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Cold weather, food lure rats from trash to dorms

By Jim Fullerton

Rat control is in its toughest time of the year at the Abel-Sandoz Residence Halls, according to members of the maintenance staff there.

The maintenance staff members said with the increasing cold, rats are burrowing next to the buildings for warmth. They also are attracted to the area by food that has been thrown to the ground from the rooms of the residents.

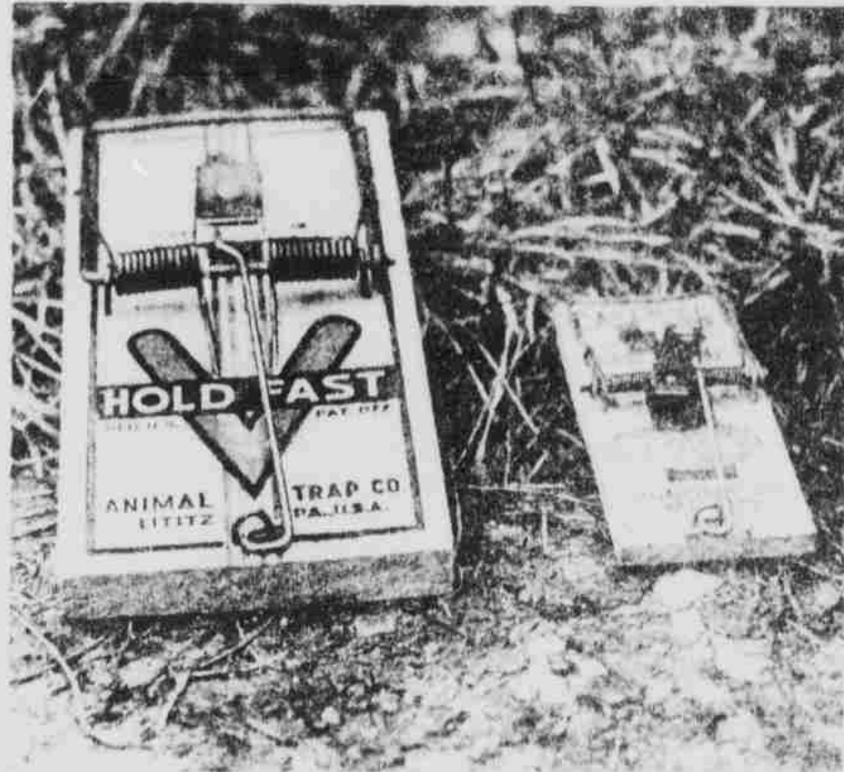
According to Joseph Zannini, assistant director of the Dept. of Maintenance and Operations, when people indicate they have seen rats, the maintenance workers set out spring traps and poisoned "rat cafeterias." As of Monday, seven rats have been killed at Abel-Sandoz since Thanksgiving.

When a complaint is made about rats, the staff at Abel-Sandoz tries to take action immediately "to prevent a complaint from reaching the health department," one staff member said.

According to Susan Fritzen, secretary for the complaint division of the Lancaster County Health Department, no complaints have been made to her regarding rats in the Abel-Sandoz area. Fritzen said that if her office did receive a complaint, a county sanitarian would check the area to determine if there is a problem, and if so, how to cope with it.

Zannini said the traps and poisons also are used as precautionary measures when no rats have been seen, just to help keep their number down.

The rats come from nearby junk piles or the creek that runs behind the dormitories, according to another staff member.



Rat trap, left, and standard mouse trap

TONIC: partial solution to Indian problems

By Keith Landgren

Last Thursday afternoon at 4:30 a van pulled away from Andrews Hall bound for Winnebago. The van carried a group of college students, members of a group called Tutors of Nebraska Indian Children (TONIC).

It's hard to classify TONIC precisely. It isn't a replacement for formal education, nor is it primarily a remedial technique. Mostly it's a means of communication between college students and children.

TONIC itself is a group formed during the activist days of the late 1960s. Part of the group, by far the larger part, meets in Andrews Hall on Tuesdays with children from Lincoln. About 40 tutors participate, with an equal number of children.

Photos by Kermit Wolff

The Winnebago project was nearly that large at one time, but the distances involved (Winnebago is 107 miles north of Lincoln) and the time commitment have diminished the group's size.

The city's problems haven't gone away, unfortunately, though progress is being made. American Indians are as badly treated as any minority group, and the Winnebagos have special problems of their own. An interview with Norman Free, chief of the four-man Winnebago Police Force, revealed glaring problems in education, politics and family life.

Alcoholism, according to Free, is "the biggest health problem, the biggest social problem and the biggest law enforcement problem" facing Winnebago in 1973. It has been for so long that Free despairs of ever really solving it.

Progress is steady, though. A halfway house was opened recently as a step toward rehabilitating Winnebago's alcoholics. Also, a crisis intervention center, staffed exclusively by volunteers, is attempting to solve some of Winnebago's social problems, many of them related to alcohol.

Winnebago's political troubles are essentially those of any community in which a minority of the population holds a majority of income-producing property. The city is 75 per cent Indian, but political control is mostly in the hands of whites.

Factions in the Indian community and traditionally low voter turnout among minority groups have enabled whites to control the school system. A typical election is a three-way race, with the Indian vote divided between a conservative and a liberal candidate, enabling the one white candidate to win the election.

Yet it is in school where the Indians' problems arise. Winnebago children, and American Indian children everywhere, begin to slip behind their white counterparts after the third or fourth year of elementary school. Some speculate it may be the Anglo-Saxon orientation of the school system and the child's growing awareness of that bias that are responsible.

It is at these years, those between kindergarten and sixth grade, that TONIC's efforts are directed. Winnebago children, mostly under 12, gather Thursdays in a building built and owned by the Dutch Reformed Church to meet the volunteers from Lincoln.

Ideally a one-to-one ratio of volunteers and children would exist, but as interest in the program has slipped, that ratio has been impossible to maintain. Normally 25 to 30 children greet the 8 to 10 volunteers.

Success really isn't measured in numbers for TONIC volunteers though. It is measured in questions like "Did you come all the way from Lincoln just to see us?" and in sighs when 9 p.m. comes and the van is to leave Winnebago.

It never quite leaves at 9, it seems. There always is a film that runs a little late—some paint, somewhere, needing to be cleaned up. And in an evening of

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tie-dying, the new math, movies and fairy tales, no one has time to wonder if it's all doing any good.

The kids are active and noisy, full of the excitement children find in what seem to be tiny things to adults. In the past, that excitement hasn't extended to learning like it does for white children.

But on Thursday nights it begins to, and when the bus finally does leave, the question of whether all that effort was worthwhile is answered. It was.