

THE BATTALION

Volume 109 • Issue 31 • 12 pages

www.thebatt.com

Friday, October 11, 2002

Student kidnapped at gunpoint and robbed

By Sommer Bunce
THE BATTALION

A Texas A&M student was kidnapped at gunpoint outside his College Station apartment complex Monday and forced to drive his assailant to Corpus Christi before being robbed and left in an empty parking lot, Corpus Christi police said.

Christopher Michael Duke, a senior history major, was loading his 1997 Dodge Dakota truck at 3:30 p.m. Monday when a Hispanic male approached him with a gun and ordered him into the car, said Cmdr. Mike Walsh of the Corpus Christi Police Department (CCPD). The man then gave Duke directions and ordered him

to drive west on State Highway 21, south on U.S. Highway 77 and south on Interstate 37 into Corpus Christi, Walsh said.

Duke contacted Corpus Christi police just after midnight Tuesday, after the assailant had directed him to a quiet parking lot. Duke told police in the report that he passed out when the man pointed the gun at him when they stopped, in what he later told police was the south parking lot of Corpus Christi's Memorial Coliseum.

When he woke up, the man had left



DUKE

and taken Duke's laptop computer, credit cards and cash.

Duke then headed down Shoreline Boulevard, calling police from the Best Western Marina Grand Hotel, Walsh said. According to the report, Duke also called his wife in College Station, who contacted the College Station Police Department.

The assailant is described as a six-foot-tall, 185-pound bald Hispanic male in his 20s or 30s. CCPD's crime unit took photos of Duke's Dakota and pulled fingerprints from the vehicle, but are still analyzing the evidence, Walsh said.

"I'm worried we may have somebody loose in Corpus Christi that's capable of pulling this," Walsh said.

Duke is the Memorial Student Center (MSC) Council's Vice President for Marketing and was chairman of MSC OPAS last year. Duke declined to comment.

Duke was not injured in the car jacking and returned to College Station on Tuesday. Friend and co-worker Barry Hammond, MSC Council president, said Duke would spend the next few days at home recuperating.

"We expect him to be back on his feet in a few days," Hammond said.

Detectives at the College Station Police Department are investigating the car jacking, said Lt. Rodney Sigler. College Station Police detectives met with University Police

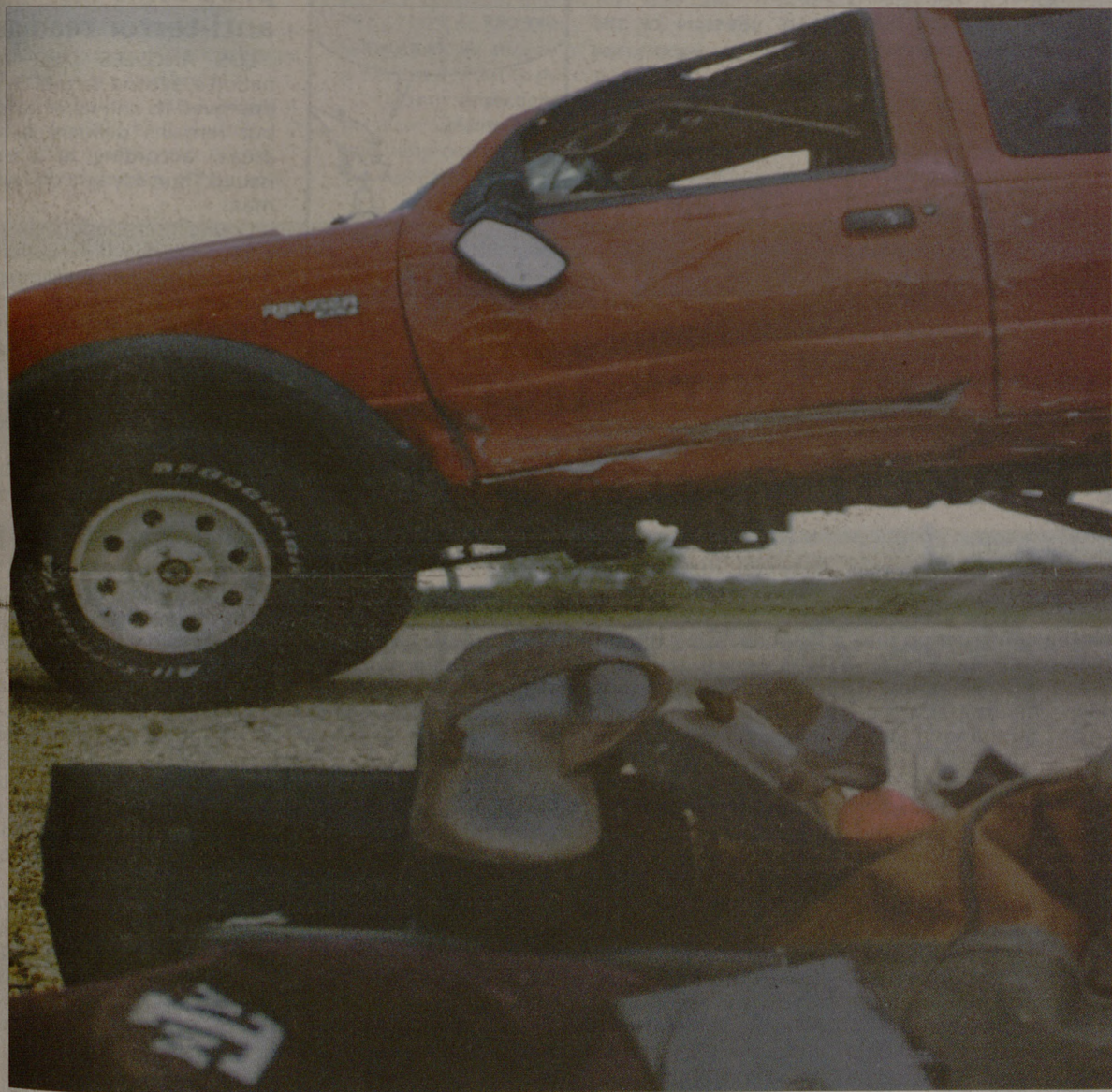
Department Director Bob Wiatt Thursday morning.

"They're asking us to help, and we're doing what we can," Wiatt said.

During the car jacking, labeled an "aggravated robbery" in the CCPD report, the assailant used Duke's cell phone to place three calls before tossing the phone out the truck's window, Walsh said. Duke told Corpus Christi police that the man spoke in rough and broken English.

"This is an unusual type of car jacking," Walsh said. "They usually relieve you of your keys and money and you're going to be standing there watching your truck drive away. I've not seen a kidnapping like this in a while."

Bumps and bruises



ALISSA HOLLIMON • THE BATTALION

Items lay in the road after being thrown from a Ford Ranger when it was hit and flipped over at the intersection of FM 2818 and Wellborn Road at 6:15 p.m. Thursday, A&M Consolidated High School junior T.J. Brooks hit the

truck when he failed to yield while attempting to make a left turn onto Wellborn in his red 2-door coupe. The driver and passenger of the truck were taken to the College Station Medical Center with minor injuries.

RHA, Hart officers charged with hazing

By Rolando Garcia
THE BATTALION

The vice president of the Residence Hall Association (RHA) and other residence hall student leaders may be ousted from their positions for their involvement in an alleged hazing incident, but the students are condemning the University's proceedings as a sham trial rigged against them.

Student Conflict Resolution Services meted out sanctions this week to Eric D'Olive, RHA vice president for administration, Jennifer Caballero, the president of Hart Hall, Rashaun Fontenot, Hart's vice president, and at least four other Hart residents for hazing freshman Clayton Whittle, who also lives in Hart.

The students were given conduct probation, which according to A&M student rules places them "not in good standing with the University" and ineligible to hold office in any student organization. Whittle received hall probation, which is a warning that a student is in violation of residence hall rules. All are appealing the decision.

The charges, D'Olive said, stem from a Sept. 16 incident in which he and others duct taped Whittle to a swivel chair and tried to spin him around until he vomited, an activity D'Olive and Whittle characterized as friendly horseplay.

A group of Hart residents had gone to Sbisa Dining Hall to eat dinner together, and Whittle ate 18 Push-Pops to break the unofficial Hart Hall record. To hold the record, a student must not throw up afterwards, D'Olive said, and so he and others playfully attempted to make Whittle throw up when they had returned to Hart.

Outside, in plain view, D'Olive said, they tried to tie Whittle to the swivel chair. Whittle said the prank was random and harmless.

"We were all joking, and I just wish I'd

had my camera," said Whittle, a business major.

Matt Fuller, the Hart director, came outside and stopped the activity, D'Olive said. After speaking briefly with the participants, Fuller wrote an incident report which he submitted to University officials. The report, D'Olive and other participants maintain, is full of gross inaccuracies and fabrications, especially its assertion that hall leadership had made a tradition of making students who broke the Push-pop record vomit.

"It is in no way a tradition," said D'Olive, a senior international studies major.

Fuller could not be reached for comment Thursday.

According to University rules, hazing is defined as "any act that endangers the mental or physical health or safety of a student for the purpose of initiation, admission into, affiliation with, or as a condition for continued membership in a group or organization."

Each student was questioned individually, D'Olive said. After interrogating a student, the hearing officers deliberated for a few minutes and then handed down the sentence, without having talked to the other students, D'Olive said.

"Because of our positions we got nailed to the wall," D'Olive said.

Michael Collins, director of Student Conflict Resolution Services, could not be reached for comment.

Kristin Harper, associate director of the Department of Student Life, said she was not familiar with this case, but said the student disciplinary process is intended to be an open dialogue between students and hearing officers.

"We want to sit down with students and discuss what happened and why it

See **RHA** on page 2

Soderberg named freshman class president in runoff

By Sarah Walch
THE BATTALION

Grant Soderberg was named freshman class president Thursday night after a runoff election and a computer error cramped the amount of time the candidates had to poll.

After a glitch last week in the computer program that tabulates votes, Soderberg and James Lloyd campaigned for a position which had mistakenly been announced as filled.

Soderberg, a business administration major, won with 577 votes, or 69 percent, out of a total 850 voters. Freshman biomedical sciences major Lloyd received 255 votes, or 31 percent.

"We would like to apologize for what happened last time," said Erin Eckhart, election commissioner and junior biology major. "We have reviewed the program and are completely confident that these are the correct results we are announcing tonight."

Soderberg said he is thankful the freshman class has put its trust in him.

"It's a great honor to be elected," he said. "We both ran incredible campaigns."

Soderberg said that since both opponents were notified last Friday after the mistake was discovered, the loss of time was the same for both opponents.

"I would have started campaigning sooner, but we did both find out on the same day," Soderberg said.

He said he will decide on the T-shirt design and start the freshman class fundraiser within the next month.

Lloyd said campaigning was a good experience.

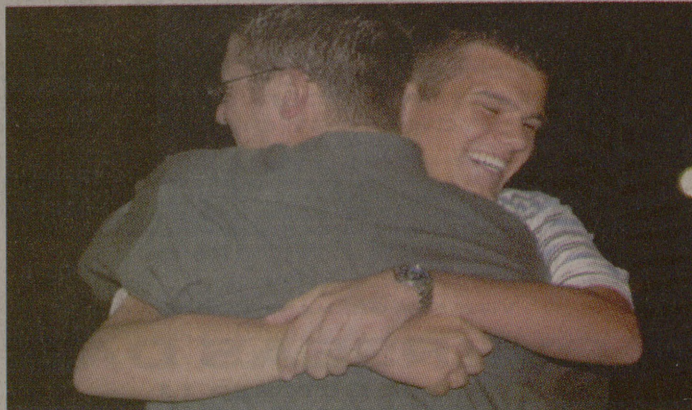
"There are many other ways to be involved," Lloyd said. "I am definitely going to be active in student government. This campaign was a great opportunity to meet people."

General studies major Ben Steed won freshman vice president with 572 votes, or 70 percent. History major Cinnamon Hodges received 250 votes, or 30 percent.

Steed said he would focus on promoting the class.

"I was pretty confident in my campaign," he said. "I worked pretty hard, and I really met a lot of people."

General studies major Lear Bowling won freshman social secretary with 516 votes, or 64 percent, and general studies major Joey Boggs won freshman class historian with 447 votes, or 55 percent.



ALISSA HOLLIMON • THE BATTALION

Grant Soderberg (top) waits with freshman general studies major Ben Steed for freshmen election runoff results Thursday night in the Academic Plaza. Soderberg hugs freshman Greg Kay, a freshman business major, after learning he is the new freshman class president.

Overseas day to educate on traveling abroad

By Lecia Baker
THE BATTALION

Texas A&M's Study Abroad Program Office will host "Overseas Day" today in the Flag Room and main hallway of the Memorial Student Center (MSC) to educate students of the University's international opportunities.

"The primary purpose of Overseas Day is to promote the Texas A&M Study Abroad faculty-led program," said assistant director Cathy Schutt.

The event enables students to shop around and talk with faculty to become aware of the different international locations available, Schutt said.

A&M cannot fulfill all of the internationally bound students' requests to study abroad. For this reason, Schutt said the office has invited other programs outside the University to participate in Overseas Day and offer students additional opportunities.

Schutt said students can also get information on student loans, international health risks, international student ID cards and other assistance and necessities for studying abroad.

"Students can travel overseas and remain in their comfort zone with their friends and Texas A&M faculty," she said. "Then they will feel more comfortable traveling the world on their own."

Along with completing classes and internships, most students have the opportunity to travel to several cities or countries while they are abroad.

"Vision 2020 states that all A&M students will have an international experience before they graduate," Schutt said.

Schutt said this is an excellent time for students to study abroad because they can receive financial assistance while at A&M.

The main events will be held from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., but additional presentations will take place at 3:30 p.m. in Rudder Tower to inform students of programs outside the University.