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best of *Aggieland*

2022

life



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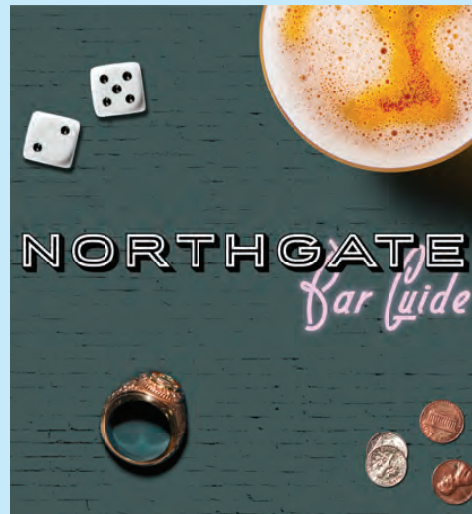
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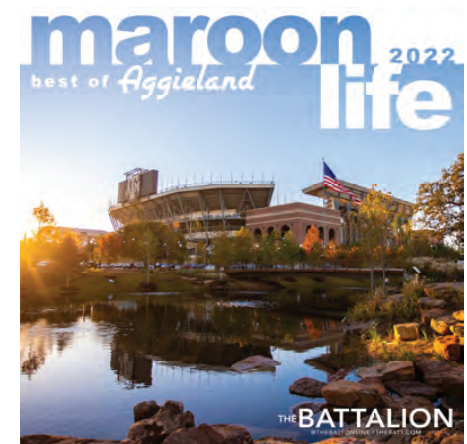
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Cover by Cameron Johnson,
The Battalion



Megan Williams — THE BATTALION

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Editor-in-chief Michaela Rush encourages students to branch out from chains, explore local favorites

Howdy! My name is Michaela Rush, and I'm the editor-in-chief for The Battalion, but more relevant to this Maroon Life, I am a proud local who calls College Station home. With this firsthand knowledge, I can truly say that Aggieland is a hidden gem, with a lot more to it than meets the eye.

Undeniably, our 5,200-acre campus has a lot to offer. The challenge I pose to my fellow Aggies is to explore beyond these borders to support local businesses, events and artists.

When making this magazine, my vision was to highlight as many locally-owned-and-operated businesses as possible. While I certainly enjoy Dutch Bros as much as the next Aggie, why not take time to try the unique brews of BCS? We've curated six coffee shop options for you. Sure, it's nice to stay home and watch movies with your significant other, but why not take a stroll in Historical Downtown Bryan, and visit The Bird's Nest? Both were voted as local bests by our readers. Northgate is a blast, but why not chill out and go to karaoke at The Tap, for a weeknight adventure?

In this magazine, we've taken votes from our readers: students, staff, faculty and community members, to identify The Best of Aggieland, and this year we took it one step further, by highlighting our staff's favorites. We hope by offering this mix of stories we can celebrate your current favorites and introduce you to new ones.

Now, I have some important thank yous to the people who not only made this magazine, but also make day-to-day of The Battalion possible.

To Kyle McClenagan, thank you for keeping me calm, even when I'm spiraling over the tiny details. Having your partnership on this project, and all throughout this

year has been my saving grace, both professionally and personally. Thank you for pushing back, and encouraging me to be better, as a writer, an editor, a leader and a friend.

To Robert O'Brien, our photo chief turned design editor, thank you for believing in my vision, even when the page count seemed impossible, and I couldn't remember my own deadlines. Thank you for your constant honesty and for encouraging me to be creative, but also helping me stay on track and not overload myself.

To Cameron Johnson, congratulations on the stunning art you've made for every project during your tenure at The Battalion. Your willingness to put in the late nights, change direction last minute and step up is truly admirable, and will serve you well in your inevitably bright future. Thank you for sharing your work, and laughter, with me this year, you'll be greatly missed.

To Ishika Samant, thank you for being just as excited about this magazine as I am. Your tireless work never goes unnoticed or unappreciated. Thank you for adding life to these pages through your talent and passion.

To Jordan Epp, even though Best of Aggieland isn't your baby, thank you for the entirety of the fall semester. The sports desk is the heart of our publication, and I don't think anyone could have handled this semester with the grace, professionalism and positivity that you did. You will be greatly missed, as a sports editor and a podcast host, but most importantly as a friend.

To Caroline Wilburn and Kenzie Finch, thank you for both going outside of your comfort zone by contributing to a features-focused magazine, in contrast to your normal quick and factual news beats.

To Kathryn Miller and Ruben Hernandez, thank you

for leading life & arts through (most of) these writers' first magazine. Over half of the stories in this edition came from the talented crop of writers hired this year, who blew me away with the quality of their work. To Ruben, specifically, thank you for providing creative vision and quality criticism to our entire staff during this (and every other) creation process.

To Caleb Elizondo, Grant Gaspard and Zoe May, thank you for making the jump and becoming editors this semester. Your energy and willingness to learn, plus your ability in keeping me sane, made this possible. To Dan Hung, thank you for being an advertising wizard and finding the funding to bring this vision to life. To Emma Moser, thank you for taking a chance on me and jumping head-first into an adviser-less void.

To Megan Williams, my constant co-conspirator, thank you for the feedback, the late-night conversations, partnership in important meetings and for lending your talents to the pages of this magazine, now go make your yearbook.

Lastly, I would be remiss to not acknowledge the man who has kept us all faithful to the mission of Student Media. Mr. Pils, thank you for always answering my frantic texts about design or ads or journalism in general, setting up pages for every fall edition and being a mentor to each and every member of this staff.

To the readers, staff, advertisers and everyone who took the time to interview with us, thank you. Now, go out and explore Aggieland, and report back next year to share the favorites we haven't found yet.

Michaela Rush is an English senior and editor-in-chief of The Battalion.

NOW BREWING: AGGIELAND'S LOCAL COFFEE

By Anna Deardorff
@annardeardorff
& Caitlyn Porras
@caitlyncarole

Sweet Eugene's House of Java has been around for students and locals since 1993 when Aaron Brown started the shop with his brother. Customers can always count on "Sweets" for an open table and some friendly conversation with the baristas.

"The size of our place is pretty large for a coffee shop, so people can stick around for hours," Brown said. "We're open really early, and we're open really late. We try to create a second home for

BEST STUDY SPOT: SWEET EUGENE'S

a lot of people, and we hear that a lot which is great."

Located off George Bush Drive and Harvey Road, Sweets is a great location close to campus. There are multiple sandwiches, crepes, pastries and desserts to choose from along with a full espresso bar, smoothies and teas.

"The place is sectioned off in different rooms, some are music friendly, some are quiet without any speakers," Brown said. "I think it's conducive to people meeting, whether they want a quiet space or not in groups. Hopefully, they can just relax, hang out here, be

with friends and connect with people."

Since its opening almost 30 years ago, a number of loyal regulars visit the shop once or even twice a day, according to Brown. He's heard people joking that the shop is their office and they love to come in and get to work.

"A lot of people come here for more of an experience and getting to see some friendly faces that they know," Brown said. "We want people to not just come here for food and drink but to have this moment where they can foster relationships and friendships."



FILE — THE BATTALION



Cameron Johnson — THE BATTALION

BEST SPECIALTY COFFEE: WHAT'S THE BUZZ?

Located on 1600 Texas Ave. in College Station, What's the Buzz is the local home to a world that coffee creates. What's the Buzz views coffee as more than just a kick of caffeine to get students through the day, but considers the beverage to be a gathering point.

Rodrigo Chavez, the current owner of What's the Buzz, started his brewing journey over 10 years ago when he moved to College Station from Guatemala and noticed the absence of knowledge in specialty coffee.

"I couldn't find a good brand that I thought was good, tasty ... I realized it was a combination of different things. The lack of

having good coffees available on the market," Chavez said.

Chavez wanted customers to experience drinking black coffee and the different amount of flavors a specific bean can provide.

"Coffee has probably the same amount of flavors, number-wise, as wine," Chavez said.

According to its website, What's the Buzz values the importance of community, starting from the determined farmers that work hard around the world to the local community of students and coffee enjoyers who want to learn.

"We have classes once a month ... We just want students to learn," Chavez said.

The shop also works with the Norman Borlaug Institute for International Agriculture, which is part of the Texas A&M Agrilife Extension Service, to help the Center for Coffee Research and Education and collaborate with coffee farmers for more sustainable solutions.

Cole Crump, Class of 2022, said that in his year and a half of working at What's the Buzz as a barista, he enjoyed the small business nature the shop has to bring.

"Anytime you want to understand specialty coffee, this is the best place to do that in town," Crump said.

BEST BEANS: POLITE COFFEE ROASTERS

Tucked away in Downtown Bryan is a grand, Victorian-style home with hundreds of years of history. Steve Turner, co-owner and founder of Polite Coffee Roasters, has turned the house into a home for all.

"I was in Afghanistan in the end of 2013, and I had called my brother," Turner said. "He said, 'Let's do something together as a business.'" I was drinking really bad coffee in my tent, and that's when I had the idea: We could do coffee."

Turner began roasting beans

as a hobby and was approached in early 2020 by Barry Ivins, the owner of Kyle House at the time. The two collaborated to make Polite what it is today, now located at the former home of Edwin Kyle, the namesake of Kyle Field.

"It's a weird, cool [piece of] local history," Turner said. "On top of that, it's the perfect setting for our brand because it's a house. Edwin Kyle was an ambassador to Guatemala, and that's where we get a lot of our coffee. It's one of my favorite coffee-growing countries in the world."

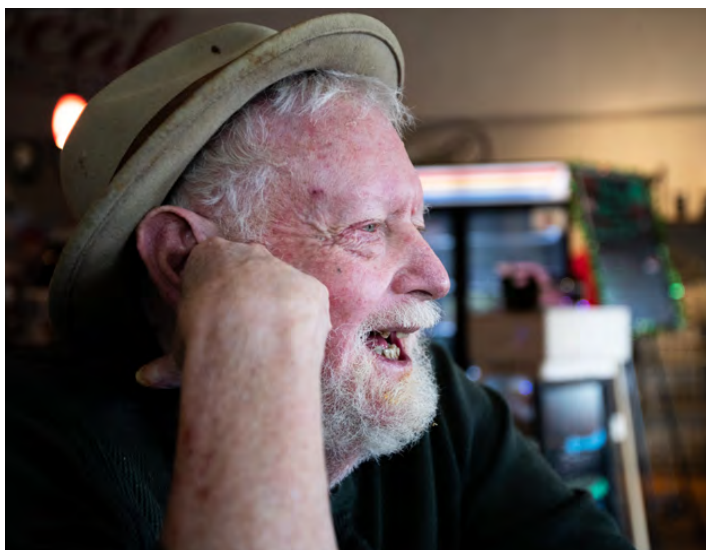
On top of serving high-quality coffee, Polite has its own roastery where beans are roasted after being filtered by Sovda, an optical sorting machine. Turner noted that it's an impressive piece of technology to have at their size, and he estimated that a little over 1,000 pounds of beans are roasted per week.

"We wanted to be a place in the community that people could meet and spend time together, and slow down," Turner said. "We're normal, ordinary people doing ordinary things, but trying



Laura McClintock — THE BATTALION

THE BATTALION'S FAVORITE COFFEE SHOPS



Cameron Johnson — THE BATTALION

BEST COMMUNITY: THE VILLAGE

The Village, located 210 W. 26th St. in Bryan, opened its doors in November 2008 as a small cafe and local art gallery. Now, it is the heart of the arts community in Downtown Bryan and promotes “all things local,” according to the shop’s website. The owner, Kristy Petty, spent years in the service and restaurant industry, which motivated her to create what is now known as The Village.

“The arts and the culture that exists in major cities, I wanted to experience more of that here,” Petty said. “We realized that because I

wanted to do local art ... and put live music in here, that it just makes sense to make it a local food place.”

The Village is considered home for many small local businesses in Bryan. According to its website, the experiences a customer has is all produced by people and farms that are only blocks away from the comfortable seats provided in the shop.

“The thing is that everything is local here ... our honey ... our drip coffee is ‘Village Coffee’ from What’s The Buzz? ... you can’t get it anywhere else,” Savannah Stovall, a current barista said.

Stovall explained that The Village Coffee is a medium blend that is a little bit sweeter than other coffee blends.

“A lot of coffee places burn their beans and we don’t so it gives [the coffee] more of a muddy flavor,” Stovall said.

“It created a very lovely community who lean on each other,” Petty said. “The Village, to me, is a community working together to showcase what Bryan-College Station has to offer.”

BEST VIBES: CARPORT COFFEE

If you’re looking for a hip and funky place to grab some coffee or a delicious breakfast taco, Carport Coffee is just the place for you. Within walking distance of campus off University Drive, the small, minimalist shop is a more recent addition to town.

“When we started, we were just two guys that didn’t know what they were doing,” co-owner and current operator Chris Klein said. “We’re just the little shop that keeps trying; we like the fact that people find us and think we’re the diamond in the rough.”

Klein and his college roommate Griffin Foley floated the idea of the shop for five years before they committed in November 2019. Through snowstorms and quarantine, the two have realized how strong their relationships with customers truly are.

“People enjoy the comfortability,” Foley said. “They know what they’re going to get and how they’re going to be treated. Your barista is a lot like your barber where if they do a good job you walk out of there happy, but if they do a bad job, it can really set

you back a couple days.”

Klein said they encourage their baristas to be themselves and embrace their individuality. He said when you’re behind the bar, “you’re more of a party host than a barista,” and are in charge of curating the vibe.

“We’re here for students and for our community, coffee is just our medium by which we get to know people,” Klein said. “We don’t just do it until we get it right, we do it until we can’t get it wrong.”



Laura McClintock — THE BATTALION



Cameron Johnson — THE BATTALION

BEST DRINK NAMES: ROOSTER'S BIKE & COFFEE SHOP

Just down the road from Texas A&M’s campus, Rooster’s Bike & Coffee Shop has been known for its multi-functional use of a coffee and bike shop rolled into a pop culture home. Jason Hamilton, owner of Rooster’s Bike & Coffee Shop, explained that from the very beginning that they weren’t trying to be a normal coffee shop.

“We’re not playing jazz,” Hamilton said. “And most coffee shops don’t have a full functioning bicycle shop hanging out inside of it.”

Located on 317 College Ave., Rooster’s is a different type of coffee shop, where groups — whether working on a projects or socializing — will be able to have their own conversations

without the worry of being too loud while also providing bike services for the community.

As a college student, finding a place to study on campus can be a needle in a haystack during finals season, and Rooster’s knew that when converting its pre-existing bike shop to a coffee shop as well.

“Students aren’t buying bikes or repairing bikes every day,” Hamilton said. “But every day, they’re drinking coffee and studying.”

Rooster’s is known for its medium to dark blend, provided by Polite, a local coffee roaster. With the medium blend being used more for their drip coffee and dark for their espresso

drinks, both are rich in flavor that have a hint of both nut and chocolate.

“We wanted [the] coffee to stay the same. We didn’t want just vanilla latte, caramel latte,” Cody Hamilton, Rooster’s long-term barista, and Jason’s son, said.

Rooster’s is home to unique coffee nicknames like the Fleetwood Macchiato and Aloha Latte served in random coffee cups that don’t match. The shop’s value is to serve a great product while creating a not-very-serious atmosphere for students to remember.

“You never know what to expect in a day, each day is different,” Cody said.

STAFF PICK: BEST PLACE TO FIND FURRY FRIENDS

Aggieland Humane Society

Local animal shelter provides affordable adoption paws-sibilities

By Meg Boone
@Meg_Boone

Aggieland Humane Society, or AHS, located in the heart of Bryan, continues to bring joy to homes all around Bryan and College Station by connecting animals to their new forever homes.

Based on the AggieLand Humane Society 2020-2021 Annual Report, there have been 984 cats adopted, 728 dogs adopted, 515 families reunited with their pets and 794 pets were fostered.

Ashley Quick, the communication coordinator at AHS, believes there are many essential parts that keep the shelter going. AHS relies on its wonderful volunteers, money donations, food donations and their foster families, she said. Quick noted that fostering plays such an important role in keeping the shelter going.

“When we get large litters of puppies that are not old enough to be spayed or neutered, or they’re not old enough to just be gone,” Quick said. “They need to go to a foster home. That’s really helpful that we have places to send them.”

AggieLand Humane Society is a non-profit organization, and does not receive any national funding, Quick said, instead relying on donations and help from the community.

“I think that it’s important for people to know that we are your local nonprofit animal shelter,” Quick said. “We do not get any national funding from NBC Humane Society of the United States ... So if anybody can find it in their hearts to make an online donation, any sort [of] dog food, blankets, monetary gift, that’s what really helps us. That really kind of helps us keep all of this going.”

AHS usually has an influx of pets around the end of summer and around the holidays. Quick said it’s easy for pets to go missing around holidays like the Fourth of July. During these busy times, the shelter offers different promotional opportunities, like 12 Strays of Christmas, where certain adoptions are only \$12, compared to their usual \$95 for a dog.

The Humane Society’s ultimate goal is to connect pets with loving homes however



Skylar Cheek—THE BATTALION

possible, Quick said. However, for some people, there is a financial hurdle to owning a pet. AggieLand Humane Society does all they can to make sure that doesn’t prevent any person

“We’re trying to remove all the barriers that we can we don’t think that you should have to have a huge pocketbook to be able to own a pet. That’s not what we stand for. That’s not what we believe. We think that everybody deserves to have the love of a pet.”

ASHLEY QUICK
AHS COMMUNICATION COORDINA-

from owning a pet.

If you are interested in adopting your own forever friend, the adoption process is a breeze. All pets at AHS are spayed and neutered, as well as vaccinated age appropriately and nationally microchipped, meaning the chip can be checked in any state rather than only within Texas borders. Any adopter will receive a healthy animal, Quick said, and all you need to do is come meet the dog in-person, fill out an adoption application, have it approved and pay.

“You can wake up on a whim one day and decide you want to adopt and have a dog of the very same day,” Quick said.

Business junior Dylan Soussan adopted his dog Ziggy from AggieLand Humane last year.

“I was really eager to get a dog,” Soussan said. “I went in one time to look at a dog. Then she jumped into my lap so I bought the dog ... And I’m thinking about getting another dog, and if I do, I think I’d be going back there.”

If you’re looking to find your new best pal, you can follow AggieLand Humane So-

ciety on Instagram, Facebook, Twitter and TikTok to see all of your potential companions. Quick runs all of the social media accounts and has the unique privilege of getting to spend time with the animals, take pictures of them, name and share them. She recommended keeping an eye out for Echo, the sweet terrier pitbull mix that loves warm hugs and lots of kisses.

Quick said she loves more than anything being able to spend time with the animals, whether that be satisfying a “kitten fix” or taking pictures of the animals to post on social media.

“It’s kind of cool that that’s a part of my



Ishika Samant — THE BATTALION

BATTALION'S FAVORITE LOCAL VEGAN OPTIONS

Don't eat meat? Aggieland has eats for you!



Jonathan Taffet—THE BATTALION

By Richa Shah
@WhoIsRichaShah

As someone who has been vegetarian her whole life, yes, I have survived without bacon, finding places that serve non-meat options — beyond salads — is a blessing. Coming from big cities like Ahmedabad, India and Houston, I was worried about the small-town cuisine possibilities. After some trial and error, I am happy to report my fears were unfounded. Here is a non-comprehensive list of the places around the Bryan-College Station area that serve food catered towards those with dietary restrictions.

NAPA FLATS

1727 TEXAS AVE. S.,
COLLEGE STATION

Started in College Station in 2013, a second branch of Napa Flats quickly opened up in Tulsa, Okla. Owner Tom Kenney explained his experience in the restaurant business and his vision for a place that was full service and served dishes from more than one cuisine. Kenney said the menu is filled with California cuisine.

“I love to create menus with people even though I’m not a chef,” Kenney said. “[I wanted] the menu to be familiar but not common.”

The restaurant serves food ranging from burgers to ravioli to calamari. With its extensive options, Kenney ensures vegetarian

and vegan customers also have their pick of options. In terms of appetizers, vegetarian diners can choose from the wood-fried avocado, the Palo Alto dip, or the crispy brussels to name a few. Kenney also takes pride in presenting a fully gluten-free pasta dish: zucchini primavera.

A big crowd-pleaser is the impossible burger offered at Napa Flats. With the juiciness of real meat, Kenney said he is often questioned about whether the patty was truly meat-free.

For a sweet treat, Kenney ensures up to three different flavors of dairy-free sorbet options are always available.

TWISTED NOODLE

2418 TEXAS AVE. S., SUITE E,
COLLEGE STATION

Located on Southwest Parkway, the Twisted Noodle Cafe is owned by a New York family that chose College Station to build their livelihood.

Though the store specializes in hand-pulled noodles, part of the charm comes from the family itself. Waitress and owner’s daughter Coco Lin spoke of the trials and tribulations that come with being a mom-and-pop shop.

“Sometimes when [the store] gets really busy, we get angry and upset ... we start blaming [each other],” Lin said. “But at the end of the day, we’re all family and we forgive each other.”

Lin explained that their rice noodles are bought from a vendor, but her father pulls other noodles by hand.

Though vegetarian versions of every major noodle dish — ramen stir fry, rice noodle soup, fried rice and so on — are offered, most other dishes could also be modified to remove any meat or animal product.

Lin said a vegetarian-friendly popular Chinese trend are noodles made of carrots or cucumbers. She said her parents had decided to add the option to their restaurant for any interested college students.

Besides the entrees, the venue offers cheese wontons and vegetable egg rolls as appetizers and a variety of bubble teas for drinks.

TAZ

2416 TEXAS AVE. S., SUITE A,
COLLEGE STATION

Based on Indian cuisine, Taz often has Bollywood music playing and serves meals in steel-serving platters and bowls. Its website pinpoints the history of the offered menu and speaks of the homemade Indian cheese they use in most dishes. Known as paneer, the ingredient most closely resembles cottage cheese.

The venue offers separate vegetarian and non-vegetarian sections on the menu. The restaurant further separates South and North Indian cuisines and even offers noodle options.

Alongside fully gluten-free biryani options, Taz also offers traditional fried rice dishes, soups, salads and hot and cold beverages. For vegan customers, Indian breads like roti and poori are available.

From savory dishes like the Mysore masala dosa and chole bhatura to sweet dishes such as ras malai, kheer and gulab jamun, vegetarian diners are bound to have a virtually endless number of choices.

The restaurant offers delivery and pick-up options for those who do not want to sit in for the lunch buffet or take on their catering services.

GOOD LUCK GOOD TIME TEA HOUSE

1613 TEXAS AVE. S.,
COLLEGE STATION

With a litter box in the bathroom, a pride flag in the window and board games, the Good Luck Good Time tea house, or GLGT, boasts a cozy and welcoming atmosphere.

Owner Ava Li opened the shop about four years ago and expressed her excitement at its success. Li opened the venue in her quest to minimize the distance between customers and shopkeepers.

“I want my customers to feel ... like they’re visiting an old friend,” Li said. “[Opening GLGT] is one of my childhood dreams.”

The tea house offers over four dozen drinks, noodles, dumplings, soups, bento boxes and more. Dishes like biang-biang noodles and dumplings have vegetarian options listed on the menu itself and most others can be modified upon request. Similarly, a variety of non-dairy milks are also available.

A display case shows customers a sizable collection of cakes, cupcakes, ice cream and so on. From cakes shaped like bears to traditional Japanese mochi in multiple flavors, vegetarian and vegan customers have no shortage of sweet options. Li also stacks a large rack of instant noodles, in varying degrees of spiciness, with seasoning packets full of artificial meat.

PROUDEST MONKEY

108 S MAIN ST.,
BRYAN

Named after the Dave Matthews Band song, Proudest Monkey was opened by Aaron Curs a decade ago. Serving tacos, burgers and a host of innovative cocktails, the restaurant is a First Friday favorite.

Manager Jose Cantrell began working at the restaurant roughly five years ago and has since familiarized himself with the menu.

“Though I am a bit of a carnivore myself, I do recommend the Grilled Cheesy,” Cantrell said. “It comes with a little bit of veggies in there and three different kinds of cheeses.”

Besides the restaurant’s signature yuppy sauce — a blend of parmesan, olive oil and monkey sauce — vegetarian diners can also order the Ciao Bella taco and the Porta Blue burger. Upon request, most other dishes can be ordered devoid of any meat. For those observing gluten restrictions, corn tortillas are an available substitute.

For sides, patrons can choose between Idaho or sweet potato fries and fried yucca and plantains. Continuing the trend of unique names like “License to Krill” and “Guac-A-Doodle-Blue,” the dessert menu names a dish using twinkies as “Redneck Shortcake” and a twist on the traditional Mexican sweet dish as “Sorta-Pilla.”

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2410 Texas Ave S, College Station, TX

A GRAND TOUR OF MEXICO IN BRYAN-COLLEGE STATION

From border to plate: Flavors of Mexico



Ana Renfro—THE BATTALION

Bryan-College Station Mexican restaurants bring authentic taste to Aggies, local community

By **Ruben Hernandez & Ana Renfro**
 @battandmuse
 @aemonia1

Approximately 300 miles away from Aggeland, the border of Mexico lies across the Rio Grande, creating a distinct line between two mixing cultures. Language and music swirls to and fro without border in this region of the continent, but what brings greater connection to the Tex-Mex community is the food. In the tradition of standard Hispanic hospitality, I, Ruben Hernandez, and Ana Renfro came together to share our personal favorite Mexican cuisine restaurants in the Bryan-College Station area, in both a move of passion and pride of tradition of ingredients and flavors from the Motherland.

RUBEN'S BEST OF COLLEGE STATION

#1 POLLY'S COCINA

Order Breakdown:

- **Single beef fajita taco (\$3.99)**

Thoughts:

- **Community-oriented**
- **Flavorful**
- **Broad selection of food choices**

Upon entering the compact corner restaurant that is Polly's Cocina, I knew I was going to get more than I expected. With walls filled with photographed memories running from floor to ceiling, covering nearly every inch, a sense of community and customer satisfaction is felt both through the environment and flavorful food.

I ordered a single beef fajita taco with guacamole, waiting patiently as I watched and heard the filled room of families and friends

clamoring for a hot and ready meal. It took some time, but the wait was worth the while.

The fajita was marinated to perfection, complimented well with the added guacamole and flour tortilla. The flavor carried effortlessly in such a simple taco, making me eagerly await the next time I go for the assortment of other plates Polly's has to offer.

#2 TAQUERIA PURO POTOSINO

Order Breakdown:

- **Taco plate (\$12.50)**
- **Beans (with order)**
- **Mexican red rice (with order)**

Thoughts:

- **On campus (sometimes)**
- **Friendly staff**
- **Leftovers for dinner**

Standing at the corner of the Innovate Learning Classroom Building, ILCB, Taqueria Puro Potosino food truck has become a food staple of the campus dining line-up. In rain or shine, its welcoming vibe brings in customers, new and recurring.

I ordered the taco plate, loaded with ingredients that light up your palette. Unlike other places that throw in vegetables and sauces just for the sake of presentation, Taqueria Puro Potosino's selection of ingredients create a flavorful harmony.

With the addition of a side of a jalapeño, lime, beans, Mexican red rice and a selection of either red or green sauce, the large platter fills you up halfway, leaving you with leftovers to eat for dinner that same day.

If you crave Mexican food during your lunch break after a study session, make sure to drop by the food truck and take an horchata drink with you while you're at it!

#3 LA PERLITA

Order Breakdown:

- **Single beef fajita taco (\$3.25)**

Thoughts:

- **Authentic**
- **Try the aguas frescas**
- **Variety of different meat options and plates**

Located at a busy corner on Harvey Road, Tacos La Perlita brings an authentic feeling of

Mexico to you. The open view of the kitchen as you settle down at your table grants a certain customer connection that you can't find in many places.

I ordered the beef fajita taco, stuffed with soft and tender meat that marks the standard at which Mexican food should be held to. Although many restaurants have sauces that add little-to-no taste, La Perlita's staple red and green sauces grant profound flavors.

Although the size of the tacos is small, the price and taste quality of each individual taco makes up for it. If anything, the small size of the taco invites you to try other flavors and meats, not limiting yourself to just one option and getting stuffed after a few bites.

Aside from tacos, other delicious options include gorditas, burritos, tortas and other traditional platters such as chiles rellenos, stuffed poblano pepper and milanesa, a traditional fried veal.

#4 MASFAJITA

Order Breakdown:

- **Beef fajita tacos (\$12.97)**
- **Black beans (with order)**
- **Mexican red rice (with order)**

Thoughts:

- **Lively**
- **Big order**
- **Quick service**

Leaning more toward Tex-Mex than Mexican, Masfajita provides a savory experience with its large platters and a variety of options to choose from. The restaurant hustles and bustles with community, notably of young, old and everyone in between.

I ordered the chargrilled beef fajita taco, consisting of two large tacos, a side of beans, Mexican red rice and a bowl of salsa. The quantity of food is perfect for sharing or an immense craving for Mexican food after a day of fasting.

The taco ingredients weren't exactly to my liking of how Mexican food should be, but that doesn't mean it was bad. The food, especially the sides, were delicious and filling enough for satisfaction. For drinking age guests, the restaurant's bar serves a wide selection of signature margaritas, martinis, classic beer-ritas and spiked horchata.

ANA'S BEST OF BRYAN

#1 JESSE'S

Order breakdown:

- 2 tacos (\$5.95 ea)
- 2 churros (\$1.85 ea)

Thoughts:

- **Quick bite**
- **Worth the wait**
- **Great for takeout**

Jesse's Taqueria and Bakery is the best place to stop for great tacos. Don't be intimidated by the line — it moves fast. Jesse's is worth the wait. Locals love eating here, or taking it to-go. Jesse's is well known for its breakfast tacos but is also a great option for a quick lunch.

I ordered a barbacoa taco and a steak fajita taco. From the bakery menu, I ordered two churros. They quickly assembled the tacos and wrapped them in tinfoil. I chose to eat in, and they kindly gave me plates.

My barbacoa taco came with fresh cilantro and onions. I added salt and creamy jalapeño salsa. My steak fajita taco came plain, so I added the mild salsa. The fajita was fresh, smokey and went great with the salsa.

The churros were everything I wanted and more. Warm, sweet, crunchy. Great quick treat that was made fresh upon ordering.

#2 DON CHENTE

Order breakdown:

- Quesa-birria tacos (\$11.95)
- 1 order of churros (\$8.95)

Thoughts:

- **Go with friends**
- **Comparable to Dixie's**
- **Try the house specials**

Don Chente would make a great weekend hangout spot. The inside is lively and gets packed during lunch and during the evenings. For drinking-age patrons, it has a small inside bar area or a bar menu if you are looking to unwind. Locally, Don Chente is known for its quesadilla-birria tacos and its seafood options.

They offer great complimentary chips with a cantina-style mild salsa, which was a great way to curb my appetite as I excitedly waited for my order.

I ordered the quesadilla-birria tacos. My plate came with three flavorful tacos that had perfectly melted queso and a generous amount

of barbacoa. It also came with fresh onion and cilantro, along with a side of birria soup.

The quesadilla-birria tacos were fantastic. I opened my tacos and added the onion, cilantro and a little extra salt along with their creamy jalapeño salsa. It was so tasty to dip tacos in the birria, but they were almost perfect as they came.

I added my leftover barbacoa, onion, cilantro and squeezed a fresh lime into my side of birria. After salting to taste, the birria was the perfect way to finish any remaining parts of my tacos.

For dessert, I shared an order of churros. It came with a generous scoop of vanilla ice cream and half a dozen freshly made churros, drizzled with chocolate and strawberry syrup.

All of the food I tried was delicious, and it was hard to leave. Enjoy the food and don't be scared if it gets messy!

#3 EL SOL DE MÉXICO

Order breakdown:

- #5 Mexico Style DF Tacos (\$8.99)

Thoughts:

- **Great for takeout**
- **Love their taco plates**
- **Humble place, kind staff**

El Sol de México is a humble establishment that is great for any casual bite or great for takeout. It has a good selection of plates on its menu. It's mostly known for its carne asada and taco plates, with the most popular tacos being its Mexican or DF tacos.

They offer complimentary chips and two types of salsas: One warm restaurant-style mild salsa and a cold cantina-style salsa.

I ordered the DF tacos, and my order came quickly. It comes with three tacos generously loaded with chopped beef fajita, onion, cilantro and queso on double-layered corn tortillas. The tacos are also served with a side of charro beans, along with a roasted jalapeño and onion bulb.

My tacos also came with a bottle of cold, creamy jalapeño salsa that tastes great on the tacos. My plate also came with a couple of lime wedges, and after squeezing them on, the tacos were fantastic. The DF tacos have become my go-to at El Sol de México for a reason. The beef fajita was great, and all of the toppings were fresh. The charro beans were good, with a sweeter, richer and oilier taste compared to other local restaurants.

I love El Sol de México's taco plates and have always had great service. I recommend trying one of the house specials or taco plates.

#4 HERMANOS MARQUEZ

Order breakdown:

- Chicken Quesadilla Plate (\$12.25)

Thoughts:

- **New owners, same great taste**
- **Laid back atmosphere**
- **Try their Mexican breakfast**

Best known for its original food truck, Hermanos Marquez is a local street vendor that is expanding. Formerly Mi Pueblito, the restaurant location has officially changed owners but has the same great taste. Typically, Hermanos Marquez is busy on weekend mornings because of its staple Mexican breakfast dishes. On the weekends, they also serve fantastic menudo and caldo de res while supplies last.

I went on a weekend afternoon, so I wasn't able to order breakfast. However, the restaurant had very kind, laid-back staff. They offer free complimentary chips and salsa with a classic red mild sauce.

I ordered the chicken quesadilla plate, which came very quickly. It came with four quesadilla wedges with fluffy Mexican rice and refried beans. On the plate, it also came with a small side of shredded lettuce, pico de gallo, guacamole and sour cream.

I also recommend asking for a side of extra lime with the quesadilla. I enjoy adding lime and salt to my quesadillas to further complement the flavor.

Hermanos Marquez is a great place to try if you're looking for a traditional Mexican breakfast or looking for another restaurant to add to your itinerary.

#5 CASA RODRIGUEZ

Order breakdown:

- Casa Rod Combo Dinner (\$12)
- Fountain drink (\$3)

Thoughts:

- **Visit if near the Downtown area**
- **Enjoy the atmosphere**
- **Be prepared to stay a while**

Casa Rodriguez is one of the most frequented Mexican restaurants in Bryan. Casa Rodriguez is conveniently located in Downtown Bryan. In the evenings or on the weekends, it is usually packed inside. It's also notable for its outdoor wall murals, making stopping by photo-worthy.

I ordered the Casa Rod Combo Dinner, which comes with two enchiladas and one taco, any style. I ordered one chicken and beef enchilada with charro beans instead of refried.

Red gravy enchiladas are a Mexican staple, and the chicken and beef enchiladas were equal contenders. The rice went well with any leftover gravy, but their charro beans were excellent. The charro beans were mild and hearty — an excellent way to warm up on a cold day. My soft flour taco came with steamed ground beef and was topped with diced tomatoes, shredded lettuce and cheddar cheese.

Casa Rodriguez is well-loved by locals and visitors. Its location is convenient and charming, and it's worth a try if you are nearby.





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The Tap remains a favorite for past, present

Break an eight ball and open a tab at The Battalion's pick for Best Bar Off-Northgate

By **Caroline Wilburn**
@carolinewilb

Despite the many bar options on Northgate, The Tap on Harvey Road has remained a local and student-favorite bar for the past 30 years.

Inside, an ornate copper ceiling overlooks dark wood-covered floors and walls, while high chairs and tables, carved with the names and initials of past customers, sit in front of a built-in stage. The main bar, large and wooden with a granite countertop, sits in front of a wall of exposed brick. In a cozy corner sits three wooden booths overlooking a pool table and dart board. Wrapped across the front of the restaurant is a wooden porch with more high chairs and tables, allowing bar-goers an escape from the loud music and voices that are common on a busy night.

Before being moved to College Station in 1975 and transformed into a bar and restaurant, The Tap was once the old Waller, Texas train depot built in the 1930s, according to its website. Owner John Whittington, Class of 1986, was one of the founders of The Tap and said the business has changed a lot over the years.

"When we first opened, it was just a beer joint," Whittington said. "We didn't have liquor, we just had wine and beer, and back then, you could bring your own bottle in if you wanted to. But the bar was in the center ... It was a big square, rectangular bar."

Whittington said The Tap has seen many transformations throughout the years — such as removing the bar from the center of the restaurant in 1996 and adding a full-service kitchen in 1999.

"When The Tap opened, there were 10 or 11 bars at Northgate, and now there's 30 plus," Whittington said. "Basically, I had to adapt to keep the students coming, and as generations of students graduated and moved on, The Tap wasn't [as] big [of a] tradition it used to be."

Despite Northgate's competitive bar district, Whittington said The Tap offers something unique for its customers.

"We came up with the piano bar, and that's been happening for 25 years now," Whittington said. "We came up with Monday night karaoke, which is [usually] students and all the Northgate employees because Northgate kind of sleeps [during the week]. Our weekends are really Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday."

Whittington said The Tap doesn't attempt to rival

Northgate bars but instead offers something different.

"We don't really try to compete with Northgate on the weekend because that's just where the students want to go, and there's all the [bar] choices," Whittington said. "We get the little percentages of people like, 'I just don't want to go to Northgate tonight,' and they'll come over."

As one of their favorite hangout spots, Aubrey Denson often visits The Tap with her friend group and said they enjoy the variety of events.

"They do something different. It's not just the same thing every night. They have game nights. They also have karaoke on Mondays and they have theme nights," Denson said. "They switch it up. It's not the same routine every night, which is fun."

Throughout the years, Whittington said The Tap has hosted a variety of bands — many of which went on to achieve major success including Maroon 5, Cody Johnson, Smash Mouth and more.

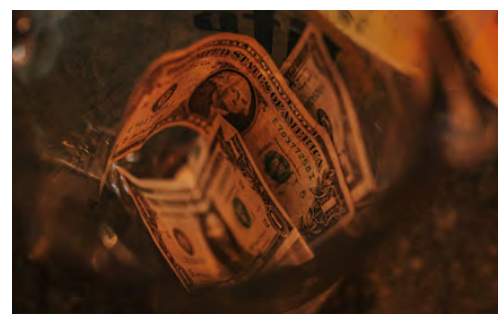
"We see a lot of bands that come through and some go on to do big things," Whittington said. "That's kind of fun. We knew them when they were just playing here and couldn't bring in 50 people."

Bartender and communication junior Riley Scales said the best part of working at The Tap is her co-workers.

"We're like a big family here and we just all really enjoy working together," Scales said. "I had a friend that worked here. She had been working here for about two years, [and] just really described to me how awesome the environment was here. I feel like at a lot of bars, it's hard to come across a very close group of coworkers and knowing you're always going to have people to count on when you're working with them."

Despite a fast-paced environment, Scales said she





enjoys serving the polite customers who frequent The Tap.

“Every type of bartending job [is] high stress,” Scales said. “Honestly, everyone here is just so respectful, we don’t really have to deal with a bunch of disrespectful people. Everyone’s really respectful to us, and it’s just always a fun environment in here.” Scales said The Tap’s laid-back climate makes it stand out from other bars in the area.

“It is very, very different than your noise cave or just like jamming all the time,” Scales said. “You can hang out, there’s music going and you can sit on the porch. Very chill environment for sure.”

In addition to a relaxed atmosphere, Scales said the bar’s history makes it unique.

“I know this bar specifically has been here for I don’t know how many years,” Scales said. “I love when parents that used to live in the town come here. They’re like, ‘Oh, the bar used to be in the middle. I lived in those apartments over there.’ It’s always fun.”

Amy Joseph, Class of 1995, said she enjoyed frequenting The Tap during her time as an undergradu-

ate.

“We could walk there, it was a casual vibe,” Joseph said. “It’s where we would find all of our friends. You could go there with one person and do a few laps around the bar and you’d run into everybody else that you knew, so that made it really fun.”

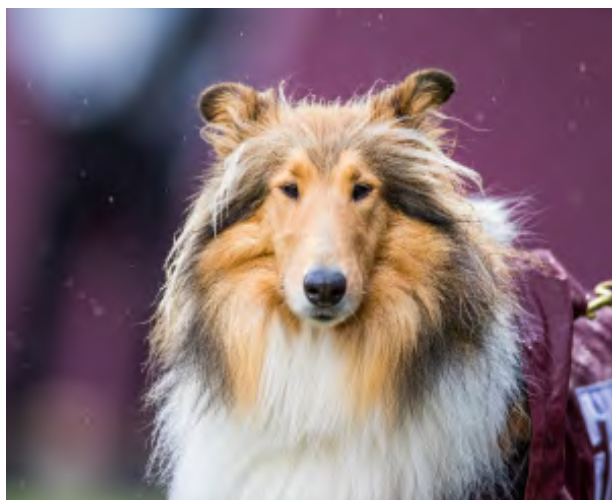
Joseph said she created fond memories with friends at the bar, which is why it is one of her favorite bars in AggieLand.

“I feel like a really exciting time there was always right before a break or finals before everyone went home,” Joseph said. “Or when everyone came back into town from Christmas break and you hadn’t seen everybody in forever, but it was your last opportunity to go out before classes started. I just felt like there was always a line out the door, and it was just tons of fun because everyone you knew was there.”

Photos by Ishika Samant
@ishthefish



EXPERT OPINIONS: Aggieland celebrities weigh in



A&M icons share their favorite aspects of Aggie life: Traditions, culture, spots around campus

By John Chapa
@JDChapabatt

While every Aggie has a special connection with Aggieland, local celebrities also have their own takes on what makes Aggieland, and more, the best.

Reveille X

Reveille X is the First Lady of Aggieland Texas A&M and the highest-ranking member of the Corps of Cadets. What was once a found little pup has grown to be a tradition that has spanned generations and upheld the Spirit of Aggieland. One tradition Reveille said she enjoys has to do with Texas A&M's longest tradition: the Corps of Cadets.

"Gameday march in with my Corps of Cadets!" Reveille X said. "It's so much fun. I get to see so many people, and sometimes they cheer for me and my Grayson!"

Reveille X is referring to Mascot Corporal and engineering sophomore Grayson Poage, who serves as Reveille X's handler. It is a tradition that a sophomore cadet from company E-2 serves as Reveille's handler, caretaker, and representative each year. There are a lot of moments with Grayson and Texas A&M that Reveille X said she enjoyed this year.

"I don't know if I could choose just one [favorite moment]!" Reveille X said. "There was going to class with my Aggies, meeting mascot friends during football season, that time I almost caught a squirrel on the Quad ... so many good things!"

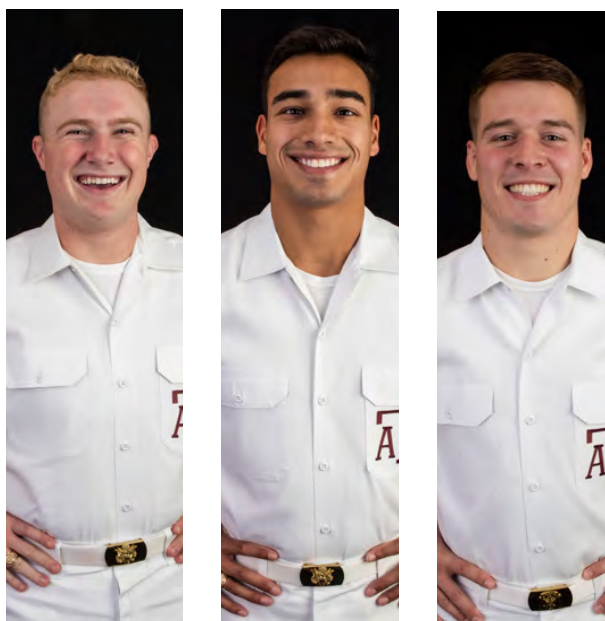
2022-23 Yell Leaders

Another proud tradition of Texas A&M is the Yell Leaders. For over 100 years, five elected upperclassmen have served as the official spirit organization of Texas A&M, leading the 12th Man in yells at university sporting events. Head Yell Leader and construction science senior Zac Cross said the best part about being a Yell Leader is giving back to the community of Texas A&M.

"A&M has given me a place I can call home," Cross said. "It's awesome to be able to give back to the school that has given that to you. Something I really wanted to do when I got the position was to give kids who will be first-gen[eration] Aggies, like myself, a chance to get into it before they get here. I felt a little left out when I got here because there are some Aggies here who are third or fourth-generation, which is so cool. I hope I'm starting that with my family."

Yell Leader and communication senior Nathan Drain said the best yell is the one everyone has the chance to get down immediately. There is nothing like attending Kyle Field each week with a new opponent to beat, Drain said.

"Everyone knows BTHO. It's super exciting to see the stadium get super rowdy for whoever we're playing against," Drain said. "It's unique to each game. We want



"My favorite yell is BTHO, because it's the bread and butter."

NATHAN DRAIN
JUNIOR YELL LEADER

to BTHO of every single we're playing. It's the mentality like, 'We're not gonna lose. I don't care if we lose a couple of games. Guess what? We're gonna BTHO the next team.'"

Yell Leader and construction science junior Trevor Yelton said he didn't know much about Aggieland before attending the university. The best part about being an Aggie is connecting with others, Yelton said.

"The best part about being an Aggie, especially a first-generation Aggie, is being able to go anywhere and connect with somebody on all the levels that Texas A&M

has," Yelton said. "You can immediately have a conversation with anybody. You see that Aggie Ring on someone anywhere across the nation or across the world and you can connect with them because you're both Aggies."

Chance The Librarian

Learning and Student Engagement Librarian Chance Medlin works at Evans Library to help students succeed in their academics. Medlin, or Chance the Librarian, per his Twitter username and website, is an A&M former student and has been a Fish Camp featured namesake. Picking the best library on campus is like picking your favorite kid, Medlin said.

"The best library is the one that you need at the time ... one library that is interesting is Cushing," Medlin said. "Cushing has an internationally famous collection of science fiction pieces. I think what propelled its fame is George R. R. Martin. A lot of people don't know that he loves the university. We have replica weaponry from the show [Games of Thrones] and some of his old manuscripts."

The best part about being a librarian at A&M is working with Aggies and connecting them with the resources they need to succeed, Medlin said. Medlin could not answer whether the best Starbucks on campus is in fact the one location on Evans' first floor.

"Starbucks is Starbucks," Medlin said. "The best one is the one with the shortest line at the time. The one in Evans is nice, but you can often walk to one part of campus and back and the line hasn't gone down at all. Whichever Starbucks is the quickest and most convenient is the best at that time."

Photos by Cameron Johnson
& Ishika Samant



FIRST FRIDAY HISTORIC AGGIELAND AT ITS BEST

By Kathryn Miller
@KathrynMiller0

On the first Friday of every month, the quiet, historic streets of Downtown Bryan transforms into a unique stage to spotlight the local businesses, food, music, art, performances and culture of the community.

A recognized Texas Cultural District, Downtown Bryan is the heart and soul of the city of 90,000. A brief 10-minute drive from Texas A&M's campus, it's a refreshing glimpse into the city's history and culture. The quaint shops and locally-owned businesses have a smaller, old-town feel, serving as a reminder of home for some students from rural areas. Unlike College Station, Downtown Bryan prides itself on its absence of big-name and chain restaurants and stores, emphasizing the importance of fostering a tight-knit community.

First Friday, Downtown Bryan's monthly event, allows the community to come together to highlight the art, culture, people and businesses of Bryan in one place. Main Street is shut down, void of cars and instead filled with vendors' stands and stages for local performers; the street lamps burn a little brighter, stores keep their doors unlocked and lights on a few hours past their typical closing times and the bars lining the streets pour out a few more drinks.

Catherine Buckner's shop Busha's Custom Cookies, where she is the owner, cookie decorator and store's operator, sits on the outskirts of Downtown Bryan on South Sims Avenue, just a couple yards south of the train tracks. Buckner said since Busha's opened almost two years ago, they've participated in every First Friday.

"Our typical hours are 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. but we stay

Photos by Cade Gossett



open until 9 p.m. for First Friday," Buckner said. "We always offer free samples of our cookie of the month and we run some kind of deal ... I change it every month. Staying open late helps a lot of people that don't get off work until later ... Since it's always such a heavily packed event, a lot of people will often start here, and then they'll walk over [to Main Street], which is nice."

Since Busha's is on the outside of Downtown Bryan, Buckner said the energy in the store varies between First Fridays and the monthly event is a hit-and-miss event for her store. However, many of those who come into Busha's are typically delighted to see they house other vendors' products in-store as well, Buckner said.

"Sometimes it's really crazy and we get huge crowds that come in at the same time so it gets real loud and real hectic," Buckner said. "Sometimes it's pretty calm, but most of the time, it's a good steady flow of people com-



ing in. It's really nice to showcase other small businesses here because I know when I first started my business, I couldn't have done it without other people. I definitely wanted to show appreciation to other businesses to be able to have a space to sell their items."

First Friday gives the opportunity for Bryan's unnoticed businesses to display what they can offer to the community, Buckner said. Specifically, stores that do not yet have a storefront can set up booths and tables on Main Street to acquaint themselves with new customers.

"Downtown Bryan is up and coming — but I think there's still so many people that don't know how many amazing businesses are down here," Buckner said. "For some of these people, their main source of income is First Friday. It gives people something to look forward to at the beginning of every month."

Haley Thurman, manager at Sparrow Lane, a spacious home decor and gift shop, said expanding the community is the best aspect of First Friday.

"I love when people come in and they're like, 'Oh, this



is my grandma,' or 'This is my grandpa and we've told them about the store,'" Thurman said. "I'm glad that we can show them around. I love when people are like 'Hey, I was in last week, this is the friend I was telling you about.'"

Thurman said First Friday is great for the city's economy, but also brings a feeling of home to A&M for some students.

"We love when people shop local, it helps us out and it helps the whole community," Thurman said. "Also, I just think it's exciting for Aggies and college students just to have somewhere to go that maybe feels a little more small town and local. Kind of just that homey feeling that they might be missing."

Psychology senior William Wetzel is the president of Maroon Steel — a steel pan ensemble band whose goal is to spread the Afro-Caribbean culture of Trinidad and Tobago around Bryan and College Station. Wetzel said it is a tradition for Maroon Steel to play at First Friday, and are the most attended performances.

"Being able to play on the street in the dark — it's a really cool vibe," Wetzel said. "Being able to get everybody to show up and seeing everybody's hard work come together for First Friday is really, really cool."

Wetzel said for Maroon Steel, playing First Friday is different because they're able to hook the audience as they're walking by with their music.

"Being able to see them actually get interested in us and enjoy the music is different," Wetzel said. "Rather than just playing in front of a sitting-down audience."

Wetzel said his favorite part of Maroon Steel's traditional First Friday performances is seeing the festival's attendees enjoy themselves while listening to the steel pan's unique sound, and a special moment between the band and First Friday's attendees is when they play the War Hymn.

"The crowd is used to hearing music at First Friday, but when they see a steel pan it's a lot different because it's such a rare instrument," Wetzel said. "A favorite moment of a lot of people in the band is playing the Aggie War Hymn and seeing the crowd start to sing along with us playing."

START

NORTHGATE

Bar Guide



Is your F250 lifted higher than your GPA? Or are you ready to fall in love with a two-stepping, upper-deck-chewing, cut-off jeans-wearing Daddy's money cowboy? If so, then this is the place for you.



For the pickle shot aficionado, look no further than Topsy, but if you think yourself claustrophobic, the Turtle may not be your comfort place.



Margaritas s
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You're either an Ol' Ag, in Student Bonfire or a member of the Corps of Cadets. If you're none of these things, you're probably there to see the snake. Either way, The Chicken is one of the best traditions in Aggieland.



Beware the shot wheel, this temptress is known for defeating even the most heavy-weight of drinkers.



If you go to Shiner you are either: a freshman OR trying to date a freshman. Good for rocking your boots, finding a one-night dance partner, and walking back to your Hullabaloo suite at 2 a.m.



galore, big tables for all your friends. Be margaritas may be ng, and are known to sugar hangovers.



END!

Jokes by Battalion Staff
Graphic by Cameron Johnson

THE BATTLE FOR AGGIELAND:

LAYNE'S VS. CANE'S

By **Emma Lawson** @ELawsonAtTheBat

Perhaps the second most popular rivalry at Texas A&M is the battle of chicken tenders — between Layne's and Cane's — and, after deliberation at The Battalion, we're ready to give our thoughts.

Layne's is a local business with its original location in College Station which opened in 1994, according to Layne's website. Raising Cane's, on the other hand, opened in 1996 in Louisiana with chain restaurants popping up around the United

States, according to Raising Cane's website.

The two restaurants feature chicken tenders, but the recipes have some definite differences; Layne's sauce is more peppery while Cane's tends to be more ketchup-based.

Similarly, Cane's toast is more roll-like while Layne's toast is just a piece of Texas toast. Due to the two being on the same street, competition ensues as people argue over which chicken tender is superior.



Bridget Bristow — THE BATTALION

Bridget Bristow — Photographer

During a blind taste test, Bristow said the Cane's box was mostly sub-par with the exception of the bread.

"It seems like the chicken doesn't have a lot of flavor, and the sauce is the main thing that says, 'Hi,'" Bristow said. "There's nothing special to the fries, but the bread is fluffy."

For the Layne's chicken tender box,

Bristow said she enjoyed the texture of the chicken more while still finding the fries to be standard.

"The breading is a little bit crunchier on the chicken," Bristow said. "The sauce tastes more like a barbecue sauce, weirdly. I also think they cooked the fries a bit longer, but it's still just a fry."

When asked to choose the winner

from each box, Bristow picked Layne's chicken tenders and sauce, but she said she didn't taste a difference between the fries and preferred Cane's bread.

"The second one has that toast taste, but it almost tastes burnt somehow," Bristow said. "The other one's sauce is way too ketchup-forward. Also, the french fries are the same."

Ruben Hernandez — Asst. Life & Arts Editor

Hernandez said he was not impressed with Cane's and felt especially disappointed at the fries.

"The chicken is very soft but oily," Hernandez said. "The fries taste manufactured, like you went to HEB and grabbed it from the frozen food aisle ... I've tasted better."

For the Layne's box, Hernandez said

the food tastes and looks more home-made, which impacts taste and texture positively.

"Visually, it looks better. With the sauce, you can tell it was made in-kitchen, as opposed to grabbing packets from the back," Hernandez said. "Huge difference."

Overall, Hernandez chose Cane's

bread and Layne's chicken tenders, fries and sauce as the winners, making Layne's the winner for this round, Hernandez said.

"They're the recurring winner every year, and it shows why," Hernandez said. "Although the bread isn't that important, if Layne's changed it, it would be perfection."



Caleb Elizondo — Opinion Editor

Elizondo said he enjoyed the sauce and bread of the Cane's box but found everything else to be unimpressive.

"I don't know how to describe the texture, but it's bland," Elizondo said. "Overall, the bread is pretty good, the sauce is also pretty good, but everything else is kinda lacking."

Although he said Layne's toast was just standard, he enjoyed the crispness of the chicken and fries more than Cane's,

"The chicken is much crunchier, there's more flavor in the chicken and the sauce is more peppery," Elizondo said. "The french fries are more crunchy, so there's more texture and the toast is

toast."

Elizondo chose the chicken, fries and toast from Layne's, but preferred the sauce from Cane's.

"The fries are much better than Cane's, which are limp and soggy," Elizondo said. "Layne's definitely wins this one for me."



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BEST BARBECUE: C&J



Smoking the competition for decades

Long-time, locally-loved barbecue entices customers old and new

By John Chapa
@JDChapaBatt

After polling the Texas A&M student body and local community, C&J Barbeque has won the title of Best Local Barbecue in Aggieland. C&J is no stranger to awards, having won the most votes for "Favorite Barbecue Restaurant" in the Brazos Valley by The Eagle's readers 17 years in a row.

Established in 1981, C&J Barbeque got its start as a convenience store that sold barbecue on the side. Co-owner Justin Manning said the executive decision to convert to a full-time barbecue store came after a much larger gas station opened across the street.

"We knew that gas station would put our little gas station out of business, so my parents decided to open the first store out of necessity," Manning said. "We saw the opportunity to scale up and decided to take the risk to see how it goes."

The 'C' and 'J' in C&J Barbeque stand for Chip and Jo, Manning's parents. Manning said he grew up not only in College Station but in C&J's as well.

"My parents bought the Gulf Gas Station in 1981 and I was born in January 1983, so I've literally been in this building my entire life," Manning said. "My dad used to sell feed, back in the day. He would put a

feed bag out in the middle [of the store] and I would take naps there with a blanket. I couldn't roll out in any direction because I was covered with feed."

C&J's Barbecue has expanded to three different stores, the original store on Harvey 1404, the largest store in Bryan, and the most recently opened store on Southwest Pkwy. Manning said popularity skyrocketed after Franklin Graham, an American evangelist and missionary, praised the barbecue in his sermons.

"When Franklin Graham came to town as a part of his Christian Revival tour he ate at our store first thing ... the rest is history," Manning said. "He ate at C&J's every day he was here and talked about it in each of his sermons four days in a row. He even took some to-go on his plane ride home. Business skyrocketed after that for weeks and we've had loyal customers ever since."

C&J's success stems from the loyalty of Aggies who are returning customers from near and far. The barbecue restaurant has become a tradition for many Aggies, Manning said.

"We grew with Texas A&M," Manning said. "We're most busy in the fall when students are here, family is in town, and Ol' Ags come to watch the football games and we're least busy in the summer when the town is quiet. We wouldn't be where we are without the Aggie family. There is a married couple from Magnolia that had their first date here. What's funny is the lady didn't know their

first date was going to be at some barbecue store off the side of the road. The man always says, 'It worked because she married me.' The couple eats here before every Aggie home football game."

When asked why Aggieland voted C&J's best local barbecue, Manning said the vote must have stemmed from C&J's proud service to the community.

"When you give back to the community, people remember that," Manning said. "We do what we can to help people. We hire students from Texas A&M as employees. We are a part of the red card program for Texas A&M Athletics, so student-athletes come to the store to purchase barbecue with their daily allowance. We've also benefited organizations like Twin City Missions and Voices for Children. After restrictions let up after COVID-19, everyone flooded our stores to return the support back to us, and we appreciate that."

Biomedical science junior Faith Lass ate at C&J's for the first time last year in the fall with family and friends. C&J's has been a go-to stop since then, Lass said.

"I first discovered C&J's last fall when my parents came to town," Lass said. "I [like] to eat at C&J's because they are faster and seem to have larger portion sizes. My favorite thing to eat is the baked potato with brisket. If it's fall time, they have really good sweet potatoes."

Lass introduced the restaurant to her mom, Karen Lass, Class of 1992, who had

never heard of the restaurant when she attended Texas A&M.

"I first ate at the restaurant on December 10th last year with Faith [Lass] and her crew," Karen said. "We didn't really eat out much when I was a student. If we did, we went to places on Northgate like the [Dixie] Chicken, Dudley's [Draw] and Freebirds."

Karen Lass said she'd now rather eat at C&J's than other barbecue restaurants in town because of her memorable first experience.

"I much prefer C&J's over the other [barbecue] places in town because of the family atmosphere," Karen said. "They take care of you. It's an immediately different feel from chain restaurants. When we went [for the first time] we cut it close to closing time and they didn't rush us or anything. They were an accommodating staff and even took a picture of our group at the end of the night."

Another factor aside from C&J's hospitality that makes the restaurant stand out is its barbecue. There are no gaps in the quality between any food items at C&J's, Karen said.

"The two biggest judges of a barbecue place are its sauce and brisket," Karen said. "The house sauce and brisket are so good. I also really like their turkey and sweet potatoes. They're absolutely to die for. In most other restaurants you only go for one thing, like brisket, but C&J's has no weaknesses. Everything is great and I'd get in a heartbeat."

Bridget Bristow — THE BATTALION

Downtown Bryan



A Nguyen — THE BATTALION

Aggieland fosters love in the historic heart of Bryan, provides variety of amorous activities

By **Kenzie Finch**
@Kenziefinch6

Picking the perfect spot for a date can be challenging. Luckily, lovers in Aggieland weighed in on what they deem the best spot.

This year, Downtown Bryan was voted as the Best Date Spot in Aggieland. Historic Downtown Bryan has everything a college student might be looking for when it comes to planning a date with that special someone — coffee shops, restaurants, historic sites and, of course, the perfect photo spots.

The Queen Theatre is the crown jewel of Bryan. Morgan Lawing, a supervisor at the theater, said the location opened in 1939 and was renovated from 2010-18 before reopening. The theater was the first air-conditioned movie theatre west of the Mississippi River, according to Destination Bryan's website.

"This is a very historic theater," Lawing said. "Now [the Schulman family] have taken back over as the original family that owned it in the [19]30s."

The location offers food service during the movie through QR codes as well as an upstairs bar — perfect for a quick drink before the movie or even shopping.

Tickets can be purchased on the theater's website.

Downtown Bryan also offers a unique experience for the community once a month by hosting live performances on the first Friday of every month, during the aptly named First Friday, from 5-10 p.m.

"The streets of Historic Downtown Bryan transform into one big stage on the first Friday of each month with live music, performances, art demonstrations and unique & interactive events and activities," according to Destination Bryan.

Allied health sophomore Caylan Buchanan said she was in Downtown Bryan for her organization's semi-formal.

"It's cute. We're going to eat here first and then our venue is [in] Bryan, also," Buchanan said. "[We're eating at] the Proudest Monkey. A lot of people come here for pictures."

Education sophomore Melody Chadwick said she visits Downtown Bryan because it's close to her church.

"I've been here a couple of times to eat, but I think it's really cute so I like to come down here whenever I can," Chadwick said. "We went to 3rd on Main Kitchen a couple months ago and that was really good."

Downtown Bryan contains several locations for vintage lovers, bookworms and the musically inclined, including thrift shops, bookstores, music hubs and more.

The overall experience is enriched with history, food

and ambience to make for the perfect location of your next date night.

Here is just some of what you might find on your visit to Downtown Bryan:

- Restaurants: The Proudest Monkey, 3rd on Main, All the King's Men, Ronin Restaurant
- Coffee Shops: Harvest Coffee Bar, The Village
- Shopping: Bird's Nest Gifts and Antiques, Brazos Glasswork, Ed's Bookshop, Texas Rose Boutique, Corner of Time Antiques Mall
- Activities: The Queen Theatre, First Friday, drag shows at HALO
- Bars: Blackwater Draw, The Top Shelf, Lone Star Meadery, Vino Boheme





BEST THRIFT STORE: BIRD'S NEST

Antique shop combines vintage finds with fresh local craftsmanship

By Sydnei Miles
@sydnei_m04

Bird's Nest is a haven for local antique lovers. Its grand size and numerous sections full of beautiful and rare antiques make it possible to find almost anything.

Located in Downtown Bryan, this unique vintage shop has won an immense amount of support from Aggies and Bryan-College Station residents as the best antique store in town.

Bird's Nest owner Robin Kenney started the business while working as a nurse, originally spending her free time at different local sales.

"We've been in business for eight years," Kenney said. "I started going to estate sales, yard sales, auctions and buying things a little bit here [and] there, and that grew. Eventually, we had enough and we actually purchased this building. We own this building that was built in 1865, so it's part of history."

Bird's Nest is special to Kenney's family and to others as it gives people a chance to showcase their own products. On the store's

second floor, products are sold by local vendors, which brings a variety of pieces to the store.

"We're all family owned and operated and we feature local artists and vendors," Kenney said. "Those are all different local people that rent the [upstairs] space from us. It's a cool idea because these are all people that we've met doing arts and crafts and antique shows. We invited them into our store and now they're like little entrepreneurs. We've had over 20 to 25 people that have started their own little businesses."

The variety of antique pieces attracts customers to Bird's Nest, as they can often find a great diversity of products. English and psychology sophomore Emily Mallin said her experience with Bird's Nest has been positive, as she's able to explore many pieces from different generations.

"I've always really been into old music and I've always been into the vibe of things from the 1970s and 1980s," Mallin said. "There's things in there from before the 1950s and they have a really diverse selection. I just like things with stories, especially with decorating [an] apartment in college. I like getting things that have meaning and knowing that lots of people have loved and cherished this thing."

Bioenvironmental sciences senior Natalie Shirley began antique shopping five years

ago and said Bird's Nest products are unique and rare to find elsewhere.

"I think it has a good variety of old and new products," Shirley said. "I like being able to go and shop. It's very aesthetically pleasing. There's diagrams of different flowers or mushrooms, and as an environmental science major that's kind of appealing to me. So that's kind of how my whole apartment is decorated and I like going there looking for those things. It's [also] good for guests to find gifts for people that you can't really find at other stores."

The warm-hearted environment of Bird's Nest is one that entices customers to come back. They welcome customers with open arms and their passion for antiques is shown through the art they sell.

"It's a really cool environment. The owner is always at the cash register and she's really sweet," Mallin said. "Everything has a story, which is why I really like it. They sort of curate the things they sell a little more and it's all sort of special."

The location of Bird's Nest is also very well-liked because it gives customers the feeling of being in a bigger town than just College Station. Many enjoy going on First Fridays where hundreds of people come together to shop, listen to live music performances and enjoy other activities.

"It's in a good location so it's very conve-



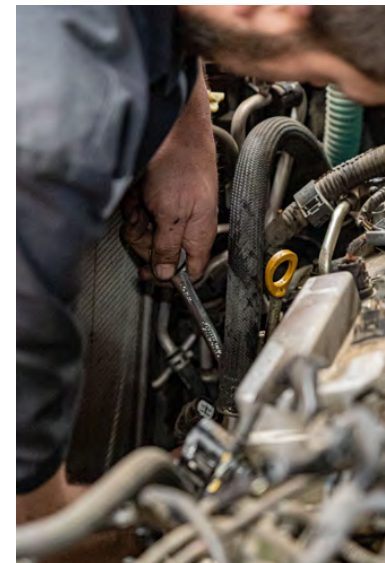
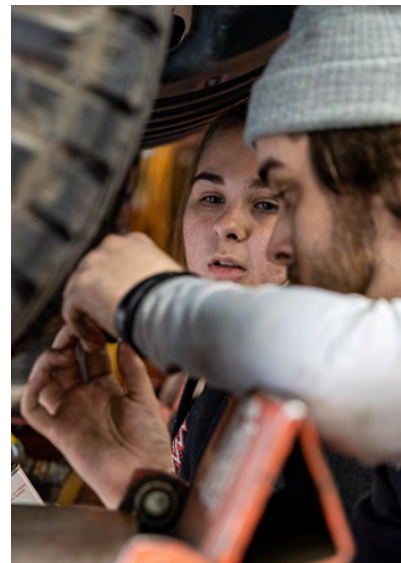
nient to get to [and] it's not far from where I live," Shirley said. "I just think they offer a good variety of different things to kind of go and spend your time doing especially on First Friday. It's also close to just a bunch of other things to do in downtown Bryan so it's kind of nice and doesn't feel like College Station."

Bird's Nest is very well known, loved and appreciated by customers across Aggieland.

"People come here from all over," Kenney said. "All over the world, actually, but people come here [and] it's almost like it's a destination."



BEST MECHANIC: CARDOC AUTOMOTIVE



Cade Gossett—THE BATTALION

'An independent family-owned repair facility'

By Kyle McClenagan
@KMcClenagan

Located at 204A Harvey R., CarDoc Automotive has served the Bryan-College Station community for over 20 years.

The majority of the automotive shop's real estate is occupied by six service bays where mechanics work away on a wide variety of vehicles. The small lobby, sandwiched between the garages and an auto parts store, has tall well-lit walls adorned with mechanical certificates and service awards the shop has acquired over the years. In the corner of the front desk, among a handful of spark plugs and small miscellaneous parts, stands several handwritten thank you letters from customers conveying their gratitude for the shop's previous work.

The owner and founder of the shop, Lary Buckley, said he took ownership of the location in 1999 after its then-occupant was bought out, and the business was going to be closed.

"I retired from Western Auto at that location in [19]99 [after] 27 years and opened CarDoc [in the same building] when they, [Western Auto], merged and switched to Advanced Auto Parts and there was no longer going to be a service [at that location]," Buckley said. "I've basically been in the automotive repair business since about around 1982, 1980."

Since beginning his career as a mechanic, Buckley said the industry has changed dramatically with the continued introduction of new technologies, espe-

cially the implementation of on-board diagnostics, or OBD, systems, which aid mechanics in identifying automotive problems.

"The biggest challenge and change, which is for the good but is hard for some people to understand, is electronic fuel injection [and] computer control OBD2 systems," Buckley said. "Now you grab a laptop and read data before you go to the toolbox and grab a tool because you [have] to understand what the computer is doing, what it's seeing."

While these automotive advancements mean that it is sometimes harder for individuals to work on their own vehicles, they are often more reliable, Buckley said.

"You don't have to change spark plugs every 40,000 miles, you don't have to have five v-belts, you have one serpentine [belt], fuel management is much more efficient and your emissions are much cleaner," Buckley said. "Back in the day, you'd have a fingernail file and a matchbook to set the points in the distributor, now you don't have to do any of that."

Buckley said the key to running a successful automotive shop has always been customer service.

"You want to treat everyone how you would like to be treated, is always my thought," Buckley said. "You want to listen to what their complaint is, then identify it and then give them the options to repair it."

Aaron Loveless, the service manager for CarDoc, can often be found behind

the front desk in the lobby, where he has served as the liaison between mechanics and customers for 10 years.

"A big part of my job is translating the mechanical lingo into your normal every day," Loveless said. "I have to try and bridge that gap and just make sure that everybody is on the same page so that their car can be serviced and that their concern is listened to and paid attention to."

Loveless was born and raised in the Bryan-College Station area and had worked at the auto parts store next door before joining CarDoc. He said the key to good customer service is putting yourself in the customers' shoes.

"They are somebody's father, daughter, son and they rely on us to keep their kids safe [and] get them home safe," Loveless said. "I really get to help a lot of people. I get to take care of parents' kids while they're gone and that's the big thing, keeping people safe."

While Loveless said he doesn't personally get his hands dirty working on the vehicles, the shop does have two master mechanics, two apprentices and two porters. Each of the master mechanics are Automotive Service Excellence, or ASE, certified. Gaining such a certificate requires the mechanic to pass multiple tests administered by the National Institute for Automotive Service Excellence.

"They're kind of the name of the game whenever it comes to certifications for shops," Loveless said. "We are an ASE blue

seal shop, which I think something like less than 5% [of shops are] ... if you get enough complaints, they pull that."

Most recently, Loveless said the biggest challenge has been finding replacement parts following the COVID-19 pandemic.

"COVID[-19] has changed everything. I've had cars sit here for almost a year waiting for an electrical part for the transmission on a Ford," Loveless said. "I've had daily price increases on everything, my refrigerant has gone up five-fold ... so we're doing the best we can to make it as easy on our customers as possible."

The pandemic has also caused an increase in new and used car prices, and Loveless said that means repairing cars that would have been considered at the end of their lifespan just a few years ago.

"There has been so many cars that before I was like, 'Don't spend the money — you don't want to fix that, it's not worth it,'" Loveless said. "But now, the market has changed so much that it's honestly been tough to even keep up with the amount of business because so many people are fixing cars instead of trading them in."

Even with the growing challenges, however, Loveless said he still would not want to work anywhere else.

"The owner here, Lary, he's been like a second dad to me, and I love working in an independent, family-owned repair facility," Loveless said. "Every day is a new day and every day something is challenging."

PUSH TO START BEST BAND IN AGGIELAND

Recently-retired local band brings authentic rock 'n roll ambience to Aggieland, discusses future

By **Emma Lawson**
@ELawsonAtTheBat

Named Best Local Band in Aggieland, Push to Start features the essence of rock 'n' roll and hopes to keep their love of music alive as they follow their own paths.

Push to Start had their first performance in 2021, and for almost a year, have delighted fans with their energy on stage and killer rock 'n' roll sound. However, due to many members of the band graduating or moving across the state, Push to Start had their last performance on Dec. 1, 2022. Although they are pursuing their own paths, the band cherishes their time performing together and hopes for the possibility of a reunion concert at some point in the future.

Alex Peters, who sings and plays rhythm guitar, said the band was created when one of his friends from a fraternity called and asked if they knew of any rock bands that could play at a party on Northgate.

"We got together, practiced for like a week, if even that, and then performed our first show," Peters said. "We had a lot of fun and continued performing after that."

One of the biggest challenges Push to Start faced was building a repertoire of songs and finding time to practice alongside full-time jobs and studies, Peters said.

"A lot of our sets were 45 minutes [to] an hour, and we had maybe 10 or 15 songs that we knew," Peters said. "After a while, we started to change our set to fit the audience."

Peters said as he's working to get his master's degree in statistics, forming Push to Start was an important form of escape and a way for him to also express his enthusiasm for music.

"I'm doing math and code mostly. So, to come here is just the opposite of that," Peters said. "Music is what I love, so being able to perform with these incredible musicians was so valuable to me."

Sean Shamgar, lead guitarist and backup vocalist, said Push to Start got their start in jazz before performing as a rock band.

"Me, Paul [Venesky] and Nick [Mischian] did jazz band together for a number of years," Shamgar said. "We toyed around with the idea of making a band, so the idea was there."

Shamgar said no matter what, Push to Start made every show a fun one by bringing passion to the stage.

"One motif that carries through anything, regardless of what we play is, we just try to bring a ton of energy to our performance," Shamgar said.

Shamgar said he is pursuing a master's in biomedical engineering and, although the band has now split up, he appreciated the bond created with his bandmates and hopes to continue working with music.



"For me, this band has always simply meant freedom," Venesky said. "Whenever I come to rehearsal, it doesn't matter what kind of week I'm having, I get to leave it all at the door and step into this."

Nick Mischian, the bassist, said for every performance, each song was thoroughly prepared beforehand. "We don't ever show up to the stage without knowing the music front and back," Mischian said. "We give everything we can to that music."

Push to Start was a time of personal growth, Venesky said, making their last show together a bittersweet one.

"I'm pretty reserved off-stage, but when I'm on stage, it's just a different level of confidence," Venesky said. "What I'm looking forward to is, for one last time, play with these three dudes and give it everything I've got."



"This band means so much," Shamgar said. "Not only was I playing with three other phenomenal musicians, I was also playing with three of my closest friends."

Push to Start's drummer Paul Venesky said he was the newest member of the band after its old drummer graduated.

"So Sean came up to me at jazz bands and said, 'Hey, you've been really improving. Would you like to join?'" Venesky said.

Although the Arctic Monkeys is their "spirit band," Venesky said the band also brought in more current rock 'n' roll type inspiration, such as Nirvana or Paramore.

"I definitely did task myself with bringing in a little bit of that more modern sound," Venesky said. "They might be more modern, but they still hold true to those core tenants of the classic rock formula."

Venesky is pursuing a master's degree in business at the Mays Business School and said the band was a way for him to step away from stressors and do what he loved.

Photos by **Luca Yaquinto**
@lucaphotobuffet/Instagram

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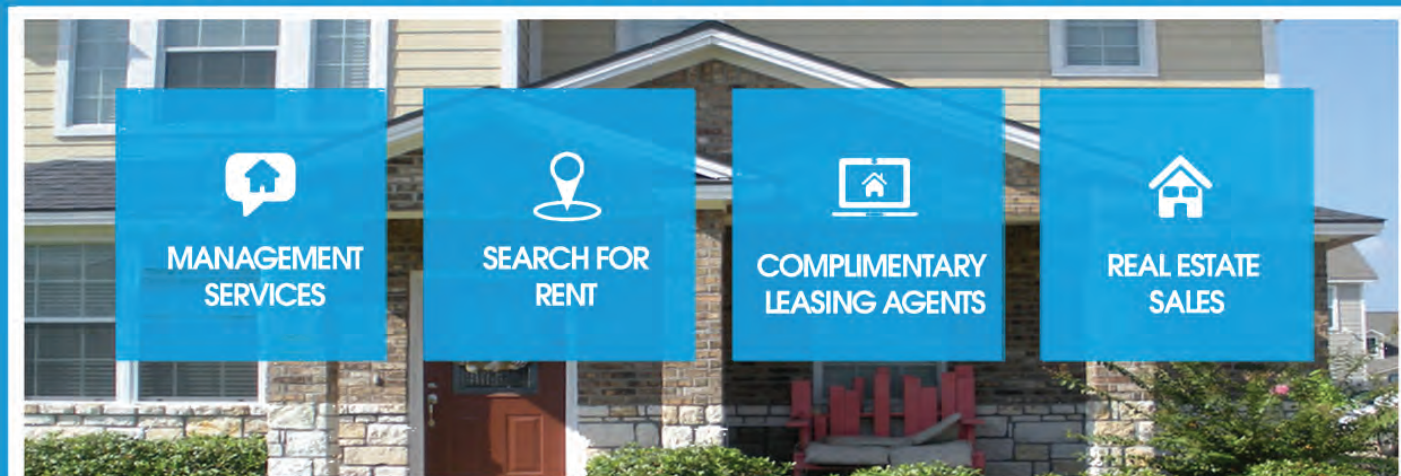
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Best Aggie TikToker: Jase Powell

Communication sophomore makes splash with entertaining student interviews

By **Emma Ehle**
@EmmaKEhle4

In fall of 2021, Texas A&M welcomed its first ever ‘yass leader’ into the freshmen class of 2025.

Jase Powell, who has gained immense success as an A&M focused content creator since going viral on the app.

With most of Powell’s videos concerning Aggie student life and the culture of the university, it’s no surprise that the sophomore has fully immersed himself in everything A&M. Sporting unique Aggie attire in the majority of his videos — when not wearing his classic “I Heart Jase Powell” merch — creates content centered around major A&M events, such as game day, Midnight Yell and sorority recruitment.

Powell’s first viral video, “The Yassification of Texas A&M,” was posted in the winter of 2021.

“I made it last December — literally the second week of December which was finals week when I should’ve been studying for a final but I was procrastinating in Evans [Library],” Powell said. “So I just made one; ‘The Yassification of A&M’ TikTok, just me walking around campus, walking to Heldenfels ... and then I began posting interviews, and I think that was the beginning of March. That’s kind of when I guess I took off and got really creatively inspired and continued with content.”

Powell’s interviews, which consist of him walking around campus and asking students various questions such as “What’s your type?” or “What era are you in?” or “Why are you single?” have not only earned him recognition on A&M’s campus, but also a widespread reach across other Texas universities, as he has already recorded several interviews at the University of Texas at Austin. His most popular video titled “Asking Texas A&M Students ‘What’s Pissing You Off Right Now?’” has over 800,000 likes, 3 million views and thousands of comments ranging from other students, to A&M alumni and fellow TikTok influencer Brittany Broski.

While a video with this kind of reception seems like it would take immense planning, Powell said he likes to maintain spontaneity in his content.

“I just go up to random people and literally just scream out like, ‘Do you want to get interviewed,’” Powell said. “If they say yes, that’s when I just kind of prepare them for the video.”

Powell emphasized that given the context of TikTok, he wants his content to come across authentically to viewers.

“I feel like I don’t want whatever I’m doing on TikTok to ever feel like a job or something that needs to be so overly structured because I want it to be fun,” Powell said. “I want that to resonate and be obvious on the viewers’ end where they can look at it and be like ‘Oh my god this is so funny,’ you know, because I had fun



Cameron Johnson—THE BATTALION

making it. I don’t want it to feel forced.”

Powell also said his videos have given him the opportunity to meet students that recognize him from TikTok, which is an experience he enjoys.

“In the last year it’s been the most rewarding,” Powell said. “The most endearing thing is that I got a chance to meet people that have similar stories with me, that share similar identities with me, and that I get a chance to relate to them in ways and also get the chance to be connected to A&M. It’s such an honor.”

Powell’s content appears to have given some people a new perspective on the university and the student population in general. Powell said his platform has allowed him to represent parts of the student body that may not be as visible on campus.

“My first few comments on the video that I posted [last] December, ‘The Yassification of A&M,’ were like, ‘I didn’t know a student like you existed there,’ and ‘Oh my god I wish you were there in my years,’” Powell said. “To feel like there’s even a minute form of representation on campus is crazy and that I represent that population ... but also there are so many more students that are like me on campus that just don’t have the plat-

form like I do. To be able to be that for them and to be able to represent them in any way, and also to meet them on campus is really huge.”

Powell also said he likes to challenge preconceived notions about the university and encourages everyone to utilize their own experiences to form A&M’s narrative.

“I believe that there are so many more people like me,” Powell said. “A&M has become a lot more progressive in its nature and behavior. I try to encourage everyone to find their experience and find their narrative of the university by their own lived experience in the people they surround themselves with.”

Despite his newfound fame, Powell said he immensely appreciates every opportunity his platform has provided him with.

“I will never normalize [the fame],” Powell said. “Normalizing getting a chance to meet people on campus that are like ‘Oh my god I’ve seen your TikToks ... it’s just crazy to have those experiences. Getting the chance to partner with brands like JCPenney, or even getting the chance to meet students that have seen me online and that again, probably share a similar story to me, is so rewarding.”

STUDENT-SELECTED: BEST PROFESSORS

By Jack Lee @JackTheBatt

Tom Burton:

Assistant professor of the practice of journalism

Tom Burton joined Texas A&M in the fall of 2019. Prior to becoming a professor, Burton was a professional journalist himself.

“I’ve been a journalist since I was in high school. My first paying job at a newspaper was during the beginning of my senior year of high school, working for a weekly newspaper,” Burton said. “For the academic year of 2018–19, I was at Ohio University. I was awarded a fellowship designed for mid-career professionals to come

in and teach and to earn credits, and I earned my master’s degree as part of the program.”

Burton said his priority as a professor is giving future journalists hands-on experience in the field.

“My hope is that as best as I can, in class I not only give you the methods and the theories of how we do things, but the practical experience of beginning to do it, because you will become a journalist by going out and doing it,” Burton said. “It’s sort of like if I read a book on sailing but never got in a boat, I’m really not a sailor. We can help you know what it’s supposed to be to go sailing, but you’ve got to go sailing.”

Outside of A&M, Burton said he enjoys traveling and immersing himself in foreign cultures.

“A lot of my career was travel,” Burton said. “I always bounced around a lot, but the one thing about teaching now is that there’s so many things that I find now that I can apply to class ... for me, it’s always interesting if we can get out of the tourist attractions and into where people live.”



Kaili Gaston — THE BATTALION

Tatiana Erukhimova:

Instructional professor of physics

Tatiana Erukhimova, started at A&M first as a postdoctoral researcher in 2001 and then as a research scientist. She first started teaching large introductory physics classes in 2006.

“It was eight in the morning, their first class. And you can imagine they expect to see their physics professor, somebody Einstein-looking. And they saw me and it did not go well,” Erukhimova said. “That experience taught me the

lesson to engage with my students, to connect with them, to inspire them from the very beginning.”

Erukhimova said physics excites her because it deals with the basic rules of nature.

“Well, physics is based on fundamental laws,” Erukhimova said. “You don’t need to memorize a lot of things, you can derive things from these fundamental laws, so you just need to think analytically and creatively to do that. And physics opens so many doors, you can do so many things.”

Outside of A&M, Erukhimova said she likes to perform science demonstrations for students and the local

community. Such demonstrations have earned her a large TikTok following on the Department of Physics & Astronomy account, @tamuphysastr.

“We show demonstrations during physics shows on campus and also bring fun physics demonstrations to places where people already are,” Erukhimova said. “For example, First Fridays in Downtown Bryan on Friday evenings, here on campus for football games. It benefits not only the public but also our students.”



Kaili Gaston — THE BATTALION



Kalli Gaston — THE BATTALION

Kyle Thicke:

Assistant instructional professor of mathematics

Kyle Thicke, Ph.D., assistant instructional professor of math, is new to A&M this semester. Prior to working at A&M, Thicke worked as a postdoctoral researcher in Germany. Thicke said that what excites him about math is abstract concepts manifesting themselves.

“I really like the order and just seeing how all this theory plays out in the real world,” Thicke said. “It’s just very beautiful to me.”

Thicke said he is looking forward to creating more intuitive methods of

teaching, to aid students in the future.

“I’m looking forward to making some more nice visualizations [for mathematical concepts] and hopefully making them interactive so that I can use them in teaching and students can kind of play around with them,” Thicke said. “I didn’t really get to do that very much this semester, unfortunately, because when you’re getting started on a class, it’s just a lot of work at first. So hopefully next time around, we’ll be able to do more of that.”

Outside of teaching, Thicke said he is still getting settled in College Station, and is looking for ways to enjoy nature

locally.

“I like playing with my cat. I like running,” said Thicke. “When I was in Germany, I really liked going hiking in the mountains. I haven’t really found anything around here yet.”



Ishika Samant — THE BATTALION

James Herman:

Clinical professor of veterinary medicine

James Herman has been at A&M since 1996. Prior to his teaching career, Herman was a practicing veterinarian.

“I had a very intensive first experience here, [as a] new practitioner ... it was kind of hard to have a good work-life balance with it,” Herman said. “So I thought, well, I’d really like to find a better work-life balance, but I would still like to have a positive impact on medicine on vet medicine and human medicine. I felt like the

best way I could do that is to train other people.”

Herman said improving the lives of other people and their pets is what excites him the most about veterinary medicine.

“[A person’s] animal usually means a lot to them. We can help them and basically take this animal that means so much to them and make it better so they can continue to have that relationship,” Herman said. “I like the idea that now because of [our work], these people have a better day, a better week, a better year with their animal.”

Outside of A&M, Herman said he likes to spend time outdoors and with his family.

“I really like the outdoors. I like to exercise. I have three kids and so their lives are all diverse and crazy right now, so they are a lot of fun to keep up with,” Herman said. “My youngest just got commissioned as a lieutenant in the marine. So we’re out in Virginia with that. My oldest is a physician up in Tyler. And so you know, sometimes we go visit and I’ve got my other oldest, they’re twins. She’s the art director for a video game company.”

BEST DRAG EVENT: DRAGGIELAND

Charisma, uniqueness, nerve and talent on display during on-campus drag competition

By **Michaela Rush**
@Michaela4Batt

Lights, camera, lashes. Glitz and glamor from head to toe, as they take the stage for the annual Draggieland competition, voted the Best Local Drag Event in the title's inaugural year.

Started in 2020 by Memorial Student Center, or MSC, Town Hall, the annual show has become an anticipated event, featuring a variety of local talent and celebrity hosts, such as Monique Heart and Texas' own Alyssa Edwards.

In August of 2021, student executives were informed by staff members that MSC Town Hall would no longer sponsor Draggieland. Following administrative interviews and requests for comment from the organization, it is still unclear as to why this change was made.

Following this announcement, a variety of LGBTQ+ student organizations, including Out in STEM, or oSTEM, LGBTQ Aggies, Makeup Artist Aggies and TRANSCEND stepped up to host the event. Through fundraising and sponsorships, Draggieland: 'Shine Through,' was hosted in Rudder Theatre on April 18, 2022.

For Queen of Draggieland 2021 Cora Cadette, said this event is particularly exciting because she knows students are coming out for drag specifically.

"It's a competition, so it puts entertainers out of their comfort zone, creating fun for us and for the audience, because they get to be a part of the decision-making process," Cadette said. "The best thing was selling out and seeing how many people wanted to come to the event. It's one thing to do a show at a bar every weekend, but last year we had 700 people who came specifically to watch us, it's not just Mitchell who strolled into the bar."

Draggieland 2022 was particularly unique, not only because of the unexpected change in organization, but also because a then-current student, Jessy B Darling, was crowned as queen.

"I feel like a local legend ... it was so validating," Darling said. "Since I started doing drag in 2019, I have been working really hard not only to put my name on the map, but also to get recognized for the work that I was doing. I worked hard to perform well: I'd practice in my apartment, I'd make mixes for hours, and during the digital drag era I made a lot of video drag performances that I'm super proud of."

For Darling, the difference between Draggieland and other local events was the competition element and the large-scale stage.

"A big thing is the stage, and being able to do all the theatrics, I was a theater kid in high school," Darling said.



Connor May—THE BATTALION

"I bought a fog machine for my Megamind thing. I was thinking 'I'm going to make this like the biggest deal ever' ... I just think having a little bit more free reign other than just performing at bars is super cool, a once in a lifetime opportunity."

While Darling has only been performing since 2019, Cadette has been entertaining as a drag queen for 15 years in the Bryan-College Station community, and fell in love with the art when she was a student at Texas A&M and a member of her namesake, the Corps of Cadets.

"When I was in college, I had some friends who were the directors of the [then] GLBT Resource Center," Cadette said. "It was a safe place where I could be open with who I was. One night BV Quest had a fundraiser, and they wanted roaming entertainers. I had never thought about doing drag until then, and I've been doing it ever since."

But even for those who were introduced to drag through the campus show, like materials science senior Tyler Corazao, Draggieland was not only entertaining, but deeply appreciated.

"Before this year, I had zero experience or knowledge of drag whatsoever," Corazao said. "It was really transformative, I got to work closely with the whole oSTEM team, particularly with folks like Daniel Hou and Bella Lopez, who were really passionate about the art form. It

was super educational for me."

Corazao said the positive reactions of patrons after the event made his hard work feel worthwhile.

"I have had so many people say this to me, that it's this entirely different, separate world from Texas A&M," Corazao said. "One-night only, it's full flamboyance, full glamor, full pride, full voice, full self. That really spoke to people."

For Cadette, even though the changes in hosting were frustrating, she was proud to see students unify to represent the LGBTQ+ community on campus.

"It's sad to see the university [took] the stance that they did, knowing how successful [Draggieland] was," Cadette said. "Where is the support — when we're supposed to be supporting cultural diversity — to drive those types of programs? On the other hand, it was nice to see all the organizations come together to make sure Draggieland still happened ... knowing what it stands for, and what it means to stand up to the university in that way."

Draggieland 2022, despite changes, was a sold-out event, allowing queens a new platform, but also helping oSTEM expand its role on campus. Corazao said he believes much of oSTEM's success this year, including winning National oSTEM's Chapter of the Year Award, can be attributed to the show.

"Draggieland really transformed the way that we, as an organization, viewed ourselves and what we do," Corazao said. "We're a professional organization for LGBTQ+ students in STEM, and that's very important, but it's not all that we're capable of. Having the opportunity to be involved in Draggieland leadership again is so impactful for us, we're really looking forward to bringing this new leadership team together, and we're looking to go bigger ... The awards are great, but it pales in com-



Robert O'Brien—THE BATTALION



Robert O'Brien—THE BATTALION

parison to talking to people who went to the show, and hearing how much it meant to them. That's what made it worth it for me."

Having performed in various Texas cities, Darling said what makes Aggieland unique is the variety of performance styles in a relatively small environment.

"Houston is a lot more pressure, because there's so many shows and it's such a big city," Darling said. "There's a lot of cliques ... the pageant queens will split up from the spooky queens or the alternative queens or whatever else. Because College Station is so small, we are kind of forced to group up. I'd say Infinity's style of drag is very different from Cora's style of drag, but they're booked at the same shows, so it makes more people see more variety of drag [compared to] Houston."

Cadette echoed this sentiment, and said Bryan-College Station's entertainment scene is full of great artists.

"I think a lot of times other venues and entertainers underestimate the talent this city has," Cadette said. "We have a lot of great, talented individuals, but it's also unique in that we have the university. Our population changes a lot every year, and every four years. We get new faces and performers year-after-year. We have performers like me, who've been here for 15 years and ones that are just starting out."

Drag shows, in recent years, have been subject to criticism across the country, from being called overly sexual to

accusations of LGBTQ+ "indoctrination." To Corazao, drag's intentional subversion of societal norms makes it a powerful art form.

"Drag says, 'Okay, there is no level of me assimilating myself that's going to be okay with you guys,'" Corazao said. "I have a ton of respect for drag artists. They go out and put their entire selves on display, they are throwing dirt on the face of some of the most ingrained, oppressive power structures that exist on the planet. It has nothing to do with indoctrination, it has nothing to do with wanting everyone to be like them."

Cadette said for her, drag is a form of self-expression, and she hopes that in the same way the university supports other performing and visual arts, it can support drag as an art form. Cadette said not everyone is going to enjoy drag, just in the same way not everyone enjoys every type of art, and that's OK.

"There's been so much negative talk and news about drag shows ... the biggest [obstacle] is just realizing that drag is a form of art," Cadette said. "All we want is to be accepted for the art form that we perform and give. Please continue to support drag, and when you hear someone saying something negative or false, say something back to them ... At the end of the day, it's all art and expressing one's self, and if you don't like it, that's fine."



Robert O'Brien—THE BATTALION



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