

No room to panic

Homebuilders should not add panic room



COLLINS EZEANYIM

The American public always wants to have a piece of popular movies, whether it is Star Wars collectibles or *Matrix* screen savers. But the recently released Jodie Foster movie *Panic Room*, has sparked a trend that may be costly to home buyers in terms of money and safety.

In the film, Foster battles intruders from the confines of what is commonly known as a safe room. The concept is simple: residents of a home that is violated by intruders can retreat to the room and call authorities on an independent phone line. Although the idea is basic, there is much more to the safe room that homebuyers must consider. Once they take these aspects into account, they will discover there is no need for such a structure.

Unfortunately, as soon as the movie was released, there was a sharp rise in the number of requests by homeowners and potential homebuyers for panic rooms to be installed. But these safe rooms do not come cheaply; a fully equipped version easily can cost \$500,000, and many security experts say the cost is not justified. The Associated Press, on the subject of people buying safe rooms, quoted William Bratton, former commissioner of the New York Police Department. "If you've got the money, that's great," he

said. "But what are the chances that you're ever going to use the darn thing?"

Granted, the concept of a safe room has its place. Reinforced rooms make sense when it comes to protection from natural disasters such as hurricanes or tornadoes. Safe rooms also have useful applications in foreign countries. In Israel, for instance, it is mandated by law that every new building or addition to an existing building is equipped with either an apartment protected space or a floor protected space. For the besieged country, this precaution makes sense and only

his Monte Carlo penthouse safe room. He had feared that intruders had set the fire, but as The Associated Press reported, the fire was really set by one of his nurses, Ted Mathers. Mathers admitted that he had set the fire in a scheme to rescue his boss and earn a promotion.

In this case, Safra relied too heavily on the false sense of security offered by a safe room. Once he discovered that his penthouse was on fire, Safra should have done everything in his power to get out, regardless of whether there were intruders in his home or not. Many who will invest in safe rooms will expect the structure to protect them from every possible threat, but Safra's tragic example shows that homebuyers must still be on their guard.

It is a homebuyer's choice whether they want to invest the time and money into a safe room. But hopefully, the majority of those who decide to take this venture will do so because they believe safe rooms are a worthwhile investment their families safety, not because a movie made them trendy.

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can be seen as necessary. And while the United States is now more aware of the threat of terrorism, it is not under the constant threat of bombings; therefore, the addition of safe rooms to homes is superfluous at best.

Furthermore, there is no guarantee that a panic room will keep the occupants safe. This addition may become a hazard by itself.

The Associated Press reported on the tragedy that occurred to Edmund Safra, a billionaire banker who was killed by a fire in

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ADRIAN CALCANEO • THE BATTALION

It's about growth

Despite challenges, Texas A&M stands out

Texas A&M University, despite the criticism and negative stereotypes that are frequently associated with it, provides students with an unmatched learning environment. For all its faults, A&M is a place where students are exposed daily to harsh debates and controversial issues that regularly escape students elsewhere. Lessons are learned the old-fashioned way here; theory gives way to real-life experiences that make powerful impacts in one's life.

On the night of Jan. 13, 2002, I gave my OK to run a questionable cartoon in *The Battalion* — a decision that set off a chain of events that has forever changed how I view race in American society. In the weeks following my decision, there were times of frustration, anger, confusion and regret, but most of all, I was left with a fascination of how ethnic groups see themselves and how they perceive others see them.

That experience reinforced the first lesson I learned upon my arrival on campus. As a fish in the Corps of Cadets, I was ready to quit on day two. I remember my commander, Mark Gonzales, pulling me aside and telling me that the fact that I chose to join the Corps meant that I believed in it and what it could do for me. I would regret it for the rest of my life if I quit something I believed in, he told me.

He was right. The Corps is among the most rewarding things I have done in my life. This is not a lesson that is limited to the Corps. Being an Aggie is not easy. The idea that Aggies take the higher road still rings true. It is what sets A&M students apart.

Yet, as evidenced by the hundreds of letters *The Battalion* received this semester, I see many Aggies wanting to quit on the school they believe in. Former students constantly threaten to withdraw support because of the cancellation of Aggie Bonfire 2002, or because they think A&M is becoming too liberal or too politically correct. Current and former students are divided over the presidential search and hang their support for Texas A&M on who is at the helm. Where are their mentors to



MARIANO CASTILLO

remind them that quitting something you believe in because things go in unexpected directions will lead to regret?

Letters to the editor are among the best samples of student sentiment. Instead of cursing the changes that A&M is heading toward, as seems to be the trend in letters, students should embrace the opportunity to engage in dialogue over difficult issues. This is not an easy or painless process, as many of us learned in the weeks following Jan. 14.

The cartoon controversy, which unfortunately overshadowed much of the excellent journalism produced by *The Battalion* Spring 2002 staff, brought out the worst of A&M, that of a student body divided, and with it came some of the harshest criticism of the University. However, it also put the much-repressed issue of race on the forefront, and all students were exposed to it, engaging their intellect and challenging their perceptions. A&M is truly a learning place, where we can learn from our mistakes and from each other's. The controversy taught all of the students involved very powerful lessons about the way people interact.

The growing pains that current students are feeling, with the Bonfire decision, the issue of diversity and Vision 2020, among others, should not be viewed as obstacles that will do away with 'Ol Army, but as changes that we should not be afraid to debate about. Dialogue such as this brings with it high tempers, emotions, politics and other things students would rather not deal with. But this is what makes us stronger. It makes us better people, better leaders, and leaves us prepared for the real world.

The University finds itself at a defining point in its history. In true Aggie tradition, students should embrace the challenges and always take the higher road; it is what makes A&M stand out.

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The terror continues

Palestinians must give up violence for peace



JONATHAN JONES

Countering the attacks of neighboring nations fighting to push Israel into the Mediterranean Sea is nothing new. The civilian innocents of this democratic nation, Arab and Jew alike, have faced a barrage of suicide attacks in the wake of stalled peace talks. Some Palestinians, including teenagers of both sexes from wealthy families, have stooped so low as to disguise themselves as pregnant women and ambulance relief workers just to be in a better position to kill. The Arab world, and Palestinians in particular, are not ready to coexist with the

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Jewish state. There can be no long term peace until violence aimed at destroying Israel is abandoned and political negotiation is embraced as a means of resolving conflict.

Before Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon began to root out the cowardly terrorists hiding among their own civilians, the hope of his people for a secure and prosperous future seemed more and more distant. Predictably, he has faced a barrage of criticism. Israel is right to defend its very existence, which the current conflict threatens. America should stand shoulder to shoulder with Israel in our collective war against terrorism. Many of its values

are shared with this country. These are the same democratic, free market and pluralistic values that are been the bedrock of Western civilization.

There should be no moral equivalency between the Israelis and the Palestinians in the current conflict. There is no "cycle of violence," only attacks and legitimate responses of war. In fact, Israel has gone beyond most of its obligations in the effort for peace and security. This has been met with violence and terror.

Following the Oslo Accords, for example, Israel has granted self-rule and a de facto state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. If the Palestinians wished, there could be much more. In addition, many refugees in Israel are living in such a sad state of affairs because the much larger countries surrounding Israel refuse to give them shelter. In the meantime, nothing is said of the right of return for the Jews of Alexandria or Baghdad. While Jews are not permitted to live in many Arab countries, Arabs are granted full citizenship with the right to vote in Israel. They are free to become members of the Knesset. Ironically, Arabs in Israel have more rights and freedoms than most Arabs in living in Muslim majority countries.

Israel, smaller than New Hampshire, is an island of democracy in a sea of totalitarianism. Israelis are willing to make peace, but the Palestinian leadership is not. The Israeli offer at the 2000 Camp David summit, which Palestinian Yasser Arafat rejected in favor of the current violence, is a clear demonstration of this. He rejected 95 percent of the West Bank and shared sovereignty of Jerusalem.

Until the Palestinian people

as a whole renounce terrorism, there can be no long-term peace and it is not just Arafat or a fanatical fringe that supports the suicide bombings. In poll after poll, over three-quarters of Palestinians approve of this gruesome tactic.

Sharon is now completing what the United States is still doing - systematically rooting out terrorist organizations that reject peaceful overtures and threaten national security. Arafat, however, is very adept at playing up victimhood to the Western media. The supposed massacre at Jenin is the latest of these disgusting episodes.

There has been much political discussion about the Oslo accords of 1993. Hailed at the time as a significant step toward peace, Arafat has since undermined the agreements from the start. Israel fulfilled its obligations, but the series of reciprocal concessions that were supposed to take place were decidedly one-sided. The only obligation the Palestinians had was to stop terrorizing Israeli civilians, and they could not do it. Israel wants to coexist in peace with its neighbors. But the steady stream of Muslim martyrs is making this impossible.

One man's freedom fighter is not another man's terrorist. There should be no moral equivalence from the American point of view. The United States must fully support Israel in their war on terrorism. By negotiating with Arafat in the wake of suicide bombings, a message is sent to Tehran, Damascus and Baghdad that terrorists can intimidate the United States. At that point, no one is safe.

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