

NEBPIRG — consumer watchdog

by Linda Larson

Interested in cleaning up the air, preserving open space, eliminating harmful products?

The Nebraska Public Interest Research Group (NEBPIRG) organized last fall at UNL offers a way to deal with these problems.

NEBPIRG is a group of students and professionals working for change within the established legal and political system. It is a non-profit, non-partisan organization controlled by a state-wide board of student representatives.

Ralph Nader, consumer advocate, helped to organize the first student organizations. But neither Nader nor the PIRG group in Washington, D.C., has any control over local groups.

Public education is NEBPIRG's objective. It publishes the findings and conclusions of the scientists and lawyers of its professional staff, student researchers and outside experts brought in for consultation.

The board of directors, selected by students, first attempts to identify issues. Issues are areas of student concern and problems which students agree are deserving of attention.

Students, faculty members, community groups and the NEBPIRG professional staff also present issues to the board.

After evaluating the seriousness of the problems and the possible effectiveness of NEBPIRG action, the board decides which issues will be researched. The professional staff then acts.

It is up to the public. Hopefully, enough public concern has been aroused by NEBPIRG efforts to bring a solution to the problem.

It would be funded by a \$1.50 per semester voluntary fee from University

students (pending approval by the Board of Regents) and other contributions from the community. All funds are turned over to the student board which hires and directs the professional staff.

Possible research projects for NEBPIRG include: consumer protection in regard to the buying and reselling of textbooks and retail price competition; racial and sex discrimination; environmental preservation; use of University-appropriated funds and use of student fees; and transportation and housing.

NEBPIRG provides a focus for the expression of values held by large numbers of the student population.

Students are mobile and their time on campus is interrupted by summer vacations, papers and exams. Thus, student activism tends to be a sporadic response to an occasional crisis followed by frustration when there is no observable change.

NEBPIRG provides continuity so that movements begun in the spring will not dissolve with summer vacation.

It also provides a focus for coordinated action by the numerous citizens' groups working in social and environmental plannings, consumer protection and human rights. Most of these groups have inadequate means for achieving their aims because of the limitations of volunteer work.

Public interest research groups have been organized throughout the country. The first two student groups were formed in Oregon and Minnesota.

The Connecticut Citizen's Action Group now has a citizen lobby prepared to take action on legislative issues this spring. They've issued reports on the M-16 rifle and a property tax in one town.

Another organization, the Ohio Public Interest Action Group, released a retail price comparison on drug store items in Columbus which showed blacks and students paying premium prices compared to suburban shoppers.

They also put together testimony on new strip mine legislation which is the key environmental issue in the state now.

Colleges in Vermont, California, Iowa, Washington, New Jersey, West Virginia, North Carolina and Pennsylvania have or soon will have public interest groups.



Partners. . . April sunshine warms both students and sculpture.

Orientation

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parents," Harper said.

It would also be a good time for students who have been involved in controversial issues at the University, like the Time-Out Conference on Human Sexuality, to explain them to parents, he said.

Instead, Harper said, selection of hosts has been based on whether or not they would leave a good impression with parents.

Secondly, if orientation is a public relations program, then student fees shouldn't be used.

"Any way you slice the cake," Harper said, "the hosts selected for this summer's orientation program are not representative of the student body of the University of Nebraska."

He pointed out that there were no minority students or foreign students chosen for host positions. Harper said last summer's orientation program was not firmed up until May, because of the axe the Legislature was wielding on the University's budget.

Replanning the program and reselecting the hosts would "not be infeasible" at this time, he said.

Senate seeks executive nominees

The University Senate Committee on Committees is

seeking nominations for the senate presidency, according to the faculty newsletter.

Standard nomination forms, to be submitted by April 10, are available in the senate office, 101 Brace.

The committee asks that nominations be accompanied by biographical material, signatures of 10 senate members and the candidate's statements about University issues. The nominee's permission also must be obtained.

Nominations may be addressed to Samuel Treves at the senate office.

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Union Concert Committee