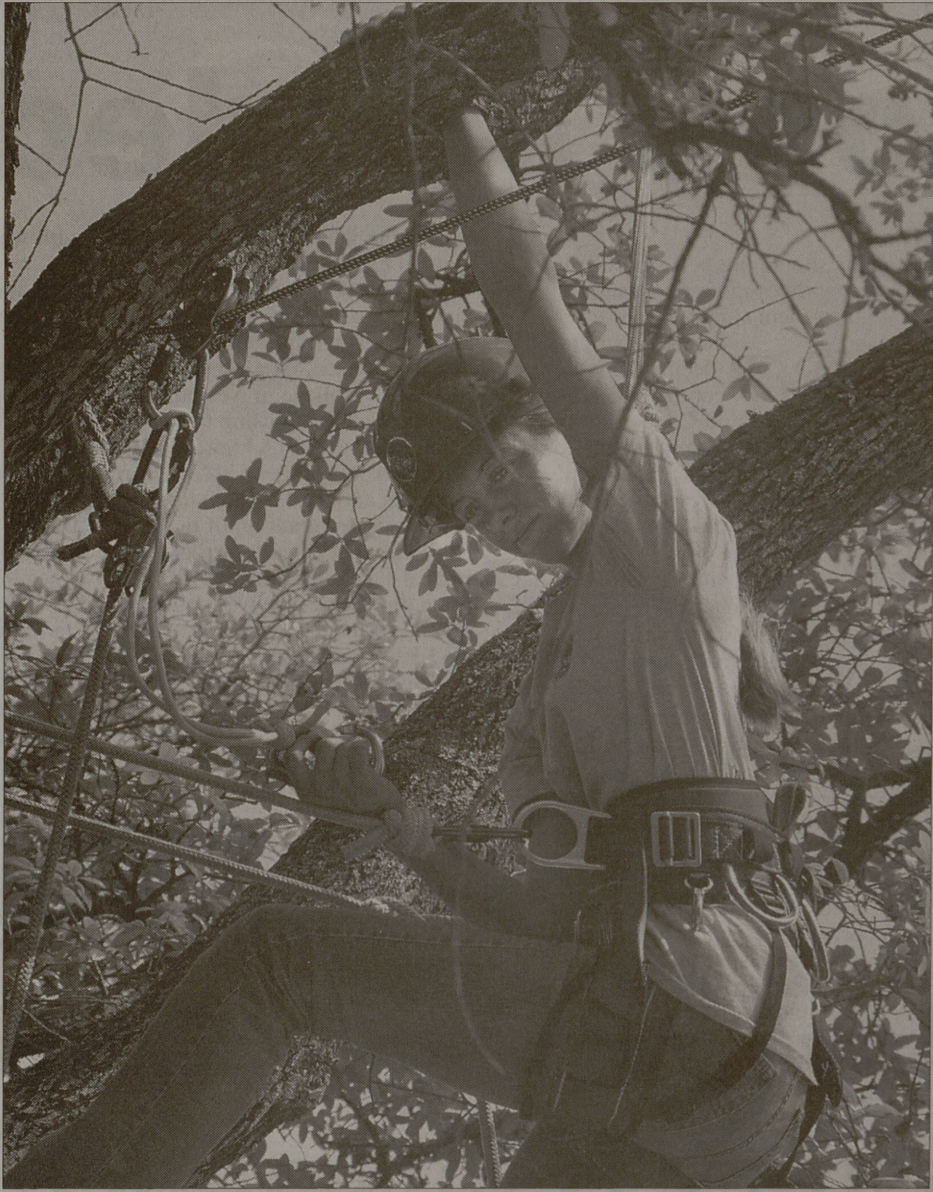


Hangin' around



JP BEATO III • THE BATTALION

Recreational tree climber **Jessica Ciomperlik**, a freshman biology major, secures ropes and a zip line to trees around the Memorial Student Center Tuesday afternoon. The Student Society of Arboriculture membership drive attracted people wanting to climb up, then slide down, the trees.

American Airlines pilots approve concessions deal

By Angela K. Brown
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

FORT WORTH, Texas — American Airlines pilots and ground workers approved wage and other concessions that the airline said it needed to avoid filing for bankruptcy, the pilots' union announced Tuesday.

American, the world's largest carrier, waited for results of voting by flight attendants, which were also expected Tuesday.

Airline officials had vowed to file for bankruptcy as early as Tuesday if any of the three unions rejected the concessions. American is trying to cut labor costs by \$1.8 billion a year, or more than 20 percent.

Underscoring American's financial troubles, auditors for its parent company expressed doubt Tuesday about the company's ability to stay in business, citing large losses and the need to cut labor costs.

Leaders of American's three main unions had reluctantly supported the concessions as a better alternative than bankruptcy. They feared that American could use the bankruptcy process to impose even harsher cuts and reduced pension benefits.

"To willingly take our airline and our company into bankruptcy would not be a better alternative," said John Darrah, president of the pilots' union, while announcing the results of the pilots' voting. "There is no upside to bankruptcy."

But angry employees packed union meetings to complain that terms of the concession deals

were too harsh. They objected to the length of the deals — nearly six years — and small raises in later years.

American sweetened the deals last week by offering one-time bonuses of up to 4.5 percent in 2006 or later if the company's credit ratings improve sharply.

The Allied Pilots Association said its members approved the concessions 69 percent to 31 percent. The union said 10,200 pilots, a high turnout, took part. Darrah said he had hoped for a larger margin favoring the agreement.

"To willingly take our airline and our company into bankruptcy would not be a better alternative."

— John Darrah
pilots' union president

The Transport Workers Union said on its Web site Tuesday morning its members had approved the concessions contract by a 53 percent to 47 percent margin.

Discussions between the company and union leaders continued up to the end of voting, including a meeting between Darrah and American chairman and chief executive Donald J. Carty on Tuesday morning before either man knew the results of the voting.

The flight attendants' union said it asked Monday for more time to vote because of problems with balloting but American denied the request. A spokesman said there was a delay in making contract language available to employees.

The union elections were conducted by phone and over the Internet — an accelerated process needed to meet American's ratification deadline.

Employees began voting shortly after negotiations for company and unions reached tentative agreements March 31.

Pilots and ground workers were able to change their votes until Tuesday, but flight attendants were not, raising concern that many flight attendants voted to reject the deal because American sweetened the deal last week with possible bonuses.

American sought \$660 million in annual concessions from 12,000 pilots, \$620 million from 34,000 ground workers and \$500 million from 24,000 flight attendants. The agreements included layoffs for 2,500 pilots, 2,000 flight attendants and 1,400 ground workers.

Carty warned that if American went into bankruptcy, it would seek \$500 million in additional labor concessions.

Darrah said he feared that American went into bankruptcy it would ground 100 planes and lay off another 500 to 1,500 pilots.

American's parent, Fort Worth-based AMR, has lost nearly \$5.3 billion in the past two years and continues to lose about \$5 million a day.

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