

AGGIELIFE

THE BATTALION

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FOR WHOM THE CELL TOLLS

Cell phone usage affects different areas of student life

By Crystal Polasek
THE BATTALION

They can be heard all over campus, from simple tones to orchestrated melodies. With the latest downloads, some even play "The Aggie War Hymn." Though the tunes vary, they are unmistakable — the sounds of mobile communication. The rings of cell phones have become as frequent in College Station as the whistles of passing trains.

Erin Brown, a junior applied exercise physiology major, said among other reasons, she likes to use her cell phone because of its convenience.

"Also, my dad travels a lot and with free long-distance, I can call him wherever he is in the country," Brown said.

According to estimates from the Federal Communications Commission, as many as 68 percent of U.S. residents who are between the ages of 18 and 24 own a cell phone. Among that demographic, 15 percent do not even have a land line at home.

"I try to use my land line when I can, but I usually reach for my cell phone if I can't remember the phone number I want to dial," Brown said. "All my numbers are saved in my cell phone."

Though she uses her mobile phone often, Brown said she gets frustrated when she sees people neglecting to use proper phone etiquette.

"I hate it when people talk on the phone in a restaurant or on the bus. You can hear their whole conversation and it interrupts whatever you were doing," she said.

As the number of cell phones increases, public interruptions have become frequent, even in the classroom.

"It's rude when someone's cell phone rings in class," said Janika Simms, a freshman education major. "I think a lot of professors are tired of hearing them, and students don't appreciate it either. It breaks everybody's concentration."

The convenience and accessibility that come with cell phones also come with hidden annoyances.

Cell phones let people contact each other anytime and anywhere, but the conversations carried out on cell phones can occur at inappropriate times.

Michelle Courter, a junior community health major, said live conversation with friends can become frustrating when a cell phone is added to the equation.

"I can't stand it when I am standing right there in front of someone and they start talking on their cell phone," Courter said. "Even if they walk away, I still have to wait for them to get off the phone so we can (continue) talking. It's the most frustrating thing I can

think of."

Aside from choosing when and where to chat, there are financial disadvantages of talking too much. Nicole Woodward, a sophomore international studies major, said her mobile conversations have come with a large price tag.

"My cellular phone bills are outrageous!" Woodward said. "I've had cell phone bills over \$200 before, and I know it's because I use more daytime minutes than nighttime and weekend minutes. Most of the calls I make are those I need to make, not social calls. Since I'm never home I have to rely on my cell phone every day."

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—Erin Brown
junior applied exercise physiology major

Shaik Rahman, president of Wireless Solutions Corporation, said unlike most fads, the cell phone craze is more than a mere trend.

"Eventually, people are not going to use land lines anymore," Rahman said. "Cell phones will be cheaper. Here in Bryan-College Station, our company activates five to seven new phones per day, and about half are for college students."

With the increasing market, wireless phone companies have been engaging in extreme competition, advertising new plans weekly and trying to offer deals that are cost-effective, in order to outdo other companies and gain customers.

Cingular Wireless offers "rollover minutes" in which unused minutes from one pay period can be used in the next period. Nextel offers free long-distance without roaming charges.

Jared Harris, salesperson for Verizon Wireless, said the new wireless deals available can easily overwhelm shoppers who are on the lookout for a plan.

Harris said it is difficult to find a

cell-phone contract lasting less than a year because users often want to change companies to get the best deal.

"Most of the calls I receive are from people asking how our plans compare to another company's plans," he said. "It matters how long (one) intends to talk, what time of day, where they are and where they're going. Now, the big concern regarding safety is how they use the phone while driving."

In 2000, the Texas Department of Public Safety reported 716 traffic accidents in the state during the year that were likely attributed to using cell phones while driving. In 2002, TDPS reported that drivers who talk on their cell phones have a 34 percent greater chance of being involved in a collision than those who do not.

"It bothers me when I see people driving (while) on their cell phone," said David Ogura, a senior history major. "It puts other people in danger. There are simply places people should never use cell phones."

Many students at Texas A&M feel strongly about this danger and would prefer that cell-phone users seek alternatives to talking and driving, or at least keep both hands on the wheel while talking.

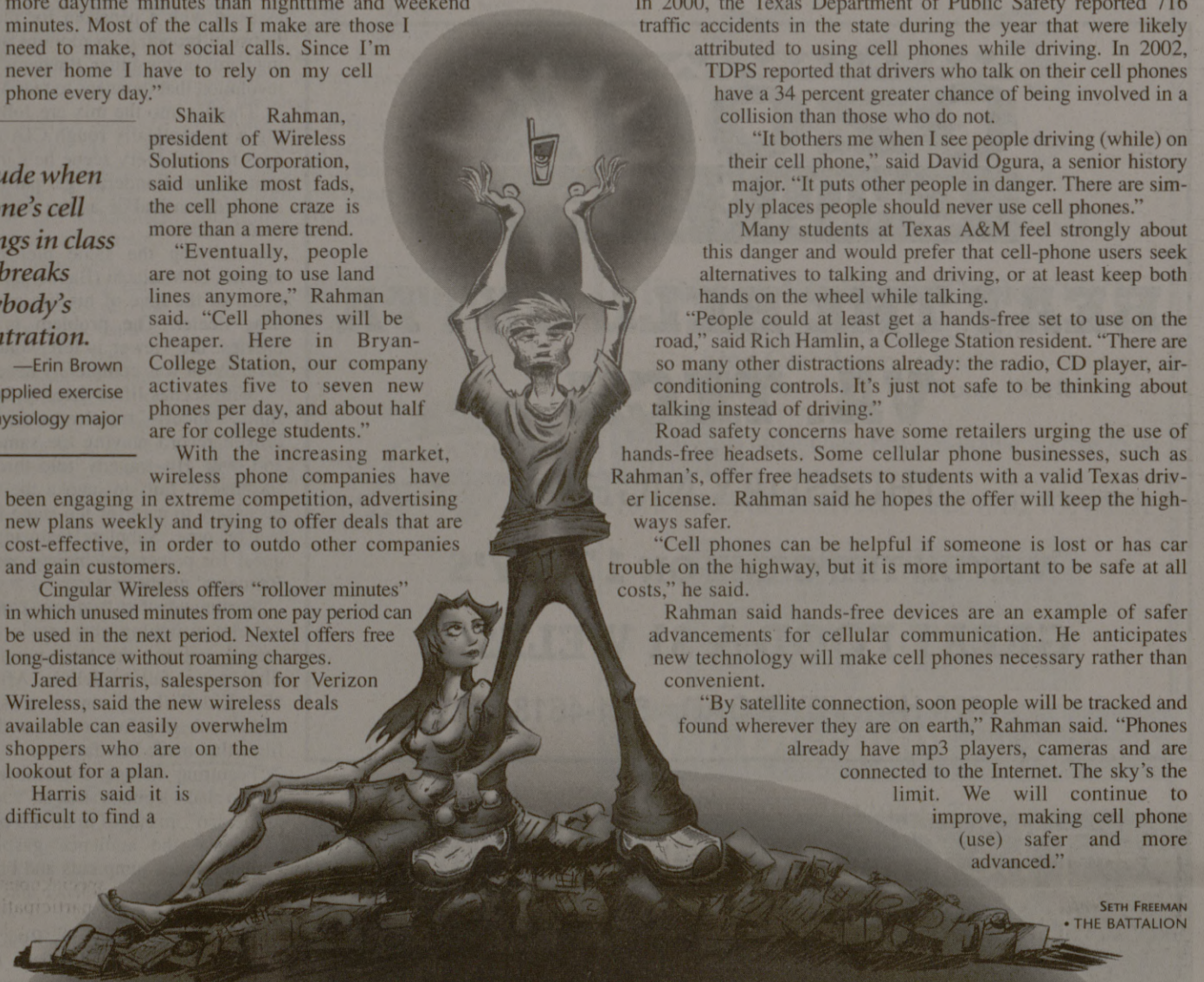
"People could at least get a hands-free set to use on the road," said Rich Hamlin, a College Station resident. "There are so many other distractions already; the radio, CD player, air-conditioning controls. It's just not safe to be thinking about talking instead of driving."

Road safety concerns have some retailers urging the use of hands-free headsets. Some cellular phone businesses, such as Rahman's, offer free headsets to students with a valid Texas driver license. Rahman said he hopes the offer will keep the highways safer.

"Cell phones can be helpful if someone is lost or has car trouble on the highway, but it is more important to be safe at all costs," he said.

Rahman said hands-free devices are an example of safer advancements for cellular communication. He anticipates new technology will make cell phones necessary rather than convenient.

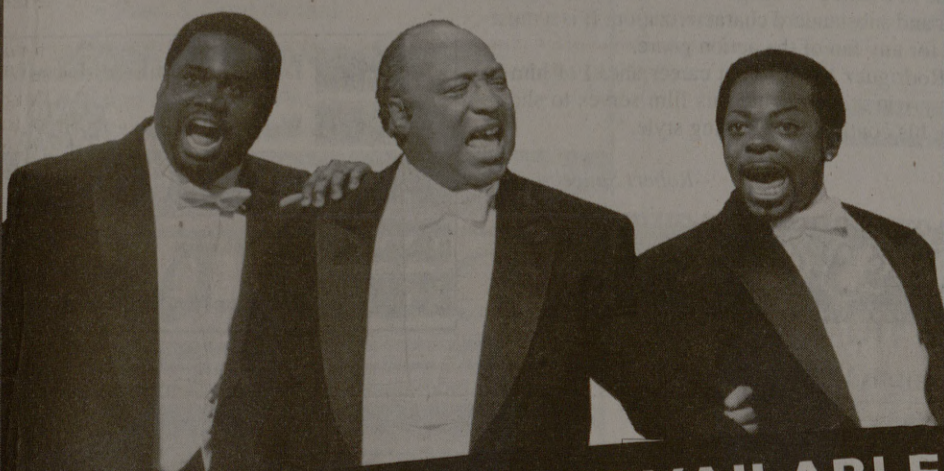
"By satellite connection, soon people will be tracked and found wherever they are on earth," Rahman said. "Phones already have mp3 players, cameras and are connected to the Internet. The sky's the limit. We will continue to improve, making cell phone (use) safer and more advanced."



SETH FREEMAN
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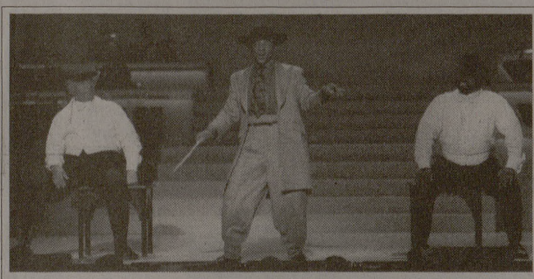
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