Opening Remarks

The semester is almost over and the holiday season looks ominously close...reason enough for another appearance of yours and my favorite aperiodical (yes, I mean the RT). Get your fill of it now, because there won't be another one till the new year (unless, of course, some elves decide to write it). Good luck to everybody on their final exams, and enjoy whatever holidays or break you happen to traditionally celebrate.

MSAC News

These are the salient details of the last MSAC meeting, which was held Nov. 10th. An amazingly large group of you actually showed up, so the contents of this column may not come as a total shock to the majority of students—what a first! Let's keep that attendance up. The meeting went very quickly—only lasted about half an hour, but a lot of material was covered. See, the rumors were all lies—the meetings can be efficient and accomplish things IF PEOPLE SHOW UP. Just a pleasant little reminder to be there when you see the signs.

First, we need a representative for the Lyceum Lecture Series, so that we have some say in which speakers come here. Anyone who has a favorite speaker would like to see (and that the department would not have to pay for) should consider doing this. I do not think it is a time intensive job. Interested parties should see President Young.

Heidi Wilson (that chick we all voted for to be Student Gv't. VP, who shows up at our TGIF's, and as far as I know is not related to our Ray Wilson) stopped by our meeting to give us some more details on the Science Bowl in February. What do you mean you don't remember? It was mentioned at our LAST meeting. Anyway, the confirmed date for it is Feb. 27th, from 7 am (yes, I know that's insane) to 12 noon. The Science Bowl will be sponsored by Martin Marietta, and is a quiz bowl/Jeopardy sort of competition, featuring the top high school seniors from across the State. DMS students are not needed to act as timers or scorekeepers (aren't you glad?), but we are being given this opportunity to increase our department's public relations. It was suggested that we put together some fun things to promote marine science: T-shirts, displays, something. Help from creative minds would be appreciated. Come to the next meeting brimming with ideas, please.

Marc Frischer and Kelli Hammer are hard at work putting together this year's DMS T-shirt order. Look for questionnaires about color preference and how to get yours.

FYI—There is a thesis subsidy fund to help marine science students defray the cost of copying their theses. It is $25 per allotment. See Tom Young or Brian Bendis about it.

Any ideas for lounge renovations (real ones, not stuff like "Remove the DANGER ASBESTOS signs for better atmosphere") should be directed to Lynn Leonard.

Fish lovers! Marine scene enthusiasts! Really bored individuals! Anybody else! Dallas could use some help setting up and maintaining that big aquarium we bought from Frank. Seeing it in the lobby during this lifetime would be great.

Kudos

To Kelli Hammer, on her engagement. Be sure to check out her one-of-a-kind ring. Very cool.

To Howard Rutherford, on his safe return from being lost at sea for practically the whole semester. (Watch out for those steps—they can be vicious when cornered.)

To all the people who defended this past month (there seemed to be an awful lot of you, so I won't name names and risk leaving people out).

Sino-America Soccer Game

Round 1 of the international soccer challenge was played Monday, 11/16 at the CAC. The event was hosted by FACSS and MSAC, but faculty members figured among the team players and cheerleaders. If you did not make it to the game, chances are you at least saw the much touted high fashion uniforms: The American team had red, white, and blue tye-dye T-shirts, and the Chinese team had teal shirts with Chinese characters spelling "CHINA" on them.

The game was played by rotating teams of five players (substituting frequently so everyone got a chance to kick some shins). The Americans made the first goal, and hung pretty tough through out the first half (after 30 minutes the score was 2-2). Then the Chinese team's advantage of playing once a week started to show itself, and the final score was 6-3 in favor of the international team. There were no hard feelings, and several players from both teams stayed after the big game to play for fun...or so they said. Could be that all of them wanted to get a jump on practicing for the inevitable rematch.

Turkey Bowl

The annual Turkey Bowl football game and picnic were a huge success—Thanks Steve! It was a beautiful Saturday
(11/21), Marc Frischer was grilling his little heart out, and a three hour game of endurance football was milked for all the action it could provide. As traditionally set up, the teams were the biologists vs. the abiologicals. The biologists showed up expecting an easy win, since the non-biologicals had seemed pretty scarce. It was a total scam. Dave Duncan arrived with his whole family of football commandos, and fleshed out the previously hazy abiological team.

The biologists were quartered by the amazing Tracey Sutton, and the other team switched quarterbacks so many times I'm not going to try to list them all (although Paul Bisset proved such an asset to the abiologicals as one, I think I'll mention him personally...besides, he's tall and easy to remember).

The final score was a tie: 6-6. This is evidently a first in the history of the Turkey Bowl, and definitely an effort that the abiologicals can be proud of. You all should buy the Duncan family a six pack or something.

---

**Mermaids**

In light of all the cruises people in our department make, and the fact that Sacy Little found this great article about mermaids, I thought they would be a good topic for the RT.

Most of us have heard the scientific explanation given to mermaid sightings. They are usually passed off as cases of mistaken identity, where either a seal (that's Phocidae) or a sea cow (that's Sirenia) was seen at night, or during a hazy, drunken stupor. Now I always thought that was stretching common sense a bit, but the author of the article did seem to think so. According to him, those of us who have only observed seals in captivity (2000) will have little idea how mermaid-like they can look when seen from a distance in the wild. "Their bodies taper to a point, resembling the typical mermaid tail, their hindlimb forefingers have a human character, and their plump, expressive, faces and soft intelligent eyes are considerably more attractive than those of most of the human females available to mariners in British ports." [Eds. Note: For your information, the man who wrote that is British. (1) Jackie, I can see why you left to come here. (2) Maybe this guy has a marine mammal fetish]. The sea cows, supposed to be responsible for tropical sightings, are not treated so chivalrously. About them, he comments: "The resemblance of these animals to mermaids is based on their general anatomical shape rather than any special pretensions to glamour. In other respects they have few charms except great mildness of temperament. They have a thick, sleek upper lip, and a somewhat vacant expression." Still, he believes that from a distance, a submerging sea cow could have been mistaken for a mermaid. Then again, he also says that most mermaid tales can be "safely regarded as springing from a fevered imagination, an elaborate flight of alcoholic fantasy, misinterpretation of inadequate facts, and in some cases straightforward, honest-to-God lying."

More interesting than his feelings toward seals and his alcoholic fantasies about them, is the genealogy he traces through myths, to find the source of the mermaid legend. His reasoning (granted it may be whacked) is as follows: "One of the most awe-inspiring natural phenomena, to our ancestors as to ourselves, was the sea, and numerous gods and goddesses were associated with it at different times in different regions. It is among these water deities of the sea and the Flood that we must seek for the origin of the mermaid legend."

"The earliest female ancestor of the mermaid in human belief is probably the Semitic moon-goddess Atergatis, or Derceto. Lucian described her as having 'the half of a woman, and from the thighs downwards a fish's tail.' We may be surprised that a moon-goddess should have such a decidedly fishy shape, but there is an interesting reason for this. Our ancestors observed that the moon often rose from the sea, and returned to it once more when its course over the night sky was run. It was clear that during the hours when the moon-goddess was invisible beneath the ocean she must be endowed with the power of swimming. That her shape should be partially fishlike was therefore reasonable."

"Another group of mythological figures ancestral to the mermaids were the sirens. These were the offspring of the river-god Achelous and one of those attractive nymphs who seem to have been so readily available to the more influential gods in Greek mythology. The sirens were regarded as the very image of marine sex appeal, luring mariners to destruction by seductive movements and beguiling songs quite as effectively as the modern bikini girl ensnares inane millionaires with a sinuous walk and a repertoire of nifty compliments. [Eds. Note: Can you believe this man? What a nut! Now you see why I felt it necessary to speculate on his "affection" for seals]. The treacherous beauty of the sirens was later transferred to the true mermaids, who were alleged to be irresistible to any male lucky enough to observe one."

Well, the number of physical observations of mermaids bottomed out during the 19th century, but I'm counting on all the intrepid (and faithful beer-drinking) oceanographers in this department to keep their eyes peeled during all future cruises.

---

**Trivia**

What common classification includes all of the following: "mermaid's wine glass," "sea bottle," "deadrnan's fingers," "mermaid's fan," and "mermaid's shaving brush?"

(aeuhbisC eht ni worg heilw agla ngerr fo seman nownmoc IIa)