

Pursuing poetry

Student-run poetry journal helps answer growing demand for arts in B-CS

By Jose Cruz
THE BATTALION

Growing up as a resident of the Brazos Valley for the majority of his life, Sam Pittman II, a senior English major, felt like there was something missing from his life. It wasn't until Pittman enrolled in the Creative Writing Program at Texas A&M that he realized his love for poetry could lead to publishing his own literary journal.

The "Brazos Gumbo," an independently produced poetry journal published quarterly, will feature Brazos Valley's most talented poets.

"It began as my English 485, Directed Studies independent project. I write poetry and I've always wanted to publish my own work and others' work as well. It started out as a little idea and it just kept building," Pittman said.

The journal will strictly showcase poets who are from the Brazos Valley, but Pittman said that readers will see a lot of flavors. People should expect a good mix of poetry and there will be a little bit for everybody.

Most of the poets who made it into the "Brazos Gumbo" are students who heard about the journal through the flyers Pittman put up around campus and local bookstores.

"I had a feeling people would respond to it if it was there. From the response I got from the poets, I get the feeling that they've been waiting for a venue to showcase their poetry. I don't think I'm alone in this," he said.

Although Pittman has enjoyed overwhelming success in his first attempt at recruiting poets, he is still unsure of how the public will receive the journal. Some think College Station hasn't yet reached the artistic level that neighboring cities such as Austin and Houston have achieved.

Chuck Taylor, coordinator of the Creative Writing Program, said that as far as he knows, there hasn't been a student-run literary magazine in the area for quite some time.

During the 1980s, some members of the faculty published a literary magazine, but it only lasted for two or three years. Taylor believes most of the problem can be attributed to the lack of a suf-

ficient population base to support the journal.

"We live in a relatively small city when you compare it to cities like Houston and Austin. Those cities have many theaters, art galleries and venues that showcase the arts and a large population to support them. Austin is a great example of a city that is tolerant of artists and artistic freedom. These cities are hungry for art," Taylor said.

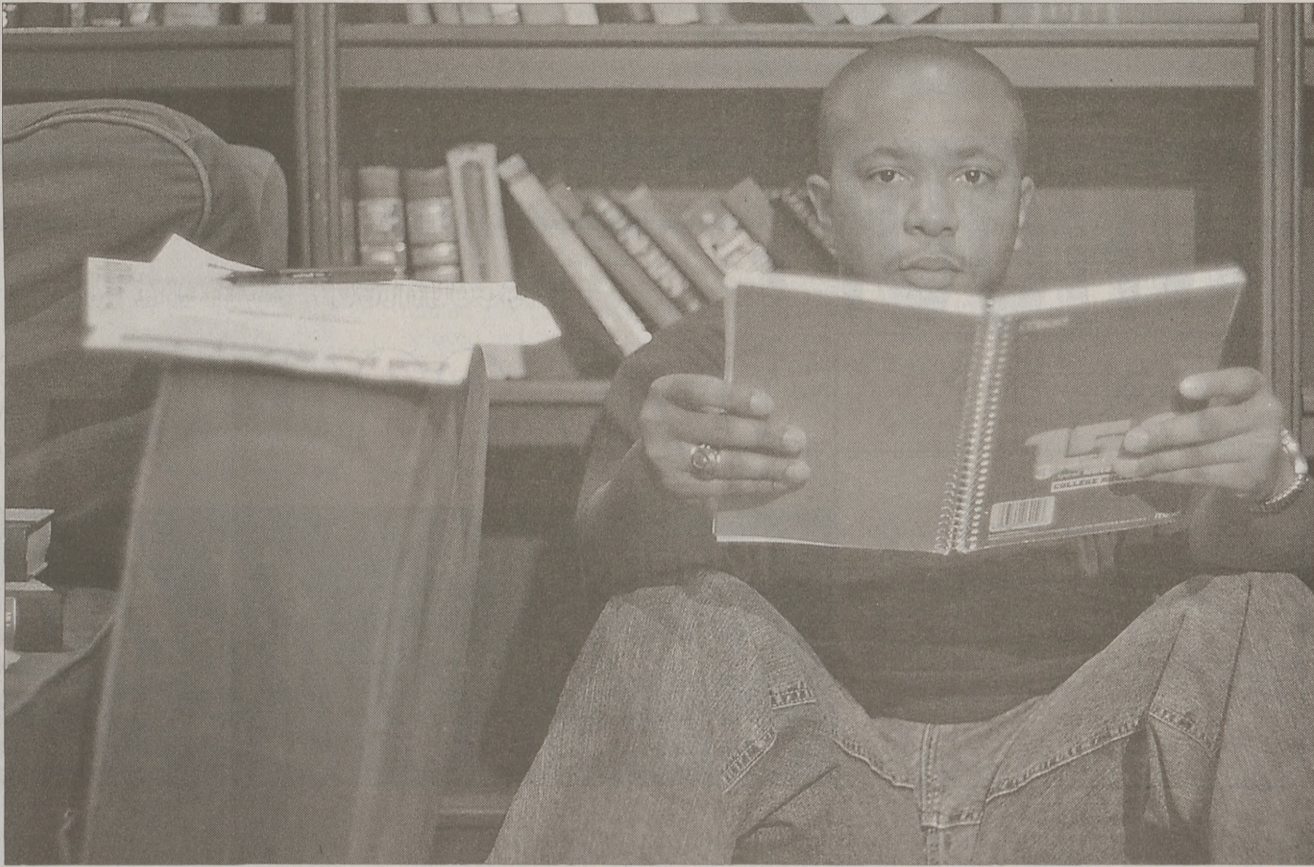
Pittman said he agrees that the Brazos Valley is definitely lacking in this area, but that he is hoping his journal will bring some attention to poetry and the arts to the area.

"I wish there were more literary venues and events here. We could definitely use more involvement in the arts, but I'm the type of person that if it's not immediately there then I will go find it," he said.

In this case, Pittman actually created it and is receiving praise for it. Taylor said one of the functions of art is to give a voice to the people who are underrepresented in society, and that this is what makes "Brazos Gumbo" so great.

"I think the journal is very important. Sam is now representing all different kinds of voices with the "Brazos Gumbo,"" he said.

Among the poets featured in the debut issue of "Brazos Gumbo" is Lindsay Sloan, a doctoral student in business. She said she supports the journal



BRIAN WILLS • THE BATTALION

Senior English major Sam Pittman II is publishing the poetry journal "Brazos Gumbo" with the help of A&M's Creative Writing Program.

because it is completely student-run, and believes students will be more willing to contribute and be involved in it if they are among their peers.

"In our area, poetry has had an underground following for a while. Most people might not even know it exists if they are not part of that following. Things like (the slam poetry event) Javashock, the P. David Romei Center and now the "Brazos Gumbo" coming to the forefront in the past year show that the following is starting to get bigger," she said.

Jeff Stumpo, a master's student in English and

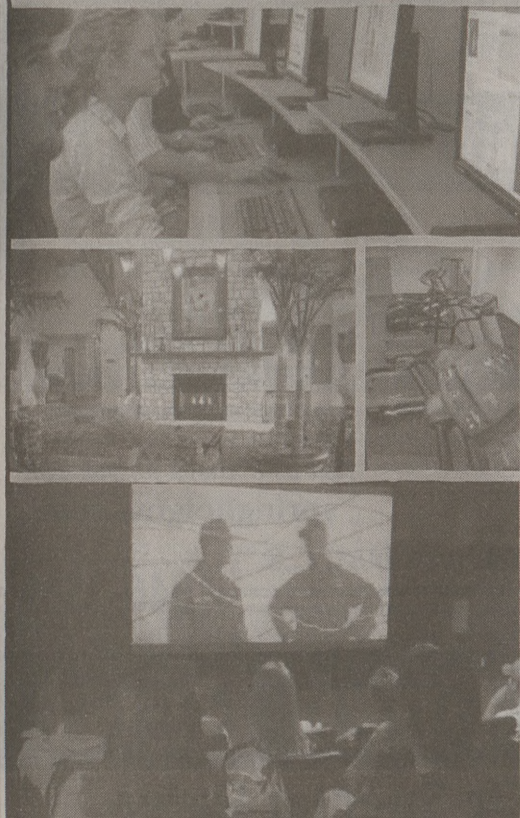
the host of Javashock, said there is a definite demand for art here in College Station.

"You'd be surprised. Last season we were averaging an audience of 100 people at Javashock, and that was largely (due to) word-of-mouth advertising," he said.

"I've talked to literally hundreds of people just in Bryan-College Station who want, to some degree or another, more of the arts," Stumpo said.

During college, many students look to the arts

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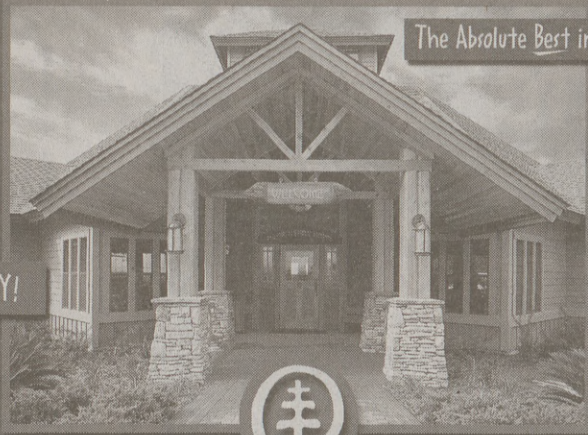
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