

THE BATTALION

107 YEARS AT TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY

TUESDAY
July 24, 2001
Volume 107 ~ Issue 176
6 pages

News in Brief State

Other, stepfather indicted for abuse

DALLAS (AP) — A Dallas county grand jury has indicted the mother and former stepfather of an 8-year-old girl locked in a closet and severely malnourished. Barbara and Kenneth Atkinson were indicted Monday on felony charges of injury to a child. They were arrested last month after police rescued the girl, who weighed only 25 pounds and had been locked in a feces-covered closet in a technicians mobile home. The girl was released from a hospital last week.

Authorities say the girl was sexually abused and locked in the closet or other confined area for up to four years.

Barbara Atkinson is being held in Dallas County jail in lieu of \$100,000 bond and Kenneth Atkinson is being held without bond because a warrant from Ellis County. They each face five to 99 years in prison if convicted.

The girl's five siblings remain in state custody.

Customs seize pot

BROWNSVILLE (AP) — U.S. Customs agents arrested a Mexican national Monday after they found 1,500 pounds of marijuana worth \$1.5 million in his van.

Saul Zamarripa Rodriguez, 23, was charged with possession with intent to distribute a controlled substance, smuggling and evading arrest, according to a Customs service statement. He will go before a U.S. magistrate judge Tuesday.

Special agents received information about smuggling activity along the banks of the Rio Grande southeast of Brownsville. They were monitoring the area when they spotted a suspicious van merge from the riverbank.

When the agents pursued, the driver abandoned the van and fled on foot. Agents followed on foot and took Rodriguez into custody.

Damage estimated at \$170 million

HOUSTON (AP) — Tropical Storm Allison is responsible for at least \$170 million in damages to Houston-area schools, including preliminary estimates of \$138 million at the University of Houston, state and federal disaster officials said Monday.

The overall total will likely rise as school districts and colleges continue to assess damages from the storm six weeks ago, Federal Emergency Management Agency and Texas Division of Emergency Management officials said.

New buses arrive in CS, will be used on-campus



BERNARDO GARZA/THE BATTALION

Stuart Hutson
The Battalion

From a lab in Roswell, N. M. two sleek crafts quietly glide through the A&M campus with the ultimate purpose of carrying students away to a place where they will be subjected to cruel testing — their classrooms.

The first two in a fleet of 22 new shuttle buses arrived in College Station Saturday from New Mexico's Nova Buses, Inc. production plant where they were custom made for A&M's campus.

"It was time for a change," said Gary Jackson, manager of Bus Operations. "These buses are going to make a real difference in the way that students get around on campus."

The fleet will first replace old buses running on-campus routes. As additional buses are purchased, they will be also used for off-campus routes.

The change will be noticeable. The new buses have a dramatically different appearance than their 20-year-old counterparts.

The seats face the interior of the bus leaving a standing space that is several feet wide for passengers who cannot find a seat or are too busy to sit down, Jackson said.

"We lost space for two seats by arranging them this way," he said. "But the buses can carry a substantially higher number of standing passengers while at the same time making getting on and off the bus a lot easier."

The buses can seat 34, but can carry 75 or more.

A door is located on each end of the bus, one equipped with a lifting ramp for wheelchair-bound patrons. For those who

find the first step up to the bus a little too far, the buses can lower their base more than a foot to provide easier access.

"What people are going to enjoy most, though, is the air conditioning," said Sam Teuton, a bus driver of three years and a senior history major. "With the old buses, you had to keep the windows down until the A/C finally got cold — if it ever did. These buses cool down almost immediately."

Jackson said the interior of the buses were meant to hold up against wear and tear. The cloth seats can be cut without showing signs of damage, and the floors are a granite mixture that gets sticky as it gets wet to prevent accidents.

"We looked at other buses like these which have been in use since the '70s," Jackson said. "The buses that were built in 1977 look like they were built in 1997."

"If we can make the old buses last 18 years, we can make these last at least 25."

The buses are equipped with a "stop request" line that passengers may pull when their stop is reached; however, Jackson said the function is probably only going to be functional on future off-campus buses to shorten route times.

Trey Cellmer, a driver of more than three years and junior geology major, said the new fleet also carries an additional bonus for students outside the buses. Along with cleaner burning and more fuel-efficient engines, the exhaust pipes are located on the top-left side of the bus, so the exhaust will not spray directly onto those nearby.

"This way, people waiting for their bus

See Buses on Page 2.



BERNARDO GARZA/THE BATTALION

Above: Bus drivers will receive a training session on handling the new buses which are scheduled to begin arriving in College Station Saturday.

The 22 new buses cost \$6 million. They were purchased from University administrative funds. The new \$50 bus fee will be used for maintenance and purchasing more buses in the future.

The buses seat 34 people but can carry up to 75 passengers. They also have a lifting ramp for wheelchairs.

Left: Bus Operations Manager Gary Jackson stands in front of a new bus. Jackson said the first few new buses will be used for on-campus routes.

CSPD offers tips to prevent fraud

Robin Lewis
The Battalion

After the recent arrests of two College Station residents accused of credit card fraud and check forgery, College Station Police Department (CSPD) officials warn residents of the Bryan-College Station area to be more cautious and protect their accounts.

James Michael Ellison, a 20-year-old College Station resident, was arrested July 13 at First American Bank in College Station, after officers found him in possession of crack cocaine while attempting to cash a stolen check at the bank.

Officers said Ellison and his 30-year-old roommate, Dawn Marie Bugge, could be responsible for as many as 250 incidents of fraudulent activity.

Bugge was arrested July 18.

CSPD Public Information Officer Dan Jones said people who knew the suspects or have experienced recent burglaries to their car or home should be concerned.

The suspects stole whole books of checks from the bottom of the victim's check boxes to keep them from noticing any immediate disappearance.

Ellison, Bugge and possibly a third suspect were stealing these checkbooks and credit cards to use them at local convenience stores and grocery stores.

Although the suspects said most of the cash was used to buy crack cocaine, they also bought

cartons of cigarettes and lottery tickets.

The two suspects could be charged with forgery, credit card fraud and the redemption of il-

legally obtained lottery tickets — a third degree felony, depending on the value of the tickets.

"We are working with the state lottery commission to see if

we can determine the total amount of lottery tickets that were cashed," Jones said. "We are pretty sure we can document over \$200 worth, which will allow us to classify it as a third-degree felony."

Jones said College Station, just like any other city, experiences its fair share of forgery cases.

Jones said valuable items such as checkbooks, purses, wallets with credit cards or anything else of value should not be placed where they can easily be stolen, such as in an

unattended vehicle.

Jones also said there are several other steps people can take to protect their bank accounts and credit cards.

"On checks, people should limit the amount of information they put on the front. If you just put your name and a P.O. Box number, then it might encourage merchants to ask for ID."

Jones said clerks commonly will only ask the customer if the information on the check is the right information instead of verifying the information with an ID. This allows the customer to purchase items without officially proving their identity.

"I also don't sign the back of my credit cards," he said.

Instead, he prints "check ID" and then said he thanks the merchants if they actually do.

Tips to Prevent Fraud

- Don't leave purses, checkbooks, or wallets with credit cards in car
- Limit the amount of personal information on checks
- Instead of signing the back of a credit card, print "Check I.D."

RUBEN DELUNA/THE BATTALION

INSIDE

Aggielife
• Barrels of fun
Messina Hof offers Harvest Weekend for wine lovers

Opinion
• You need body art
Outdated laws against tattooing should be revised

Battalion News Radio:
1:57 p.m. KAMU 90.9

www.thebatt.com