

Vended food called nutritious; consumers influence selection

By Betsie Ammons

Food bought from campus vending machines can provide a nutritious meal, according to Gene Meerkatz, vending systems manager at UNL. He operates vending machines in 52 locations on city and east campuses, excluding the Union South Crib.

"It's as nutritious as the food served across the counter," Meerkatz said.

He said the university contracts with Automatic Merchandising of Lincoln for vending machine foods, which are made in the company's Omaha commissary daily and shipped to Lincoln early every morning.

Food changed daily

Although state health department rules say food must be removed every 72 hours, Meerkatz said the university removed it daily.

Hazel Fox, chairman of the Department of Food and Nutrition in the College of Home Economics, said the nutritional value of prepared foods depends on what is in them. She said one of the chief concerns is spoilage. Anything that contains eggs or milk, will not keep as long as sliced meat will.

Fox said he would like to see more fresh fruit and sandwiches offered in the machines.

"Just the fact that it is there promotes good nutrition," she said. She added that it is up to the customer to see that he purchases a well-balanced meal.

Meerkatz said he is concerned with meeting sales demands. He said because there is a limited number of items in machines, he provides the foods the public seems to want most.

"If there was an unlimited number of slots in

the machine, we could offer more natural foods," he said.

Bob Richeson, manager of vending service in the Nebraska Union South Crib, said the Union owns the machines it operates there. He said the staff in the North Crib prepares food for the machines along with what they sell across the counter.

"We like to think it is just as good as what goes through the Crib," he said.

Richeson said the machines were installed when it was no longer feasible to keep a manual food service open at night. The South Crib machines contain sandwiches, milk, fresh fruits, yogurt, salads and desserts.

Try new foods

Richeson said they are always trying new items in the machines, such as additional natural foods, but they have to provide what the public will buy.

Meerkatz said profits from machines on campus have dropped 30 per cent in the past year. He said selling food always has been more a service than a profit maker, but that they make up for lost money with snack machines. The university controls prices on vending machine foods, he said.

Richeson said the Union Vending Service is a "break-even" type of operation and has a net profit of less than one per cent. The profit they do make goes back into the operation.

The South Crib operates a "vending help line" which allows people who have trouble with the machines to call for assistance.

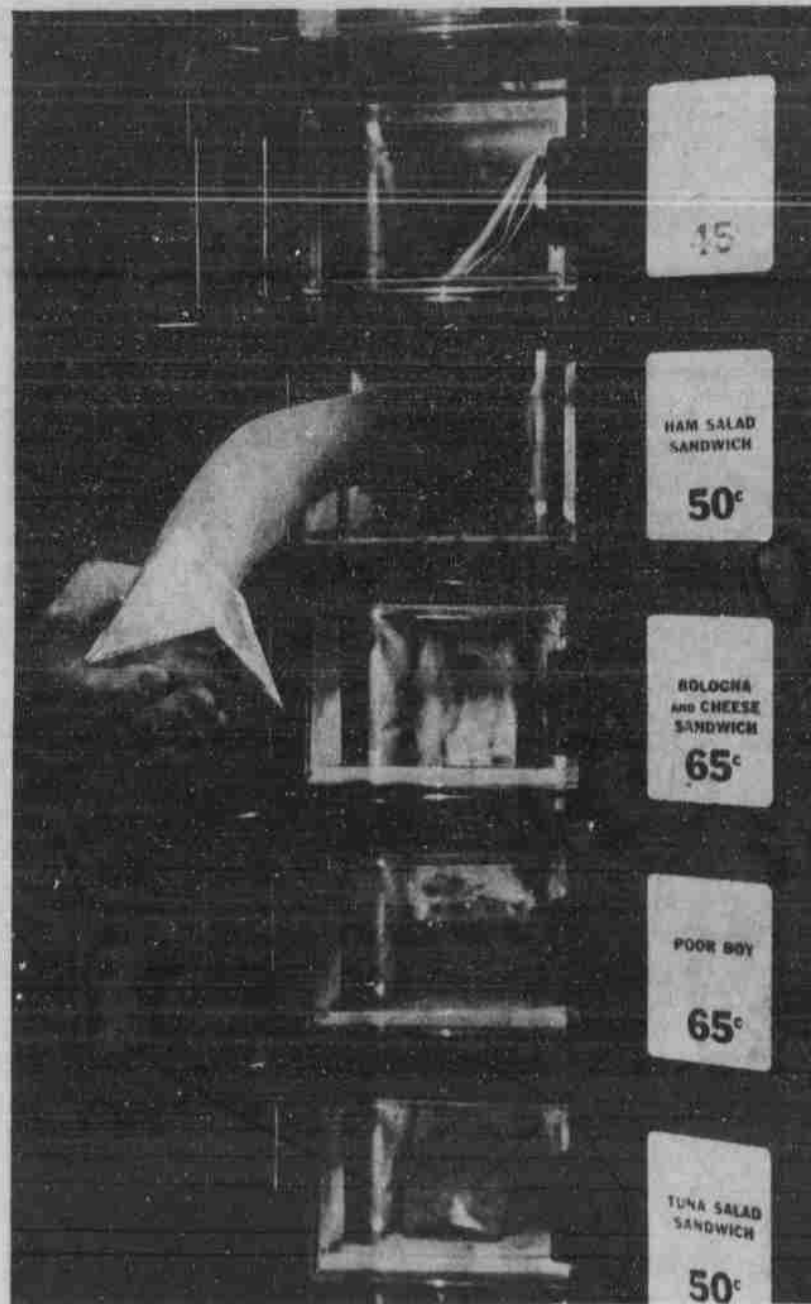


Photo by Steve Boerner

Housing group reviews policy, hears appeals

Any student living in a fraternity, sorority, cooperative, residence hall or married student housing may present his concerns about UNL housing policies to one group interested in all UNL housing.

The Housing Policy Committee, a subcommittee of the Council on Student Life (CSL) was created in 1970 to review and make recommendations about housing policies in all types of UNL housing.

The committee also serves an appellate function. If a student thinks a housing policy is being enforced discriminately, he or she can appeal to the committee, which will study the matter further and make recommendations, said John Breckenridge, a committee member for several years.

Never had an appeal

Wendy Reitmeier, chairwoman of the committee, said the committee never has had an appeal, and said she does not expect HPC to be overwhelmed by them. Aspects of UNL housing reviewed by the committee usually are suggested by students, the

housing office, CSL or committee members, she said.

HPC is useful because it serves all areas of UNL housing and although there have been no appeals to date, it is important that an appellate committee be available to the residents when the need occurs, she said.

The committee cannot change a policy but it can attempt to correct areas where a policy is not being enforced equally, and possibly can make recommendations concerning a policy, Breckenridge said.

HPC may be supportive of a more cooperative kind of living situation in the residence halls next year, he said. Much of HPC's work takes a two-to-three-year campaign to complete.

Two vacancies

Ordinarily there should be 12 regular members and a housing staff member on the committee, Reitmeier said, but there are student and faculty vacancies now.

Reitmeier, who joined the committee in September and has been chairwoman since December,

said the faculty and staff positions are filled from Faculty Senate nominations approved by CSL. Student positions are filled from ASUN nominations approved by CSL.

"Students aren't apathetic, but it's hard to find one with enough time and energy to serve on the committee," Breckenridge said. "A lot of students are action-oriented and do not join the committee because its work takes several years to complete."

Working with HPC is better than any course the university could teach, Breckenridge said. Students who become involved learn about UNL, problems with bureaucracy and what they have to do to bring about changes, he said.

Students who want to participate or bring a concern before HPC may attend their meeting at 5 p.m. every Thursday in the Nebraska Union, Reitmeier said.

"We have an open agenda and informal meetings, so it's not necessary that a student contact a member beforehand," she said.

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