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The spirit of twelve

Ceremony helps families say good-bye

By Rolando Garcia
THE BATTALION

When Richard West attended a father-son Bonfire cut event with his son Scott, West said he was impressed by the camaraderie and bonding of the Aggie family. Weeks later, Scott was one of the 12 Aggies killed in the Nov. 18, 1999 Aggie Bonfire collapse.

Three years after the accident, West says it is that Aggie camaraderie that helps his family through the grieving process.

"There's always a bit of sadness this time of year, but this (remembrance) service helps you get through it, and reminds you you're part of this big Aggie family," West said.

West joined the families of nine other Bonfire victims at a low-key memorial ceremony Sunday evening at the Polo Fields to mark the third anniversary of the Bonfire collapse.

"When you lose a child like that, you want to know their life had meaning," West said. "In talking to his Corps buddies, we've realized what an impact (Scott) had on people's lives."

The Corps of Cadets and hundreds of students and on-lookers watched in silence as friends and family of the Bonfire victims walked in a procession from the Williams Administration Building to the Polo Fields. The Bonfire families laid a wreath for each of the 12 Aggies who died, and then "Amazing Grace" was played on the bagpipes.

A&M President Dr. Robert M. Gates said the short, solemn ceremony was an appropriate way to mark the anniversary of the collapse. Some Bonfire families criticized the University last year for not scheduling any remembrance ceremony. Gates, who took office in August, said there was consensus among campus leaders and Bonfire families that the anniversary should never again go unmarked.

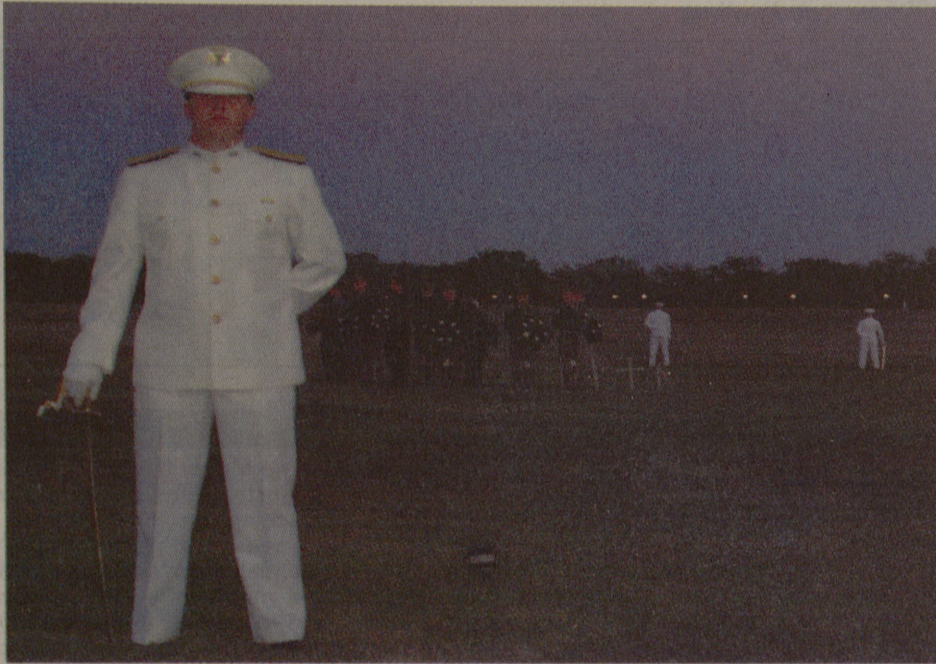
"We want an observance every year, and to make it a permanent part of the University's life," Gates said.

Student Body President Zac Coventry said the remembrance ceremony was intended to bring all Aggies together, including students who had never seen or worked on Bonfire.

"Even younger students who were not here when it happened have a sense of what Bonfire meant," said Coventry, a senior agricultural development major.

The wreaths were arranged in a large circle, and the Ross Volunteers, an honor guard outfit within the Corps, were posted on the perimeter.

Before walking to the Polo Fields, See **Ceremony** on page 2



Above: The Ross Volunteers stand in a circle on the Polo Fields on Sunday around representatives holding wreaths in honor of the 12 victims of the Bonfire collapse. Right: Corps of Cadets Squadron 16 members stand with **Janice and Tim Kerlee Sr.** at the memorial tree for their son, **Tim Kerlee Jr.** Below right: Senior poultry science major **Bowen Shepard** stands at attention as **Kevin James**, a freshman business major, plays "Amazing Grace" on the bagpipes while families stand by.

Students cannot decide what should be next for tradition

By Sarah Walch
THE BATTALION

Three years after the 1999 Aggie Bonfire collapse, students are still divided on how central Bonfire was to maintaining unity at Texas A&M.

Students from off campus, on campus and the Corps of Cadets expressed different views about what Bonfire meant to the A&M community and what A&M means now without Bonfire. But students agreed that Bonfire's suspension has had an enormous impact on the community of A&M.

After a year-long process seeking to reinstate the annual Thanksgiving fire for this fall, in February, then-University President Dr. Ray M. Bowen announced that Bonfire would not burn again, saying the stakes were too high. Twelve Aggies were killed and 27 injured when the 60-foot-high stack swayed and fell at 2:42 a.m. on Nov. 18, 1999.

Bowen said students should face the inevitable and focus their energies on creating a new tradition that replicates the camaraderie of Bonfire but does not entail the danger and expense.

The fate of Bonfire is now in the hands of University President Dr. Robert M. Gates, who has made no indication of his thoughts about what will happen with Bonfire since his term began Aug. 1.

John Parrish, a senior civil engineering major and member of the Corps' Squadron 17, said his group was one of the most active units during the build-

ing of Bonfire in 1999. The group was awarded Center Pole, the most prestigious of the logs, for their efforts at the site around the clock.

"Bonfire is something that all the other traditions were built around," Parrish said. "Not everyone understood Bonfire, but they respected it."

When the unique bonding experience of working together for a common cause is taken from students, it can't be replaced, Parrish said.

Student Body President and senior agricultural development major Zac Coventry said Bonfire was a unifying experience for some, but didn't include all Aggies.

"I never saw an international student in all the time I worked on Bonfire," he said.

That's something the International Student Association is seeking to change if Bonfire is brought back to campus, said Molina Warty, the organization's president and a senior economics major. Ninety percent of international students are graduate students who are here for two years, don't live on campus and don't have much of a chance to get involved, Warty said.

"They don't really feel involved in campus activities," she said. "It takes a lot to reach out to everyone, but that is one of our goals, to get more international students involved."

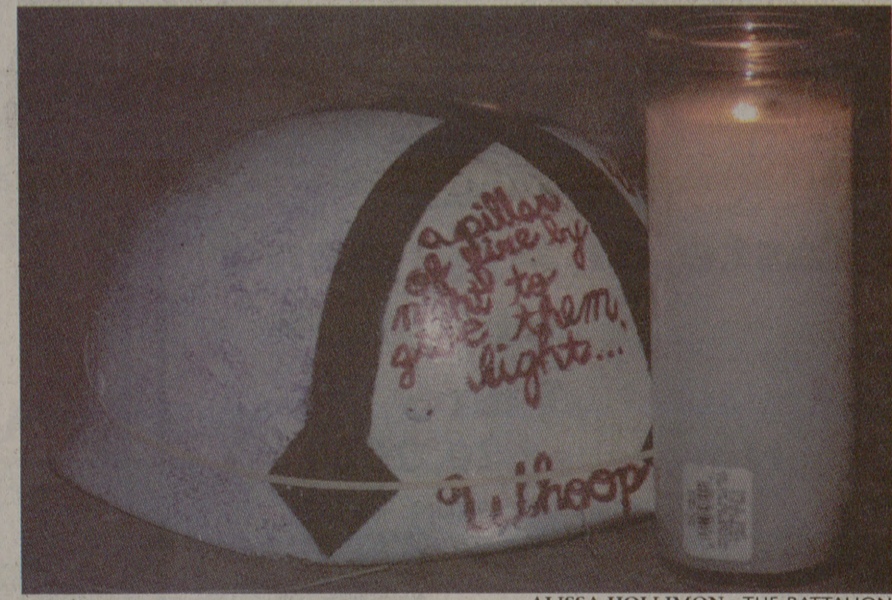
See **Bonfire** on page 6



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A&M vies for homeland security research facility

By Rob Phillips
THE BATTALION

A U.S. Senate vote next week could decide whether Texas A&M will become the first national center for homeland security, said A&M Vice President for Research Dr. Richard E. Ewing during his

status report on research initiatives Friday.

"We really do have the inside track of being the first and initial national center for homeland security," Ewing said to an audience at Langford Architecture Center during his keynote address for the College of Architecture's fourth annual faculty symposium.

U.S. Representatives Joe Barton, Tom DeLay and Kevin Brady recently added wording to the Homeland Security Act of 2002 that would establish university-based homeland security centers, Ewing said.

"The new wording says there should be at least one university-based center that would guide research and development in this area," he said.

Ewing hopes A&M's newly established Integrated Center for Homeland Security will get the University appointed as a national center if the new wording is accepted by the Senate early next week. The House of Representatives passed the new version last Wednesday, he said.

In May, the A&M System Board of Regents created the Integrated System for Homeland Security in response to

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Chao: U.S. must revamp worker training

By Rolando Garcia
THE BATTALION

With too many skilled jobs and not enough trained workers to fill them, it is imperative that America revitalize its workforce training programs,

U.S. Secretary of Labor Elaine Chao said Friday in a speech at Texas A&M.

Chao, speaking at the George Bush Presidential Conference Center, said the business community, schools and the non-profit sector must collaborate to match workers' skills with jobs that are available.

"The government can't do it alone," Chao said. "Employers know where the jobs are and what skills are needed, and we need to enlist their help."

She stressed the importance of volunteerism, saying non-profit organizations play a critical role in tutoring and mentoring those who need to learn new job skills. Chao, who served as director of Peace Corps under former President George

Bush, said she sent the first Peace Corps volunteers into the former Soviet republics to assist in education and training efforts.

"We saw first hand the transforming power of free enterprise and volunteerism," she said.

Since the September 2001 terrorist attacks, applications for Peace Corps and AmeriCorps have increased dramatically, Chao said.

The department of labor spends \$12 billion annually on workforce training for the unemployed she said, including 1,800 local career centers that assist with resume writing, job interviewing and other skills. Chao said she plans to link these centers closer to the local business community. She said schools will also play a key role in closing the skills gap.

Over the past decade, public schools have emphasized preparing all students to go to college and have neglected vocational programs, Chao said.

High schools should partner with community colleges and local businesses to offer certification programs that will equip students with marketable skills once they graduate, she said.

During a question and answer period, Chao addressed the looming

strike among longshoremen in ports on the West Coast. With more than 40 percent of America's international trade passing through the western ports, a strike by the 10,500 longshoremen would deal a temporary blow to the U.S. economy, she said.

The ports were shut down for 12 days during the summer, causing more than \$1 billion in economic losses each day, Chao said. Agricultural produce was rotting on the docks and auto manufacturers started laying off workers as parts were not delivered. On Chao's recommendation, President Bush invoked a rarely used authority to end the strike and order the ports re-opened. Chao said Bush's order expires Dec. 27, and said she was not optimistic that the workers and port management would reach an agreement.

Chao criticized labor union leaders in general for not representing rank-and-file members.

"(Labor unions) are an apparatus of the Democrat party, and its important for union leaders to understand at least one-third of their members are Republican," she said. "I exhort union leaders to fairly represent their

See **Chao** on page 2

Top Ranked Universities For Research in 2000

| University | Expenditure in millions |
|------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. Johns Hopkins | \$901.2 |
| 2. U Wisconsin-Madison | \$554.4 |
| 3. Michigan | \$551.6 |
| 4. UCLA | \$530.8 |
| 5. Washington | \$529.3 |
| 6. UC San Diego | \$518.6 |
| 7. UC Berkeley | \$518.5 |
| 8. Stanford | \$454.8 |
| 9. UC San Francisco | \$443.0 |
| 10. U Pennsylvania | \$430.4 |
| 15. Texas A&M | \$397.3 |

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