the spread of infection, prohibit tattooing of minors, prohibit the tattooing of people under the influence of drugs or alcohol, maintain records for every person being tattooed and report infection or adverse reaction to the Texas Department of Health.

Pat Beck, a tattoo artist and owner of Arsenal Tattoo and Design in Bryan, said his interest in tattooing developed once he began getting tattoos.

"I've been drawing since I was a kid," Beck said. "I started getting tattoos and then I started working at a shop. I learned a lot from watching other guys on my own."

Beck said it is unfortunate that there is not a standard apprenticeship program.

"What I teach someone is going to be totally different from what a person would learn from someone else," Beck said.

During an apprenticeship, potential tattooists learn about sterilization and all the laws that tattooists have to follow. They also learn how to translate an idea from paper to skin.

"Skin moves and stretches, and the only way you can learn to tattoo is to practice on real skin," Beck said.

Beck said his favorite part of being a tattoo artist is the freedom of working for himself.

"I like being able to pull something out of someone's mind and translate it to skin," Beck said.

Doug Tucker, a tattoo artist at Aggieworld Tattoo, said he was asked if he would like to try tattooing after he took some commercial art classes.

"I spent about one year studying and doing an apprenticeship," Tucker said. "It's really a profession where the knowledge is passed on."

Tucker said he gets inspiration for his designs from tattoo conventions and from customers.

"I always study [tattooing] when I can," Tucker said. "I encourage customers to try to sketch out something for me or I get them to verbally describe [the design] to me so I can give them more customized work."

Tucker said that, as an artist, it is important for him to give his clients a unique tattoo.

"If they pick something off the wall, I get them to look at the shape and pick out the colors that they like best so all the tattoos are different," he said.

"I enjoy drawing more than copying," Tucker said. "Sometimes I really get into the design, and then I'll get blocks, just like writers do. Cover-ups are the most challenging thing to work with because it limits what you can do. I like fresh skin better because it's like a fresh canvas."

Beck said that aspiring tattoo artists must be able to draw.

"If you can't draw, there's no sense in being a tattoo artist," Beck said. "Custom work is really popular right now, and customers need help coming up with ideas."

Tucker said that, because most of his clients are college students, he always gives them advice before they get their tattoos.

"I always tell them to get something that won't show," Tucker said. "There's still a lot of prejudice against tattoos, especially in the business world. Avoid tattoos with the name of husband, wife, boyfriend or girlfriend. Also, the feet and hands are bad places to get tattoos."



A tattoo enthusiast gets his ink on — without flinching.



Walls of tattoo designs can give inspiration to uninspired ink fiends.

A secretary's work is never done

Kings of the foyer and queens of the lobby extol the virtues of royal guidance

BY BROOKE HOLBERT
The Battalion

She refuses to let students barge in on advisers right now. She will not let students change their majors from business to economics in this office. She just said the rest of the on-campus housing rent must be paid, even for those moving off campus. And now she will make the anxious student wait in this tiny little office. And wait.

Secretaries get a bad rap. In a kill-the-messenger world, they often receive students' frustration with the tedious rules and regulations necessary to run a university. These men and women are the controllers of campus life, the gatekeepers of information, often wielding power over the rights to on-campus housing, parking tickets and schedules with a simple click of their mouse.

Patricia Goins, the staff assistant of Housing Assignments in the de-

partment of Residence Life, said students' misconceptions about her abilities to house them often cause problems.

"It is very surprising to students how their expectations often differ from what is actually true," Goins said. "Often they do not get the housing assignment they wanted, they are not given housing or they are over assigned. We try to get what they want, but it is always disappointing to not get what you had hoped."

Aside from delivering less-than-desirable news, these men and women answer countless incoming calls, greet visitors, type, fax, copy, supervise student workers, order supplies and fill in when professors or advisers fall short.

For the most part, these clerical heroes enjoy the benefits of working at the quick and youthful pace of college life.

Cynthia Briggs, administrative secretary in the Department of Finance, said interacting with the students and watching their futures unfold can be a unique and rewarding dimension to a job.

"Each of us has an assigned area of duties," Briggs said. "I work alongside the program 'Aggies on Wall Street,' which is an elite group of 20 or so students that go to New York to work in the Wall Street environment. They have become such an asset to the college of business and I have really enjoyed getting to know

those students and watching their success."

Often it is not the students, but their parents, who are most involved with the particulars of college life. This is especially true in the department of Residence Life, where housing assignments often remain a mystery until move-in day, Goins said, in such a confusing environment, sensitivity is a necessity for an administrative assistant.

"We have prospective students here with their parents all the time, and it is very hard for them to hear that there are no guarantees with housing," said Goins. "You have to keep in mind that this is their child we are talking about and be sensitive to that. I always try to make eye contact with the student to draw them into the conversation. Often the parents do all the talking and the students are not even listening."

There are some ways for students to make friends with secretaries. These office workers see hundreds of faces every day, so it is the squeaky wheel that gets the grease.

Beverly Driskell, assistant supervisor at the Career Center, said the best way to obtain a secretary's help is to be energetic.

"We have 4,000 students registered in here, so it is impossible to remember them all," Driskell said. "We remember the most aggressive students — the ones who are up here all the time, following up on their job interviews, calling up here about

something. It is so great when one comes in to tell about some great job offer they received. It is such a valuable service."

Judy Shear, senior secretary of Liberal Arts Undergraduate Student Services, said once past the crossed wires and confusion that surfaces at a large university, everyone usually ends up leaving the secretary's office a little more cheerful, a little more optimistic.

"Some just don't know where to go," Shear said. "They do not know where to get started and they can get a little irritated when they have to see their major adviser before Q-dropping, or they will have to wait until walk-in hours to see an adviser. But it is mostly a positive thing. The students are very friendly, very respectful. A girl will come in a little tearful and leave feeling better, and that is always nice to see."

While being a secretary at A&M has its drawbacks, sometimes the people secretaries help will reciprocate.

"I just received a plant from some brothers who I helped with their housing arrangements," Goins said. "That helps a lot, it is a challenging and stressful thing, being sensitive to the needs of the student and following university policy at the same time. We know that this is very important to them. We are going to try our best to accommodate them. We want each and every student to have the best experience they can starting out."



KEVIN BURNS/THE BATTALION