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System employees await ruling

By Karen Yancey
THE BATTALION

Texas A&M University System employees are awaiting a ruling from Texas Attorney General Gregg Abbott concerning their eligibility to receive state insurance benefits after retirement.

The Texas Legislature passed two bills this session that change the age and years of service requirements for A&M System employees who want to retire with

full insurance benefits. Only the A&M System will be affected by these bills.

Under the old law, employees who are at least 55 and have at least five years of state service can retire by Aug. 31 with full health benefits. But under the new law, any employee who wants to be eligible to receive full health benefits and retires after Aug. 31, must be age 65 and have at least 10 years of state service.

A memo from the Human

Resources Department sent out to A&M employees last week said that the new bills have not been signed by Gov. Rick Perry, but could have an impact on A&M employees who plan to retire in the future.

Bob Wright, director of communications for the A&M System, said one of the new bills has a grandfather clause that allows current A&M System employees to remain under the older law even after Aug. 31.

However, Wright said, A&M officials are waiting for a decision from Abbott on whether the grandfather clause applies to both bills.

Wright said there are several hundred potential retirees in College Station and several thousand in the TAMU system.

"A lot of people are trying to figure out what they want to do and time is running out," he said.

Sen. Robert Duncan, the primary author of one of the bills, could not be reached for comment.

Legislation affecting A&M EMPLOYEE BENEFITS

Before August 31, 2003

To receive full health benefits, must be:

• 55 years of age with five years state service OR

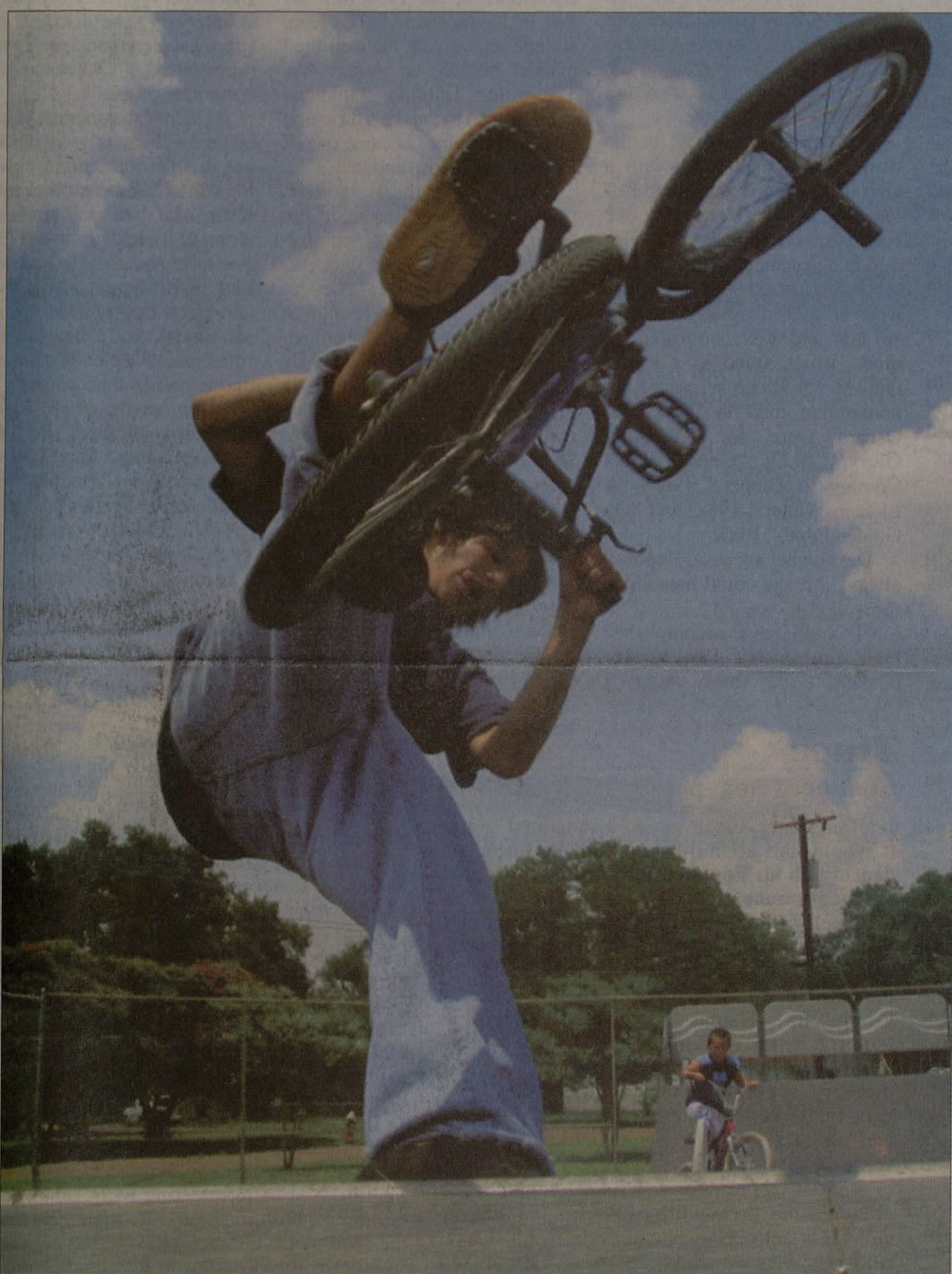
• Meet Rule of 80, where years of service added to age is equal to 80

After August 31, 2003

Must be 65 years of age with 10 years of state service credit to receive full benefits

RUBEN DELUNA • THE BATTALION
SOURCE: TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY SYSTEM

Pop a wheelie



SHARON AESCHBACH • THE BATTALION

With only one year of experience, 14-year-old Garrett Karr pulls stunts on his BMX at the opening of a new skate park near the Bryan Municipal Golf Course on Saturday. The skate park, which houses a 5-foot

wedge, a 4-foot quarter pipe, a fun box, stairs and grinding rails, was built on top of seldom-used tennis courts and now provides a safe place for area youth to skate.

Baylor campus awaits word on missing athlete

By Angela K. Brown
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WACO, Texas — As the FBI joins the search for a missing Baylor basketball player, some of his friends say their fears that he won't be found alive are growing.

Patrick James Dennehy, 21, hasn't been heard from in more than two weeks, and police suspect that he was killed in the Waco area. His sport utility vehicle, its license plates missing, was found abandoned in a mall parking lot in Virginia last week.



DENNEHY

John Cunningham, a speech communications professor at Baylor, said Dennehy was working on an independent study project for his class this summer.

He said Dennehy was a "solid B student" who dreamed of playing for the NBA and then working in public relations for his favorite team, the Sacramento Kings.

"It's been unbelievably hard," Cunningham said Sunday. "Right now, the hardest part is not knowing. We're trying to stay positive, but it's been hard as more

time passes."

Waco police say Dennehy's teammates and others have been questioned about the disappearance of the 6-foot-10, 230-pound center and junior speech communications major from Santa Clara, Calif. Police declined to comment Sunday, saying a news conference was planned for Monday afternoon.

Rene Salinas, a spokesman in the FBI's San Antonio office, said Sunday that the FBI was helping Waco police in the investigation. He declined further comment.

Dennehy often sat in the front row so he could concentrate and didn't talk much to his teammates, who sat in the back, Cunningham said. But the professor said he was surprised about reports that basketball players may be suspects.

"I've taught those guys, and there's no way in my mind that any of them are capable of doing anything like that," Cunningham said.

Dennehy's stepfather, Brian Brabazon, told the Waco Tribune-Herald someone had

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Africana Studies approved

By Lindsay Broomes
THE BATTALION

This spring, the College of Liberal Arts approved an undergraduate minor in the field of Africana Studies to increase the globalization of the curriculum of the College of Liberal Arts, said Julia Kirk Blackwelder, associate dean of the College of Liberal Arts.

"The minor will contribute to the cultural understanding among our students," she said.

Africana Studies is an interdisciplinary area that focuses on Africa, the people of Africa and the cultures and experiences of Africans who have migrated around the world, Blackwelder said.

"History, literature, sociology, anthropology, the arts

Africana Studies Minor

- Must complete 18 hours
- Coursework in classes such as:
 - African American History
 - Modern Africa and Sociology of Black Americans
 - Rhetoric of the Civil Rights Movement
- First courses offered in Spring 2004

RUBEN DELUNA • THE BATTALION

SOURCE: COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS, NOVA DEVELOPMENT

and other disciplines contribute to Africana Studies," she said.

Blackwelder said the minor is comprised of 18 hours of course work with classes such as African American History, Modern

Africa, Sociology of Black Americans and Rhetoric of the Civil Rights Movement as some points of focus.

In addition to courses already offered, three

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Israeli troops set to withdraw as Mideast truce announced

By Ibrahim Barzak
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

GAZA CITY, Gaza Strip — The militant Hamas and Islamic Jihad groups and Yasser Arafat's Fatah movement declared immediate suspensions of attacks against Israel on Sunday, and Israel began pulling troops out of Gaza, breakthroughs in attempts to end almost three years of fighting.

The militant groups announced three-month truces and Fatah's cease-fire was for six months. At sundown Sunday, Israeli troops and tanks began pulling out of northern Gaza, in keeping with an agreement to hand responsibility for security in Gaza over to the Palestinians.

An Israeli pullout is a

condition of the U.S.-backed "road map" to peace and a Palestinian state by 2005.

The Bush administration welcomed news of the cease-fire, but said it wants to see more progress.

"Anything that reduces violence is a step in the right direction," White House spokeswoman Ashley Snee said. "Under the road map, parties have an obligation to dismantle terrorist infrastructure. There is still more work to be done."

The truce was first announced by the two militant groups. The timing came as a surprise, after Palestinian officials said it would be delayed at least until Monday because of political infighting in Arafat's

Fatah movement, a partner in the three-way deal.

Hamas and Islamic Jihad apparently did not want to wait for Fatah to resolve its internal agreements.

Abdel Aziz Rantisi, a Hamas leader, read the truce announcement in a phone call to The Associated Press.

"The two movements (Hamas and Islamic Jihad) decided to suspend military operations against the Zionist enemy for three months, starting today," Rantisi said.

Islamic Jihad leader Mohammed al-Hindi confirmed that the truce took effect Sunday.

"This is a joint declaration between Islamic Jihad and Hamas and I think our brothers in Fatah are going to declare their

Mideast truce

The militant Hamas and Islamic Jihad groups and Yasser Arafat's Fatah movement declared a suspension of attacks against Israel on Sunday. Two of the militant groups announced three-month truces and Fatah's cease-fire was for six months.

Timing
The truce was first announced by the militant groups Hamas and Islamic Jihad. It came as a surprise after Palestinian officials said that it would be delayed until Monday because of political infighting in the Fatah movement.

Troops pullback
Sunday night Israeli troops began the pullout from northern Gaza, according to the agreement giving responsibility for Gaza security back to the Palestinians.

The demands
Hamas and Islamic Jihad want Israel to halt all military strikes, including targeted killings of wanted militants and the release of Palestinian prisoners. Also, Palestinians are to have the freedom to travel the length of the main road in Gaza occupied in parts by Israeli forces.

SOURCE: Associated Press, AP

position soon," al-Hindi told the AP.

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Chicago porch collapses, 12 killed

By Brandon Loomis
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

CHICAGO — Natalie Brougham was crowded onto a third-floor porch with dozens of friends early Sunday when the floor dropped out from under them, sending wood and bodies crashing through two other decks to the ground. Twelve people died, most of them crushed on the porches below.

At least 57 others were injured, authorities said.

"There were people covering me. It was pitch black and people were yelling, 'I'm dying.' I was assuming I was going to die," Brougham, 22, said. "I guess I got lucky and only had two or three people on top of me."

Brougham walked away with injuries to her hip and shoulder, in pain but alive. As many as 50 people, most of them in their early 20s, had crammed onto the apartment porch for a party in the city's affluent Lincoln Park neighborhood when the floor fell at about 12:30 a.m., police said. Seven men and five women, most of them apparently on the porches directly below, were crushed between the falling floors and

killed, said Larry Langford, spokesman for the city's Office of Emergency Management.

"There was no warning," said Simon Rasin, a University of Chicago law student who attended the party. "I fell through both the second and the first floor decks into the basement area in just a pile of bodies."

His friend Henry Wischerath was among those killed, he said.

"There was chaos," Chicago Fire Commissioner James Joyce said. "There were people screaming and crying in the alley."

Partygoers who had been safe inside the apartment said they tried to rescue their friends from the pile of lumber and bodies, while people poured out of a nearby tavern to help.

"They were bloodied and covered in rubble, their clothes were ripped. Women were looking for husbands, men were looking for wives. It was horrible," said Geraldine Schapira, 33, who lives nearby.

Eleven people were pronounced dead at

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