Fiberglass Construction Studies: Roof Panels Sprout At Anderson

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Don’t panic the next time you see a four-foot tall volcano on the Rice Campus. It’s really just another architecture department project.

“These roof panels (that’s what they are) that we’re building are a project of our class,” explained senior architecture student Tuck Henry and Bill McGregor. “Actually this is an experiment.”

The fiberglass panels which can be seen beside Anderson Hall, were made on a special form by stretching a twelve-foot-square of polymer foam sheet over a central post. The sheet was sprayed with coats of a styrene polymer-resin and fiberglass and allowed to harden.

Possible Pavilion
McGregor pointed out that the point of the cone will rest on a column. “The four panels being made can be used singly or together as a pavilion.”

Mr. Charles Thomsen, professor in charge of the project, stressed the experimental purpose of the sections. “We plan to put them up and check periodically for deflection and weathering.”

When asked how the panels will be used on campus, Mr. Thomsen replied that he wasn’t certain. “We hope they filter into a useful position.” He mentioned the possibility of using one as a roof of a cage for Sammy.

Low-Cost Housing
Thomsen, also director of the Rice Chilean Aid Project, foresees the use of such structures in low-cost housing for underdeveloped lands. “With mass production techniques this process could be extremely economical.

“Besides being inexpensive the roof panels are extremely light and have good insulation qualities.” He stressed however that the experiment is not specifically involved with the aid project.

Thomsen continued, “This is a process we’re collaborating on with the University of Michigan where research is being done in the development of plastic in architecture.”

Jim Haeker, a research associate in the Michigan project, was named as the man specifically connected with Rice’s efforts. He furnished much of the basic information and some equipment needed for the Rice project.

Original Research
Senior Tuck Henry, a transfer from Princeton, emphasized, however, that the study of the plastic panels here is original research. “We have discovered several ways to simplify the process. We have already eliminated the need for Mr. Haeker’s machine.”

Thomsen gave a great deal of credit for the success in constructing the shells to Rex Fiberglass, a local firm which loaned the school an air pressure machine and personnel to operate it. Blowing the fiberglass and resin onto the foam sheet is a new process.