

# Financial woes trouble Omaha high school papers

The dark cloud of financial woes has cast a shadow over the future of high school newspapers in Omaha, according to reports from faculty advisors and student editors at three Omaha high schools.

A possible shutdown has prompted newspaper supporters to appear before the Board of Education (BOE) for District 1, asking for money to bail them out and stirring controversy.

The controversy is centered around a high school journalism teacher, Omaha Benson's Gunnar Horn, and his Benson Higgy News.

## Threatened stop

The News is threatened with stopping production for the first time in over 40 years. The Omaha Burke Beat will probably miss at least one issue, according to co-editor Connie Casari, and other papers, with the exception of the Central High Register, "couldn't pay their bills if they put out a paper every two weeks," according to Horn.

Central charges more than most high schools for advertising and receives more money from its activities fund for production. Omaha Westside is in District 66 and faces fewer problems because that district provides a larger budget for the paper.

Principal Howard Sorensen of Benson said the activities fund, the main source of money for newspapers, has been shrinking the past few years due to decreasing sales of activities cards. The decrease has been dramatic at Benson, Sorensen said.

Central's journalism advisor, Mike Gaherty, credited stable sales of the cards at Central for the optimistic shape of his budget.

## Additional funds

Additional funds have been provided this year by the Board of Education. Each school received \$1,250 to help its journalism program. According to Board Vice President Jack Barnhart (one of Horn's former students), this is the first time the Board has ever provided money for journalism.

Horn said that the money is not enough and was spent at Benson to erase part of a \$2,100 deficit incurred over the past years. According to Horn, the deficit was incurred with the assurance from BOE members, including President Paul Kennedy and Barnhart, that "the tab would be picked up."

Barnhart denied that such an assurance was made, although he said he had told Horn that "he would try to help."

"I was the main promoter on the Board for the \$1,250 and thought that had solved the problem until it appeared in the newspaper that it wasn't enough,"

Barnhart said. "I don't think that's the way to (notify the board), you don't write page one stories in the newspaper about it."

## Advertisers reluctant

Advertising has been unable to pick up the slack because advertisers are reluctant to advertise to a high school market. National guidelines also suggest that advertising take up only 15% of the column inches in high school newspapers, according to Horn and Gaherty.

Because of the increasing costs, Benson and Central have averaged nearly 20% advertising in recent years while Burke averages nearly 40%.

Omaha Northwest has recently gone to publishing a quarterly "magazine" while other area high schools publish less than fifteen issues a year, according to Horn.

Horn resists the move to fewer issues. "Even at two weeks, it's a tough way to stay current and be a real newspaper," he said.

## Big loss

Chris Garrett, managing editor of the News, said he feels that the death of the News will hurt the school as a whole.

"Of course everybody on the staff will lose a valuable educational experience but there will also be a disruption of school spirit and unity on a long term basis," he said. "The focus (of a high school newspaper) creates an identity in a school; it enables students to recognize other students and activities."

Horn said that Omaha high schools are larger than some of the smaller communities in the state. "In a large metropolitan area like Omaha, the high school paper is the only avenue of information in school for most things, with the possible exception of varsity sports," he said.

Associate Superintendent of Schools Joe Hanna said, "We're very proud of our papers; the newspaper has a real valuable contribution to make. But the Board has to decide what its overall responsibility and contribution should be."

## Benefit questioned

Barnhart said he supports the papers but is resisting providing more Board money to bail out the beleaguered papers. Horn said the papers are necessary to teach journalism, but Barnhart said he questions their necessity in journalism education.

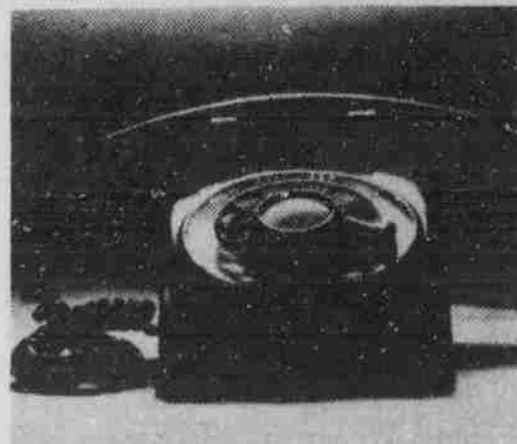
Barnhart said that each school should pay for its own paper, pointing to the example that Benson had over \$33,000 in so-called "discretionary funds." He said the schools' attitude was: "You spend your

money because we don't want to spend ours."

Benson Principal Sorensen told the Daily Nebraskan that he was "amazed at Jack Barnhart. He apparently doesn't realize that the \$33,000 is the school's total worth. It is divided into many parts and is made up of funds from Math Club, Art Club, everything. We have no right to use that money and we don't have a contingency fund."

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