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Photo by Scott Seeles

John Davidson, retired professor of botsny, continues to pursue his interests by teaching a botany course in Centennial Education Program. Davidson retired from the UNL faculty last June.

daily nebraskan

Age doesn't hinder lively existence of retired teacher; he's busier now

By Mary Jo Pitzl

Take one retired botany professor, mix in an interest in people, add a zest for life and a pinch of adventure, and out comes the unique personality of Prof. John Davidson.

"I've got a 60-page manuscript written on how I got started in flying," Davidson said, weaving his Volkswagen in and out of traffic en route to the Lincoln Municipal Airport. He was taking one of his students in the Centennial Education Program to the airport to check requirements and credits for earning a pilot's license.

"I just sold my Cessna 150 (airplane) last spring," he said, speaking about his 13-year flying career.

Flying is just one of Davidson's interests. Pastimes ranging from growing bonsai plants to frying fish and chips in a downtown restaurant fill his time.

"I'm busier now than before I retired," he said with a chuckle.

Davidson, 65, retired as UNL botany professor last June, but continues to teach a botany course through the Centennial Program. "I didn't like the idea of completely cutting off cold from teaching," he said.

No texts, lectures, labs

Davidson has developed his own teaching technique, which he calls the Inductive Method.

"You've never seen anything like it before," he said, explaining that no texts, lectures or labs are required in his courses. He said students learn by doing, drawing conclusions based on their observations and experiments.

"Students who are tired of being spoon-fed and want to do some thinking on their own rave about it," he said.

Davidson taught several summer school sessions at the University of California at Berkeley, where he introduced

his Inductive Method.

"I'm the first professor I know of to try this method with a class," he said. "I've found out quite a few placesthe English Dept. at UNL especially-have been using this method."

Last spring, Davidson was named an outstanding professor by the NU Foundation.

Davidson combines his love for education with his hobbies. He will teach the art of growing bonsai, miniature wild Japanese trees, through the Communiversity program this fall.

'Real' fish and chips

Several nights a week he can be found in the kitchen of the Greenwich Cafe, 1917 O St., mixing up his own special batter for fish and chips. The native of Scotland began cooking at the Greenwich when he wanted to show friends how "real" fish and chips tasted.

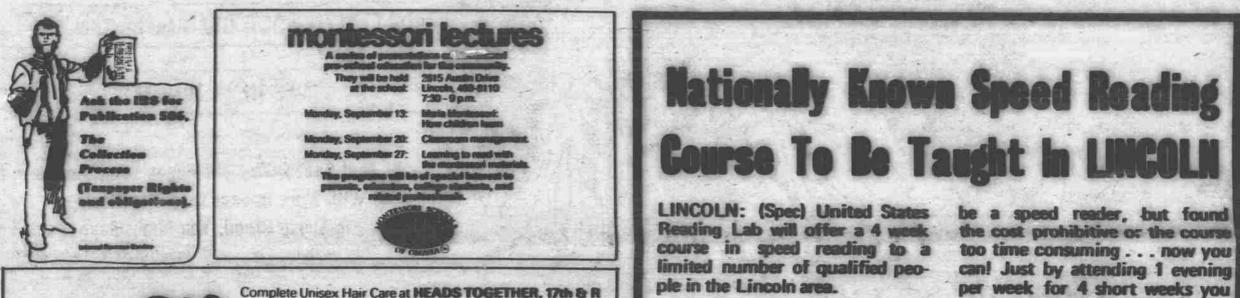
"I was wondering if there would be a market for fish and chips in Lincoln," he said. Sales have been building since Davidson began cooking at the cafe four years ago.

"Heck yes, we sell a lot. We used to cook five pounds of finh. We're up to 100 pounds a night now," he said.

At his "professorial home" in southwest Lincoln, Davidson rummages through a cluttered array of books, papers and the packaged beauty products his wife sells. Pulling a well-worn book off the shelf, he hands it to his flying student.

"This book will convince anyone to try flying," he said. "Gliders, that's something else I haven't tried. I haven't flown a balloon either."

But if it's true that your're only as young as you feel, that balloon ride may be next on Davidson's schedule.





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