

# AGGIELIFE

THE BATTALION

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## The road less traveled

Alternative Spring Break offers a new view of the annual week-long party

By Katie Wigginton  
THE BATTALION

Chris Young, a senior environmental design major, prods at his desk surveying drawing plans. He looks at all the intricate measurements that make up the structure. While eyeing them, his mind drifts and he remembers a particular spring break when those numbers on the page meant something more than a numerical value because he was building a home for a poverty-stricken family with his own two hands.

Alternative Spring Break (ASB) is relatively new to A&M and the size of the organization is growing each year. In lieu of the "normal" spring break choices of beaches or snowy mountains, more students are seeking out enlightening, memorable and life-changing experiences that impact the future of the individual as well as the community at large.

"It seemed like every year, I would hear about my friends' spring breaks and the story sounded the same every year," Young said. "I love a party just like everybody else, but I wanted to get out of Texas for spring break and do something special."

Young and about 10 other students piled into a van and traveled to Nebraska to help low-income families construct houses with Habitat for Humanity. Even though the accommodations were not entirely appealing, Young said, he believes minimal sacrifices are worth it.

"The best part was when the family came out to their house and one of the little girls was telling me how excited she was to have a birthday party in her new home," Young said.

According to Jillian Somers, president of ASB and a senior English major, Alternative Spring Break, a chapter of the national nonprofit and non-religious service organization, Break Away, selects about three agencies and locations in the United States that deal with a range of social topics and issues of concern.

Once the three agencies are selected, three separate groups are educated on their specific issue beforehand and travel to their location of service during spring break. At night, each group gathers together to talk about the day's activities and individuals share the personal effect taken from the day to further ignite his or her awareness of the situation.

Angela Gray, a coordinator of volunteer services at the Department of Student Activities, stays active in the community by advising volunteer groups at Texas A&M such as Big Event, Replant and Alternative Spring Break.

"I applaud organizations such as Big Event and Replant for showing the importance of service outside the A&M community," Gray said. "That's where the service starts, but that is not where it ends."

Gray said ASB is important because it takes the time and effort to offer education with social issue, hands-on service experience and the

opportunity to reflect and make meaning within the individual who impacts him personally. Yet that impact ripples out to the community as well.

The ripple is already taking affect as ASB has added a trip, along with 11 new participants, each year since it formed in 2000.

Gray said ASB started out with seven students on an environmental trip to the Gila National Forest in New Mexico.

Each year expanded its membership and scope to add different issues such as animal rescue, inner city youth and education and cultural connections. For spring break in 2004, low-income housing, helping senior citizens, conservation and wilderness reclamation for the environment are the topics selected for the upcoming trip.

Typically, this particular agenda would not appeal to the college spring breaker, but members of all classes and majors are joining despite having to sacrifice alcohol and parties during the break week.

Jon Todd, vice-president of staff development for ASB and a senior journalism major, joined the organization as just another meek and mild freshman looking for an organization to join among the plethora surrounding him at open house.

When spring break arrived, Todd became appreciative of the personal experience he gained from the service road trips and he continues to bring back with him the memories and advantages each year.

"I think the biggest advantage is that it is the cheapest, yet safest, fun you can have for spring break," Todd said.

He said the trip costs about \$250 per person, but fund raising is attempted every year to lower the cost to around \$150. This cost covers housing, food and everything in between — except souvenirs.

Along with the low cost, meeting new people, going to a different place and overall allowing an escape from the everyday life that is the purpose of spring break, there are also career advantages to joining ASB.

"Showing on your resume that you worked with the community and you can work within a team looks good to all companies," Young said.

Gray also advises that the trip can be an advantage to making career connections and finding mentors and internships. She said one former trip participant received an internship because of the trip.

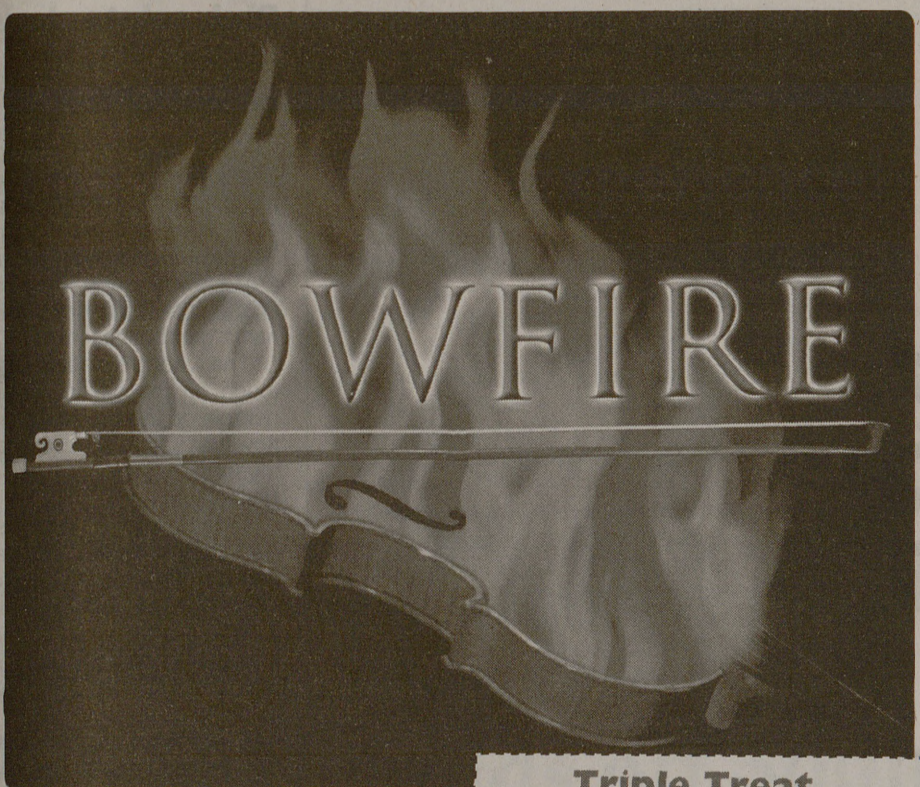
"I do believe there is an ASB movement of growth that is starting to happen at A&M," Gray said. "Students of all different races, religions and ages are out there taking the opportunities given to them to change not only their personal place as a citizen in college but the active citizen they can become afterward that will inherently shape their lives and the world they share with everybody else."



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For more information about ASB or if you would like to become a trip participant, contact Angela Gray at (979) 458-3347 or e-mail at [asb@stuaact.tamu.edu](mailto:asb@stuaact.tamu.edu). Applications are being accepted until Friday, Nov. 21.

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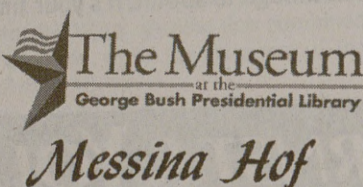
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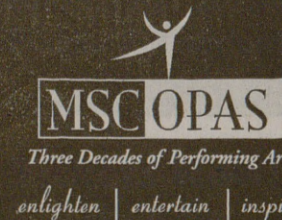
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