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Tech cuts ribbon on Alumni Center expansion

By TRISTIN WALKER
STAFF WRITER

The Texas Tech University Alumni Association and supporters of Tech gathered to celebrate in a ribbon cutting ceremony for the expansion of the Merket Alumni Center on Saturday.

First built in 1995 as an addition to the original President's Home, the Merket Alumni Center soon grew popular, hosting more than 800 events annually.

In February 2008, the Isom family and the Ben Ralston family gave a lead gift to expand the Merket Alumni Center. The gift was the beginning of a two-and-a-half-year fundraising and construction project that would double the meeting space in the center.

The expansion added an additional 11,400 square feet to the Merket Alumni Center and includes a new serving kitchen and storage, new circulation, a new staging and planning office, renovation of the current kitchen into a marketing suite, a Bride's area and new restrooms.

The expansion also included the McKenzie Ballroom — which

will seat up to 600 — and the new Anders Courtyard, which includes an outdoor gazebo that will be adjacent to the six-foot-tall Texas Tech Class Ring sculpture and should be in place by August.

The project also added the Peggy and Bill Dean Grand Reception Hall, which was named in their honor for their lifetime support of the university.

Bill Dean has served as executive director of the Texas Tech Alumni Association and is the associate dean of student affairs for the College of Mass Communications. He is also a faculty adviser to Phi Delta Theta and Saddle Tramps.

Peggy Dean was a teacher in Lubbock and now is the vice president of Lubbock Women's Club and a sustaining member of the Junior League of Lubbock. She is also a member of Lubbock Symphony Guild, Indiana Avenue Baptist Church, Community Bible Study, Philanthropic Educational Group, Texas Retired Teachers Association and Lubbock Retired Teachers Association.

The Peggy and Bill Dean Grand Reception Hall includes a recep-

tion area with a serving bar, a grand fireplace and a metal-and-glass sculpture of the Masked Rider by Charise Adams.

"I am very humbled by this whole experience," Bill said at the ribbon-cutting ceremony. "It has been a great experience to see the university grow and see the Alumni Association grow."

He said he would also like to thank everyone who is responsible for the expansion of the Merket Alumni Center — including Nelda Laney, who was responsible the fundraising, and Renée Underwood, who was the marketing and communications project. Bill said everyone did a wonderful job.

Nelda Laney, the National President of the alumni association's board, said the expansion was a \$4 million project that was funded by Tech Alumni, friends of the university, students and grants.

The ribbon-cutting ceremony symbolized that the building is now open for business, Laney said. The hard work that everyone put into this project has really paid off, and the ceremony was meant as a time of celebration.

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PHOTO BY JUSTICE RICE/The Daily Toreador

MEMBERS OF THE Texas Tech University Alumni Association, including Tech Chancellor Kent Hance (far right), Larry Anders, chairman of the Tech board of regents (second from right) and Bill Dean, associate dean of student affairs for the College of Mass Communications (third from right) cut a red ribbon to symbolize the completion of the expansion of the Merket Alumni Center Saturday at the Merket Alumni Center.

Oil-crippled Gulf pelicans rehabbed, freed in Texas

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

AUSTWELL (AP) — More than three dozen brown pelicans were cleared for takeoff Sunday when they were released along the Texas Gulf Coast after rehabilitation from a soaking in oil from the BP spill.

Federal wildlife crews have released 38 brown pelicans and one Forster's tern at the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge on the Texas Gulf Coast after the U.S. Coast Guard flew them in from rehab in Louisiana.

The birds were soaked with oil from the spill in the Gulf of Mexico that began in April when they were rescued. They were cleaned, treated for ingested oil and had their waterproofing restored.

"The oil breaks their waterproofing down, so they try and clean it off on their own," said Dr. Dan Mulcahy, a wildlife veterinarian for the U.S. Geological Survey, told the Corpus Christi Caller-Times. "They ingest it and then it does real damage to their organs. They basically waste away."

Cages containing two birds each

arrived at Aransas County Airport in Rockport aboard a Coast Guard cargo plane Sunday morning. They were loaded into vehicles and taken to the nearby Aransas refuge, where the cages were opened and the birds flew away to the cheers of a small crowd that had

gathered for the occasion, the Caller-Times reported.

Each bird was tagged and will be tracked to see if they remain in the Texas Coastal Bend or return to Louisiana. Aransas refuge staff members said the birds should find their new surroundings congenial.

"This habitat couldn't be better for them," said Aransas project manager Dan Alonso. "they've got ample room, food and a lot of other pelicans to interact with."

The refuge also has plenty of the small fish and invertebrates the pelicans typically feed upon, Alonso said.

As the birds were released from an Aransas bayshore Sunday, they flew to the middle of the bay and settled into a floating group. It was the biggest release of birds rehabbed from the spill so far, and the first in Texas.

"The oil breaks their waterproofing down, so they try and clean it off on their own. They ingest it and then it does real damage to their organs. They basically waste away."

DAN MULCAHY

Wildlife veterinarian for the United States Geological Survey

Iran bans, refuses nuclear inspectors

BY NASSER KARIMI
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

TEHRAN, Iran (AP) — Tehran said Monday it had banned two U.N. nuclear inspectors from entering the country because they had leaked

"false" information about Iran's disputed nuclear program

The ban is the latest twist in Iran's deepening tussle with the U.N.'s International Atomic Energy Agency and the West over its nuclear program. The United States and its allies

warn that Iran's program is geared toward making nuclear weapons.

Tehran denies the charge saying its nuclear activities are only for peaceful purposes like power generation.

The IAEA report in ques-

tion stated that in January Iran announced it had conducted certain experiments to purify uranium, which could theoretically be used to produce a nuclear warhead. Iran then denied the experiments had taken place a few months later.

MEASURING UP



PHOTO BY BEN LIU/The Daily Toreador

MATT BICKHAM, A senior Civil Engineering major from Allen, learns how to set up the total station — a surveying instrument used to measure coordinates, angles and distances — during a class Monday outside the Mechanical Engineering building.

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WEATHER

Today	Sunny	Wednesday	Partly Cloudy
	99 / 69		98 / 69

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THE DAILY TOREADOR

Local cover band takes sold-out audience for a walk down Memory Lane at The Cactus Theatre

By MERIDETH MURPHEY
STAFF WRITER

The JD's, a local Doo-Wop cover band, took Lubbock for a walk down memory lane on Friday night when they played a sold-out show at The Cactus Theater in the Depot District.

The JD's and their self-proclaimed "geeky" alter-ego group called the Sophomores, combine hits from the 50s and 60s with comedic wit in their performances.

Over the years the band has had different members but the current members of the group are vocalists Donnie Allison, Jeff Bailey, Jason Fellers and bassist Mark Paden.

Allison is from Lubbock, graduated from Coronado High School, and attended Texas Tech for a while. In the 80s he was in a band called The Nelsons and he now plays weekends at the Cactus Theater with the JD's, has been married for 15 years and has a five-year-old child.

"Being a weekend warrior, you do it more for the joy and then you remember, 'oh yeah I get paid, this is cool,'" Allison said. "I probably make more as a weekend warrior than as a professional."

Bailey moved to Lubbock in 1995 to attend South Plains College and was in the Commercial Music Program where he sang on Thursday Night Live. He met Allison when he was auditioning for the

Buddy play at the Cactus Theater. He got the part and from there he became involved with the JD's.

"Another professor from South Plains (College) was in a gospel show and somebody dropped out and he called me and asked me if I would fill in," Bailey said, "and this was in '97, and I said yeah, absolutely, and as they say, the rest is history, I've been singing here ever since."

He said he has been singing all of his life, but took a couple years off to work and then realized he liked singing more than working.

He recently got married for the second time and he and his wife have three children.

Fellers, who is also from Lubbock and attended Tech, started singing in his church choir when he was four years old. He first got involved with the Cactus Theater when he auditioned for the Buddy show but didn't get the part. However, he was remembered and when a spot opened up in the JD's he was called.

"There was an opening in the JD's in the summer of 2000," Fellers said, "and Don asked me if I was interested in singing in this group called the JD's and I hadn't really heard of them and he gave me a video tape and said 'here, listen to some of their music and come here on this day and audition and learn this voice part,' and I said 'ok.'"

He is also married and has a

16-month-old baby.

Paden said he loves playing music and had known the owner of the Cactus Theater, Don, for many years. When the JD's had an opening for a bassist, Don called him and asked him if he would like to be a member of the band.

"When they were putting the Cactus together in about '94, Don and the drummer at the time were talking and said 'we need a bass player and can't think of anybody,'" Paden said, "and Don said 'well, I know a guitar player that played bass one night and he turned out to be an ok bass player.' So, they called me and said would you like to be the bass player and I said yeah and I didn't even really have to audition, Don just said come on down and bring your bass and I said I don't have a bass, I don't have an amp or anything, but I got that stuff and I've been here ever since."

The band first started playing at The Cactus Theater when it opened in 1994. Allison said for the first few years they were just listed as male vocal group, so he was tired of that name and decided to form a solid group and came up with the band's current name.

"I wanted to get away from the male vocal group thing and have some kind of persona," Allison said, "and I thought yeah you know JD, Juvenile Delinquents, and we could be these leather jacketed, street corner singers."

Every member of the group has a

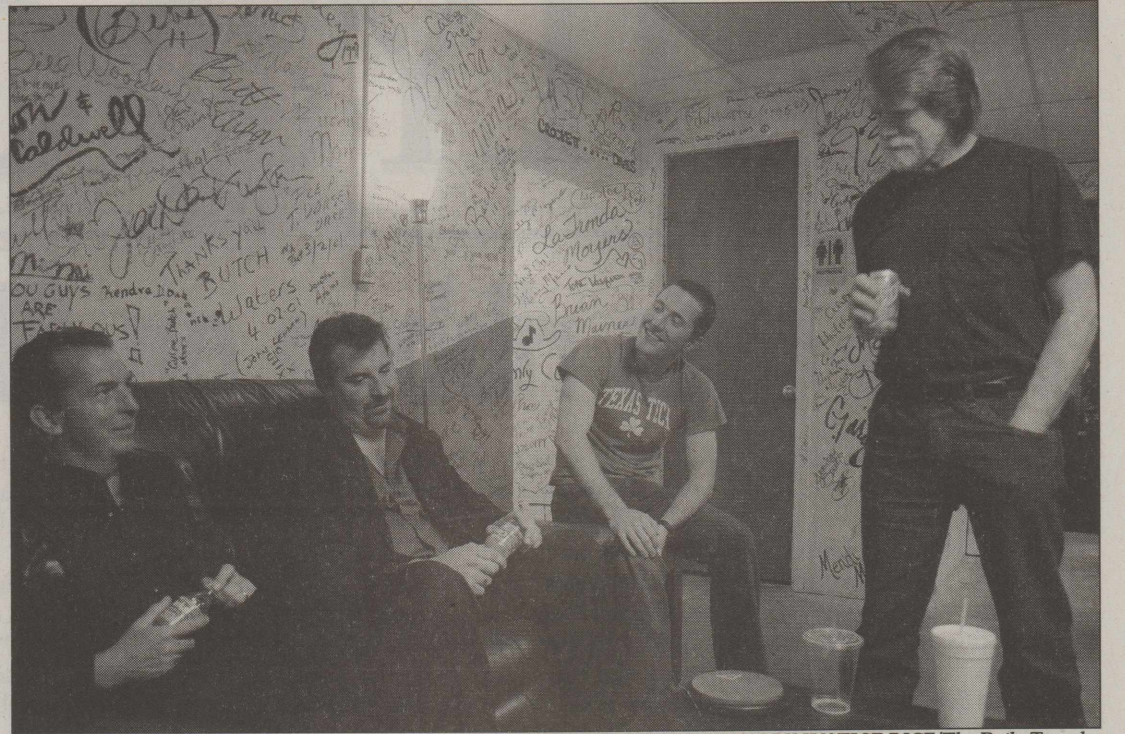


PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY JUSTICE RICE/The Daily Toreador

MEMBERS OF THE JD's, from left to right, are Donnie Allison (vocalist), Jeff Bailey (vocalist), Jason Fellers (vocalist) and Mark Paden (bassist). The band formed in 1994 and has been playing shows at The Cactus Theatre ever since.

New Jersey character they play when they are on stage. Allison is Vinnie, Bailey is Cesar, Fellers is Mickey, and Paden is Hugo.

Allison said a chance encounter with a man on a New Jersey elevator is the inspiration behind the group's gimmick.

"Vinnie was based on really two

people," Allison said, "one being Bowser from Sha Na Na, and the other one being this guy. When The Nelsons and I played in Manhattan we used to always stay across the tunnel in North Bergen, NJ because it was cheap and I got on the elevator one day at our hotel and I had a Lone Star Oyster Bar shirt on

and this guy gets on and that's his voice I'm doing."

The band plays at the Cactus Theater a few times a year and the members play individual shows as well. For more information on show times, visit www.cactusstheater.com or call (806) 762-3233.

merideth.murphey@tu.edu

Today's su | do | ku

		6			8
4	3			5	
				2	6
	2	4	3	5	8
1	3	7	2	4	
9	3				
	7		6	1	
6		1			

Puzzles by PageFiller

In Sudoku, all the numbers 1 to 9 must be in every row, column and 3 x 3 box. Use logic to define the answers.

4	7	2	3	9	1	5	8	6
9	1	6	8	5	7	2	3	4
5	8	3	4	2	6	1	9	7
7	5	8	9	1	2	6	4	3
6	3	4	5	7	8	9	1	2
1	2	9	6	3	4	7	5	8
8	9	5	2	6	3	4	7	1
2	4	1	7	8	9	3	6	5
3	6	7	1	4	5	8	2	9

Solution to yesterday's puzzle

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Medical marijuana can cost parents in custody disputes

MATLOCK, Wash. (AP) — Nicholas Pouch runs an organic farm and a glassblowing studio on a 20-acre spread in southwest Washington's timber country. Spicy mustard greens, tomatoes and corn sprout in humid greenhouses as chickens and sheep roam nearby.

It would be an ideal place for children to romp, Pouch thinks. But his children can't be there because he's a medical marijuana patient.

A drug task force acting on a tip from his former partner raided his grow operation in 2007. Even though Pouch's criminal charges were dropped, she cited the arrest and his marijuana use in winning full custody of their boys, now 9 and 11.

For the past 2½ years, Pouch has seen the boys twice a month, during supervised visits at a neutral house in Olympia. "There's no reason anybody should have to go through this," Pouch said. "Why aren't they here, chasing snakes like they like to do?"

More than a decade after states

began approving marijuana for medical use, its role in custody disputes remains a little-known side effect.

While those laws can protect patients from criminal charges, they typically haven't prevented judges, court commissioners or guardians ad litem from considering a parent's marijuana use in custody matters — even in states such as Washington, where complying patients "shall not be penalized in any manner, or denied any right or privilege," according to the law.

Arbiters often side with parents who try to keep their children away from pot. Medical marijuana activists in several states, including Washington, California and Colorado, say they've been getting more inquiries from patients wrapped up in custody-divorce cases in recent years as the ranks of patients who use marijuana swell.

Lauren Payne, legal services coordinator with a California marijuana law reform group called Americans for Safe Access, said that since mid-2006 her

organization has received calls about 61 such cases.

In Colorado last month, an appeals court ruled that medical marijuana use is not necessarily a reason to restrict a parent's visitation. Washington courts have held otherwise.

"The court cannot countenance a situation where a person is using marijuana, under the influence of marijuana and is caring for children," an Island County, Wash., judge ordered in one such dispute. "There's nothing in the medical marijuana law that deprives the court of its responsibility and legal authority to provide for proper care of children so that people aren't caring for children who are under the influence of alcohol or drugs."

In that case, the medical marijuana patient, Cameron Wioldraayer, was granted only supervised visits with his two young daughters — a decision upheld by an appeals court.

Many patients insist that using pot makes them no less fit as parents, and that they shouldn't lose custody

or visitation rights if there's no evidence they're abusing the drug.

According to the Washington, D.C.-based Marijuana Policy Project, two of the 14 states with medical marijuana laws — Michigan and Maine — specify that patients won't lose custody or visitation rights unless the patient's actions endanger the child or are contrary to the child's best interests.

Pouch, who grows marijuana in an old chicken coop, smokes a few puffs three or four times every day, and says he doesn't get high the way he did when he used marijuana recreationally in his younger days. He said he uses it to treat pain from carpal tunnel syndrome aggravated by glassblowing, as well as a shoulder that frequently pops out of its socket due to old sports injuries.

"I'm an outgoing, upstanding person. I do three different farmers markets and I'm a member of the Mason County Chamber of Commerce," said Pouch, 37. "I am not an activist at all, but I have the right to use this. It aids my pain, and it allows me to function in my everyday activities, where pills and opiates don't."

The mother of Pouch's boys declined to comment.

Pouch also has a young daughter with another woman, and is also allowed only supervised visits with her. This month, after a guardian ad litem made a favorable report about Pouch's parenting skills, a court commissioner awarded him custody — but then stayed the decision while the girl's mother challenges it.

Opposing spouses often argue that they have a right to keep their children away from illegal substances, and marijuana remains illegal under federal law.

With some other medications, such as narcotic painkillers or bipolar medications, judges can require tests to establish how much of the drug a parent has in his or her system, said Eleanor Couto, a family law attorney in Longview, Wash.

But treatment providers can't prescribe specific amounts of marijuana without running afoul of federal law, so it isn't always clear what constitutes an appropriate level of the drug.

"How do you monitor how much someone can smoke?" Couto asked. "How do you know they're able to adequately care for that child? I think it's got to be a case-by-case basis."

Seattle lawyer Sharon Blackford noted that urine tests can establish how much marijuana is in a patient's system based on current use, and that monitoring is "as easy to do for medical marijuana as it is for alcohol."

Couto said she represents one father who worked out a tentative arrangement with his ex whereby he can continue to use medical marijuana, as long as someone else watches their child while he does.

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FAREWELL COLUMN

It's tough to say goodbye

By **BEN LIU**
MANAGING AND PHOTOGRAPHY EDITOR

Ever since high school, I knew that I belonged in the newsroom. Journalism was my first love and it will always hold a special place in my heart.

It all started because of a research paper I wrote during my junior year of high school. I wrote about Watergate and how journalists brought down the president of the United States.

I was introduced to Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein. And I wanted to be just like them.

That same year, I watched the television movie Tuesdays with Morrie and read the novel (of the same name) by Mitch Albom, and I became even more intrigued by the lifestyle of journalists.

I remember sending Albom an e-mail and asking him questions about journalism. I was so excited when I saw that he had replied back. He signed off with, "See you in the locker room someday."

Unfortunately, I never had a chance to meet Albom. He might not even remember who I am, but he did e-mail me back. To hear from him was exciting and it made me a happy kid.

Surprisingly, this time it was a sports writer/columnist instead of a news reporter who had inspired me.

That's when I became fascinated with sports journalism. But then on the field, I discovered how sports photography was so much more exciting.

Albom once told me "Sports is life."

Although I'm not a big sports fan, in a way that statement is still true for me. Sports introduced me to photojournalism, which further

developed my passion for journalism. And journalism became my life.

I never thought I would leave the field of journalism after I graduated from college. But I had many great career opportunities and experiences that I would have never thought were possible.

As I said in my previous column, my degree in journalism taught me how to refine my communications skills and to network. It changed my outlook on life.

Life has been an adventure and full of surprises. I went from being in the newsroom to serving in the U.S. Air Force and then to a career in public service. I am now pursuing a future in education.

And I never expected to find myself back in the newsroom. I never forgot how much I loved journalism.

It has been a great pleasure working as the managing editor of The Daily Toreador. It was a memorable

opportunity that allowed me to meet some great friends and coworkers.

It reminded me just how much I missed the newsroom. Journalism was my life after all. And sadly, it is now time to say farewell.

There is no need to be depressed. I'm going to miss the newsroom but the memories will always be with me. Life is what you make it.

And this is not the end, but a new beginning.

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The Daily Toreador welcomes letters from readers. Letters must be no longer than 300 words and must include the author's name, signature, phone number, Social Security number and a description of university affiliation. Students should include year in school, major and hometown. We reserve the right to edit letters. Anonymous letters will not be accepted for publication. All letters will be verified before they are published. Letters can be e-mailed to dailytoreador@ttu.edu or brought to 211 Student Media. Letters should be sent in before 3 p.m. to ensure the editors have enough time to verify and edit the submission.

Guest Columns
The Daily Toreador accepts submissions of unsolicited guest columns. While we cannot acknowledge receipt of all columns, the authors of those selected for publication will be notified. Guest columns should be no longer than 650 words in length and on a topic of relevance to the university community. Guest columns are also edited and follow the same guidelines for letters as far as identification and submittal.

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Fmr. astronaut argues for continued US space travel

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — Mercury astronaut John Glenn wants NASA's space shuttles to keep flying until a reliable replacement is ready, no matter how long it takes.

Glenn joined the national debate Monday over America's future in space and became the latest ex-astronaut to speak out on the matter. He issued a nine-

page statement in which he questioned the decision to retire the shuttle fleet and rely on Russia to take astronauts to the International Space Station.

"We have a vehicle here, why throw it away? It's working well," the first American to orbit Earth said in a telephone interview with The Associated Press.

Los Angeles Times Daily Crossword Puzzle

Edited by Rich Norris and Joyce Lewis

ACROSS

- Smoocher's smoochers
- Course with fractions
- Russian country home
- Short race
- Course with fractions
- Peek or bug ending
- Moral principle
- Birthday treat
- Mannerly man
- "Here Come the ...": 1945 college comedy
- Information disparity in a social system
- Greetings and seats
- Piggy bank opening
- Calif.'s second-busiest airport
- The Waldorf, e.g.
- Clapton's strings
- Ready-made graphics for frames
- Small songbird
- Actress Lupino
- Substitute spread
- Standard cooking supplies
- With 66-Across, each of this puzzle's four longest answers ends in one
- NBC weekend revue
- Ltr. afterthoughts
- Docs prescribe them
- Coffee orders
- Skeet challenge
- Can't stomach
- Wordsmith
- Field of expertise
- Mouthed on-field greeting
- Gardner of mysteries
- Painful skin ridge
- See 45-Across
- College leader
- Not as much

DOWN

- Security devices
- Absurd
- Orange tea
- Distorts, as data
- Purplish hue
- Still in the sack
- Salad servers
- The Waldorf, e.g.
- Central Illinois city
- Situated on
- Revolutionary
- Guevara
- Stayed out of sight
- Their capacity is measured in BTUs
- Flaccid
- Like disco dancers
- Inscribed pillar
- Taxi charges
- Estimate phrase
- Broad smile
- Pop star
- Reacts to a tearjerker
- Baltic natives
- Cuzco empire builder
- NFL six-pointers

By Gail Grabowski 6/22/10

Friday's Puzzle Solved

A	W	A	I	T	C	H	E	N	B	A	R	B
M	O	N	D	O	L	A	Z	Y	O	V	A	L
P	E	T	E	R	L	O	R	R	E	X	E	N
F	A	N	C	Y	P	A	T	I	E	N	T	S
B	A	A	A	D	S	C	R	U	E	T		
A	C	R	I	D		S	A	F	E	E	D	S
J	U	M	B	O	J	E	T	T	I	E	S	
A	P	S	E		O	C	E	A	N		O	B
T	I	E	R	E	D	S		Q	U	A	R	E
R	E	C		S	L	U	R		U	R	K	E
A	D	O	R	N		D	N	A		E	M	S
S	W	E	A	T	I	E	R		W	O	R	D
S	O	R	T		D	R	E	A	M		T	E
L	O	C	O		I	G	E	R		E	L	L
E	D	E	N		G	O	L	F		T	I	E

36 Dugout equipment meal
37 Sitcom radio station
41 Boyfriend-to-girlfriend "You have to choose!"
42 Mountain ht.
43 "Here's what happened next..."
44 Courtroom response

49 Ate a ft.
50 Sleeper's sound
52 Move on all fours
53 See eye to eye
54 Has a hunch
55 ERA and RBI
56 Drop anchor
57 Red-carpet event
58 Satisfied sounds
59 Small piece
60 Patient care gp.

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~William Butler Yeats

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OPINIONS

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TUESDAY, JUNE 22, 2010

Church camps should encourage faith

BY THOMAS LOTT

Since it is the middle of the summer, I hear a lot about kids going off to summer camp. The most I hear about this is when I am at church. Whether kids go to Pine Cove, Redcloud or Kanakuk, I hear about how great their week was and how on fire they are for their faith.

I would be much more fired up if those kids actually let that passion flow over into the next year of their lives. But what I am seeing more and more of these days is what is coming to be known as the summer camp high.

These kids go off for a week during the summer and are surrounded by kids and counselors that are on fire for their faith. Don't get me wrong, that is a great thing. I truly do appreciate all of my friends that go off to be counselors at these camps. They are stronger people than me. I could not deal with elementary, junior high and high school kids for a whole summer. That would be a heart attack waiting to happen.

But the problem I am seeing is that these kids will go to camp and not apply what they have learned to their lives. Honestly, I wonder how often these kids go to these camps and learn nothing over the long run.

What is happening in these camps can be a great thing for kids that are already

strong in their faith. But how many kids do you really see that are 18 or younger that actually know what they believe and are able to defend it?

These kids are falling victim to what I call the Altar Call. They spend an entire week dancing and singing about how great God is and how much they love him. They have countless large group sessions with passionate speakers and calm small groups that let the kids talk about their faith in a more personal session.

Most of the time, on the last night of camp is when the speaker for the week gives the recommitment speech. They ask the kids if they believe they are not living their lives as they are supposed to. And with an entire week of praising God and spiritual overload these kids start to believe that their entire life should be like that week.

I am not saying that kids should not praise God every second of every day. In fact, I believe that is what young believers are called to do. But when kids have this spiritual experience which is so much different than their daily lives, they begin to doubt whether they had any faith before they got there.

That is when the speaker will ask the kids to recommit their lives to Christ. I am not a fan of recommitment. In fact, I am a Calvinist (Someone that believes in the

teaching of John Calvin). And one of his teachings is Perseverance of the Saints, or more simply, Once saved, Always saved.

Telling these kids to recommit their lives to Christ is essentially telling them that no matter what they had done before, they were doing it for the wrong reasons. In my opinion, they are really telling them they are not Christians, or they once were but they somehow lost it. That is one of the most dangerous things you can tell a young believer.

What happens when that kid goes home and they are not feeling what they felt at youth camp? They are going to start to think this: "If I recommitted my life to Christ, why am I going back to the same person I was before?" Then the kid starts to try to find that passion they felt at camp and when they inevitably don't get it back, they are going to wonder if they were ever a Christian at all.

Now these youth camps have their places. They are great for a week of worship and good for learning more about your faith, but these camps need to be careful with the altar calls. They are getting these kids to question their faith and it can really set a kid back even further than they were before. Christianity is about growth, and that is what these camps should encourage, not recommitment.

►►tlott33@yahoo.com

US debt temporary, cyclic, reversible

By CHRIS LEAL

Recently there's been a lot of chatter about the Gross National Debt of the United States and the government expenditures necessary to sustain the recovery of our economy. We've seen grotesque projections of where the level of our nation's debt could be in the coming years, and subsequently it's become a favored talking point of politicians, with deficit hawks seemingly coming out of the woodwork.

First off, I don't want to be misunderstood on this topic. Debt is a burden and a nuisance, and potentially toxic to the economic livelihood of a nation. But debt is also not completely disadvantageous. It can have significant strategic benefits if used appropriately, similar to a student loan. Secondly, when talking about levels of national debt, nominal amounts — such as \$10 billion — are not as useful of a metric as is the amount of debt as a percentage of that nation's Gross Domestic Product. That being said, does our current spending entail certain doom for the country?

While it's true that our level of national debt is close to reaching

100 percent of our GDP — roughly \$14 trillion — this is not uncharted territory for the United States as many politicians and media pundits would have you believe. The highest our national debt has been, in modern history, was 120 percent of GDP. This was in 1945-46 under presidents Roosevelt and Truman, and was a response to the costs of World War II. After that peak, the next 35 years saw a general downward trend in the national debt, from 120 percent of GDP to 33 percent in 1980. It was with the Reagan administration that we entered a new period of upward trending national debt levels. Under President Reagan's two terms we saw the nominal value of our national debt triple, and by 1990 our debt level was back up to 56 percent of GDP.

It continued to rise under George Bush, Sr., then declined under Clinton, and began to rise again under George Bush, Jr. The United States went from a debt level of 65 percent of GDP in 2007, to roughly 85 percent at the end of George W. Bush's presidency a year later.

Barack Obama took office at the beginning of 2009, and the most current count put us at a debt level of 90 percent of GDP, with estimates of reaching just under 100 percent by the end of this year, and set to begin declining by 2013.

The reasons for these fluctuations in debt are numerous. Under Reagan, the most prominent reasons for his tripling of our national debt were his steep tax cuts on the national revenue side and increased spending on things like discretionary defense on the expenditure side. Under Bush, Sr. the rise can be explained by wars in the Middle East and the recession of 1991. Clinton's decrease in debt can be attributed to dramatic increases in GDP and also to his balancing of the national budget and even running a surplus in one year.

The administration of Bush, Jr. saw the return of budget deficits

with numerous tax cuts and increased spending on the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

But the current spike in debt levels, seen under the end of George W. Bush's term and the beginning of Barack Obama's, is due to the massive monetary stimuli and corporate bailouts that were needed in 2008 and 2009 in order to keep our economy from falling into a severe depression.

It's important to understand that while politically unpopular, these recent expenditures are necessary responses to macroeconomic cycles. And though combating the financial crisis with these one-time costs has temporarily increased the nominal value of our national debt, we shouldn't let the issue become a political scapegoat for not tackling other pressing issues facing our country.

While balancing our budget is a very important task, attempting to do so too early could plunge a fragile economy back into turmoil. FDR made this mistake in 1937 while the economy was still recovering from the Great Depression; he attempted to balance the budget too early and sent the economy back into a recession. Like it or not, doing so now would run the risk of wasting the many billions we've already spent on stimulus.

While this recent criticism of our nation's debt serves an important role in keeping an eye on the long-term fiscal health of our country, it's also crucial to see things in the correct context; as perspective and context are friends of the wise.

The United States is one of the richest and most innovative countries ever to exist. We've never defaulted on our debt and there are many countries that far exceed our level of debt relative to GDP. The current budget deficits needed to support our recovering economy are only temporary. And while the current level of debt is high, The United States has seen deeper depths and prevailed.

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