

'Gang' to champion UNO cause

By Kim Shepherd

A champion for the causes of University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO) students' has emerged from the Omaha delegation to the Nebraska Legislature.

The state senators, led by John Savage, have formed what they call the "Dodge St. Gang."

"The Dodge St. Gang is a group of Omaha citizens enthusiastic about doing something for UNO," said Savage. He said the senators are the counterpart to Lincoln's "O St. Gang."

The Lincoln group is composed of the "pillars of the community," said Lanny Jorgensen, executive director of the Lincoln Center Development Association.

Impossible to separate

As a result of the O St. Gang's consistent work for the betterment of UNL, Jorgensen said, it is impossible to "separate" downtown Lincoln from the UNL campus.

"A strong university means a strong downtown, which means a strong city," Jorgensen said. "You can't separate them."

Omaha Sen. Glenn Goodrich agreed with Jorgensen. He said that business generated by a strong university can economically benefit a downtown area. Therefore, businesses surrounding a campus will help assure that the university remains strong, Goodrich said.

Among projects the Dodge St. Gang is said to actively support is the proposed UNO Downtown Educational Center. Goodrich introduced LB838 in the Legislature this session for construction of the center and a health, physical education and recreation building on the UNO campus.

Several Omaha businessmen are offering to help finance the Center, which also might house state offices.

There is no gang

"You can't really blame Lincoln or Omaha businessmen for wanting what's best for their campuses," Goodrich said. However, he said he believes the Dodge St. Gang doesn't exist.

"There isn't really a Dodge St. Gang," Goodrich said, "but a contention by several individuals that there should be one." By saying there is one, the backers hope Omaha businessmen will realize their responsibility to UNO, he said.

Jorgensen said he had heard of the Omaha group's formation and wished it luck.

"The city of Omaha should have an interest in UNO even though it is a part of a system," Jorgensen said.

John Empson, executive director of Downtown Omaha, Inc., said he believed UNO was a vital part of Omaha.

Meeting the need

"The university system is designed to meet the needs of all the citizens of Nebraska," Empson said. "There is a need in the downtown area and it should be met."

Empson said support for the downtown center is community-wide. Businessmen from all areas of Omaha are being asked to contribute money to the center, he said.

Businessmen are trying to match the \$2.5 million contributed to the downtown center by Peter Kiewit, publisher of the Omaha World-Herald, Empson said.

Nebraska Gov. J. James Exon informally has pledged to support raising state financing an additional \$1 million, to \$9 million, if Omaha businessmen raise \$5 million for the center.

The "Dodge St. Gang" title is not really applicable, Empson said, because all interested citizens are not downtown businessmen.

The group has jelled in the last few years, said Omaha Sen. George Syas. He said the group is composed of individuals willing to twist a few arms to produce results for UNO.

"Generally, the Dodge St. Gang has been informing the people of the needs of UNO," Syas said. "It's an information center pushing for UNO."

No hard feelings

The group has benefited UNO, said Clint Bellows, UNO student government president and student regent. Much of the credit for the focus on the current campus parity issue belongs to the "gang," Bellows said. Parity is equal financing for similar programs at UNL and UNO.

Both Syas and Jorgensen agree that no hard feelings will result from the surfacing of the Dodge St. Gang. Syas said both groups have the same goal—the betterment of NU, but each group works locally for the campus most important to its area.

Sen. Goodrich said the Omaha delegation's voting record on capital construction bills for Lincoln show that they are not trying to hurt UNL to benefit UNO.

Goodrich said he believed any conflicts that have arisen over UNO's attempts for parity come from UNL faculty members who fear losing their jobs.

The state senators are not battling, he said. Any differences among them have been manufactured by Lincoln newspapers, he added.

"There is no part in the Omaha delegation's minds that we want to take the UNL campus to Omaha," Goodrich said. "We have enough trouble with the UNO campus; we don't need UNL."

Parity...

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"This is my estimate of the political base which the different systems now have," Warner said.

The technical community colleges are ranked first because they are a statewide network of institutions, he said. UNO is second because of the 13 votes Omaha has in the Nebraska Legislature. Private institutions are ranked third because of a pending state constitutional amendment that would provide them with indirect state aid. He said UNL occasionally may be higher because it is supposed to be a statewide institution.

"UNL's base should be statewide since it is the only institution that goes from undergraduate to Ph.D.," Warner said.

UNO offers a doctorate in psychology, but the student must be registered through UNL, a spokesman in UNO's Graduate Studies office said.

Barnett, who agreed with Warner, said, "As long as we try to make four or five state institutions of equal quality and size, we'll be in trouble. There just isn't enough money to go around."

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