

Eileen Smith

IN THE PINK TEXAS BLOGGER'S SITE PROVIDES FEISTY FORUM ON LEGISLATIVE HAPPENINGS — AND MORE

BY PATRICIA COLLIGAN

Tucked away at a corner table in the garden courtyard at the chic Hotel San José and sporting retro Jackie O sunglasses, the petite blonde looks every bit the part of the quasi-celebrity she's become in recent months. Haven't heard of Eileen Smith AKA "The Pink Lady"? Then you're not a Capitol staffer. But if you have heard of her, no one is more surprised than the woman herself.

"When I go to the Capitol, people that I don't know actually come up to me [and say,] 'Are you who I think you are?' And you're blown away by that," says Smith.

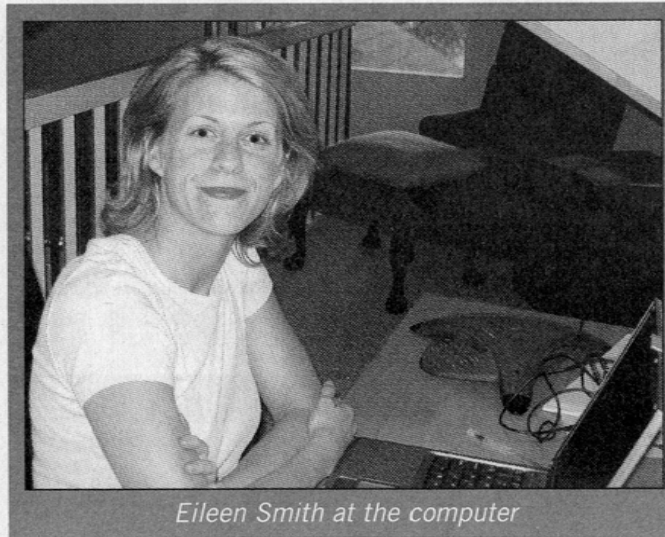
Smith, a self-described "news-hound," created a buzz during the past legislative session when she launched In The Pink Texas.com — "Politics on the Lege of Reason," a web blog based primarily on Texas politics and culture. ITPT provides snapshots of recent happenings in Texas government peppered with colorful commentary and acerbic humor.

The site, which invites visitors to anonymously post feedback, often sees lively debate. According to Smith, the hottest topics have naturally centered on the most divisive figures and issues. For example, she cut off the comments section after more than 40 virulent exchanges about an article on conservative pundit Ann Coulter. Posts on HJR 6, the Legislature's joint resolution establishing marriage as between one man

and one woman, drew many heated responses as well.

The focus isn't always on Texas politics, however. Occasionally news items that capture the attention of the rest of the country, and the world, make it onto the site. A guest commentator going by "Smooch" followed the progress of this season's "The Bachelor" for readers. Smith says she likes to involve other writers and other topics as a release for both her and her readers; "de-wonking" she calls it.

In the Pink Texas.com debuts



Eileen Smith at the computer

just as the war heats up over what is "real journalism." Both bloggers and members of the traditional

mainstream media — like those employed at broadcast networks and major U.S. newspapers — are jockeying for a position in what they see as the future of information. Each side believes it is the more pure form of journalism.

In his March 2005 Texas Monthly column, "That Blog Won't Hunt," Paul Burka derides blogs as being "... the talk radio of cyberspace: entertaining, provocative and usually identified with one end or the other of the political spectrum."

Smith disputes the notion that blogging isn't journalism. She points out that newspapers evolved in much the same way that blogs are now. Early newspapers were merely the editor's interpretation of the day's news, often aggrandizing one political view or another. Criticisms such as those from Burka and Smith's own training and ethics are why she strives to keep ITPT in the middle of the political aisle. She also dismisses the "war" as a non-issue, stipulating that it's an evolving rela-



An op-ed cartoon on the war over "real journalism" © PAT OLIPHANT

tionship and is really just journalistic symbiosis: Bloggers read mainstream media reports for information, and members of the mainstream media read blogs to find out what the buzz is on the issues.

"If blogs aren't journalism, why are newspapers starting blogs?" she asks.

Smith is uniquely qualified to comment, having worked as a journalist after graduating from college. She has seen both sides of the argument. In fact, she first started a primitive form of blogging while she worked at a newspaper.

Growing up in the Washington, D.C., area, she always had an interest in politics. At 24, she began sending out a periodic e-mail to family and friends entitled "Good News U.S.," or GNUS, more or less for her own amusement. The witty commentary kept her readers up on current events and gave them a chuckle. When she became bored with a series of jobs that were less than fulfilling, they encouraged her to pursue blogging.

She says the time was just right for it. "I was 32 ... and I'm married now; we still don't have any kids. If I don't do this now, I literally am never going to do it."

With no business plan and no

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We live in a world that is full of beauty, charm and adventure. There is no end to the adventures that we can have only if we seek them with our eyes open.

-Jawaharlal Nehru



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expectations, she dove in at the beginning of the legislative session. She's been surprised at the success she's had. Approximately 1,500 people visit her site every day, and she's had 100,000 "unique visitors" since the inception of In The Pink Texas.com.

And the traffic her site gets isn't just local. She's had visitors from all over the country, including from the U.S. Capitol, and parts of the world as far away as Switzerland. Smith has appeared on KLRU's "Special Session" and was recently interviewed by D.C.-based *Governing* magazine for an article about blogs and their impact on state legislatures.

Smith theorizes that her site has taken off because people want to stay informed but are bombarded with too much "hard news." The success of programs such as "The Daily Show with Jon Stewart" seems to bear her out.

Where will this initial achievement

take her? Smith doesn't know for sure. She acknowledges that keeping the audience will be the challenge now that the session has ended. However, there will be no shortage of interesting events to comment on: the legislative special session, the coming gubernatorial race – and the new season of "The Bachelor." Ultimately, however, she would like to figure out a business plan that would allow her to showcase other writers' talents and become more of an editor.

Although Smith is not making any money, she says the perks are paying the real dividends. When she gets out of bed in the morning, she's excited to get to work for the first time in years. Her surprise notoriety does

wonders, too.

"A writer really thinks that nobody cares about what they write," Smith muses. "I love the fact that people come up to me and say that I wrote something that made them laugh. That is worth everything." ★



Smith at the Texas Lieutenant Governor's Roast with Dallas Morning News reporter Karen Brooks