

Custodians aren't exactly cleaning up

by Bart Becker

At 9:30 a.m. Good Friday one basement classroom in Andrews Hall contains the following items: 19 desks, one chair, one table, seven cigarette butts and their ashes, nine used book matches, two cold drink cups carrying the message "Careless Hands Earn First Aid Bands," one chewing gum wrapper, and one wastebasket. The wastebasket holds two cigarette butts, two matches and one toothpick. The other items have been deposited on the vinyl-tiled floor.

Discounting the desks, table and chair, somebody has to clean up that stuff. Since it's unlikely students will, the task falls to University custodians. But the custodial corps at UNL is below maximum strength.

"We're budgeted for 160 custodians," said John Dzerk, physical plant operational manager, "but we're short 20 as of today. People just aren't coming in looking for this kind of full-time work."

The UNL custodians police living units, classroom buildings and office buildings. No work-study students are assigned as custodians, but about 20 to 25 part-time students work up to four hours per day, according to Dzerk.

Bill Behmer punches in at 7 a.m. Then, he said, "I click on the automatic pilot and don't think for the next nine hours."

Behmer works in the Cather-Pound dormitory complex. He is mainly responsible for the recreation area: the TV lounge, the games areas and the places students hang out. He also cleans both lounge bathrooms and the Cather and Pound trash chutes.

Behmer, who corrected the reporter's terminology from "menial workers" to "custodial technicians," said he doesn't notice students peering down their noses at janitors.

"The first few weeks I worked, I didn't have the uniform so I looked a lot like any student who just happened to be cleaning up," he said. "Since I got the uniform I'm more like a piece of furniture. The students don't really notice me. There's a certain anonymity to the job."

