

Message from 10th floor Smith—'Get the hell off'

By Mary Jo Pitzl

"Once upon a time there was a fire on 10th floor Smith. No one was too happy and things were a mess. What made matters worse was that people from other places came to gawk and got in the way. There is nothing we would appreciate more than to be left alone. We do not need that and we strongly resent spectators. If you don't belong here, get the hell off!"

This hand-written sign hangs on the sooty bulletin board facing the elevators to 10th floor Smith Hall. Some curious visitors have seen it and turned around before the elevator doors could close.

For them, the charred floor is merely an attraction, something unusual to talk about with their friends. But for the women living on 10th floor, the blackened walls and smoky rooms are home.

"People don't appreciate other people walking in their rooms and saying, 'Oh what a shame.' We know that," student assistant Denise Muff said.

Muff and the women on her floor are trying to repair the damage from the Saturday morning fire. The single-alarm fire gutted room 1016 and caused smoke and water damage to other rooms of the floor. The state fire marshal has not yet determined the cause of the blaze.

All that one can see of room 1016 is a boarded door. "Closed by order of the University Police."

Incinerator

"It looks like the inside of an incinerator," sophomore Judy Balwanz said of her former room. "It leaves you like your stomach is going to turn around."

Balwanz said she was at her home in Omaha when the fire broke out in her room. Her roommate, freshman Kim Lee, said she spent the night with friends in town for the state high school wrestling tournament.

"We were going out to eat breakfast and were driving up 14th Street and we looked up and there was my room," Lee said. "It was kind of a bummer."

Lee said she lost everything she owned in the fire. "I had some stuff at home, but you know," she said, her voice trailing off, "Judy lost a TV, I lost a stereo. A lot of expensive stuff."

Lee said her father is checking to see if her family's insurance plan will cover her losses.

Balwanz estimated her loss at more than \$1,000. "I had a lot of personal stuff at my home," she said. She noted that Lee lost personal items in the fire. "Stuff like that (yearbooks, pictures) can't be replaced."

Property covered

The homeowner's policies of the student's families should cover personal items lost in the fire, according to Roy Loudon, director of personnel and UNL representative for Aetna Life and Casualty Co.

Ten per cent of the value of the contents covered in a homeowner's policy applies to contents damaged away from the home premises, Loudon explained.

This 10 per cent extension is included in every fire insurance policy in the state, he said. The Nebraska State Fire Insurance policy is the only standard insurance policy the state has, he said.

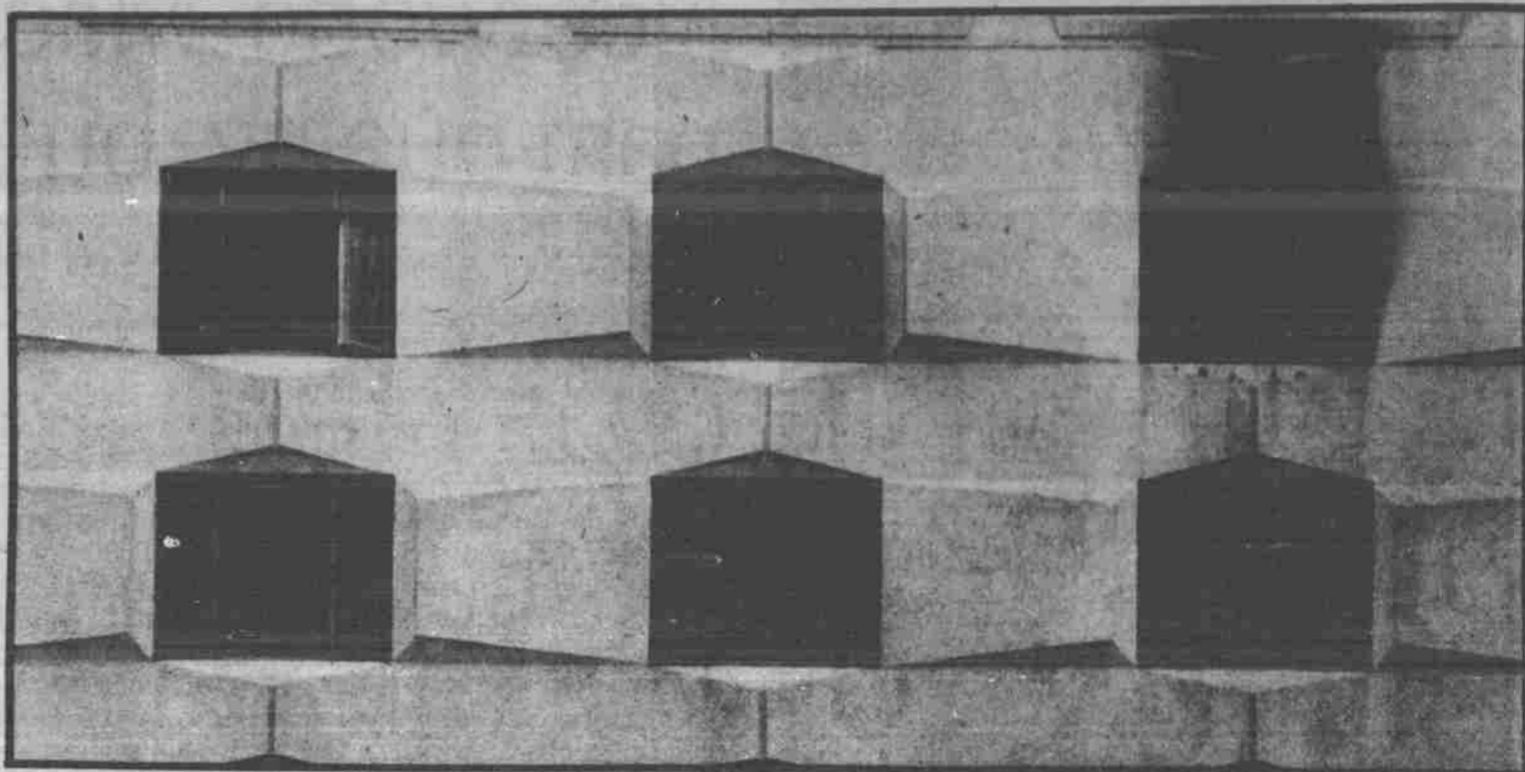


Photo by Kevin Higley

The tenth floor of Smith Residence Hall has become an attraction for "unwanted visitors."

UNL insurance will cover the damage to Smith Hall, Loudon said. Under policy terms, UNL pays for the first \$500 lost, with Aetna compensating for the rest of the damage on a replacement cost basis, Loudon said.

Damage estimates will be made after the state fire marshal completes his investigation, Loudon said.

Balwanz and Lee have been reassigned to another room on second floor Smith. Neither girl can explain why the fire started.

Freshman Doris Uher, who used to live in 1015, said she heard a loud banging in the room next door before the fire was detected.

"It never phased me what it was," Uher said, explaining the noise was like a bed being slammed against the wall. "I thought they (the occupants of 1016) were being awfully loud for a Saturday morning."

Smelled smoke

Three floor residents notified student assistant Denise Muff when they smelled smoke, and pulled the fire alarm, after Muff used her pass key to open room 1016 and saw smoke.

Smith Hall residents were evacuated and couldn't return to their rooms until 1:30 p.m. Saturday, according to Housing Director Richard Armstrong. Tenth floor residents returned to their smoke and water damaged rooms by 6 p.m., he said.

Aside from the spectators circulating on 10th floor to look at the damage, "everybody's been great," Muff said.

Uher and her roommate, sophomore Diane Clader, have been temporarily reassigned to rooms on 10th floor. All other floor occupants are remaining in their rooms, and no one has asked to move off the floor,

according to Muff.

The 10th floor residents have been receiving help from the university community, Muff said.

Collections have been taken on other floors within the Harper-Schramm-Smith Residence Hall complex, the Smith Hall government has offered financial help and clothing contributions have been sent to 10th floor, she said. Nebraska Bookstore replaced all of Lee's books that were destroyed in the fire.

"There's been a tremendous amount of all university support in clean-up," Muff said. Residents wanted to thank everyone who has been helping them out, she said.

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