

# Capitol's elevator operators say they don't get the shaft

By Cindy Coglianese

Legislative life sure can have its ups and downs as Vivian, Carol and Margaret well know.

Vivian Bailey, Carol Shaw and Margaret Stimbart work eight hours a day, five days a week controlling the elevators at the State Capitol.

This involves continuous runs up and down the Capitol's 14 stories.

Stimbart has been going up and down like this for 11 years, Shaw has been at it about two years and Bailey is the newcomer of just about a year.

The elevators are small with narrow doors. Stimbart said she thinks it is about time for some new elevators but added she wonders about the possibility of getting larger elevators in the narrow shafts.

Shaw is not sure how much she enjoys the business. "It's the only thing I'm trained to do," she said. "At least there is no physical labor."

She said she operates the elevator constantly at this time of the year because the Legislature is in session and many schools are taking tours of the Capitol.

Stimbart said she knows of no serious accidents in her 11 years. "Once in awhile someone will get caught in the door, but that's it," she said. She does recall a time a few years ago when she was stuck in the elevator for about an hour with some all-state high school wrestlers "who weighed about 300 pounds each."

Shaw also has had a few sticky situations in the elevator. "Whenever the elevator gets stuck they just come and pry the doors open and get me out," she said.

For the most part, the elevators are run automatically. A buzzing sound signals the

elevator operator that someone on some floor (she does not know which) needs to use the elevator. The operator shuts the door and the elevator does the rest.

The essential responsibilities of the job, according to Stimbart are making sure people do not get shut in the elevator door, answering questions and letting people off on the right floors.

Tourists are allowed only on floors one through three and on 14, the observation deck. Shaw said often tourists will try to get to floors where they do not belong.

Bailey works about three hours every day covering for the other elevator operators when they go on break.

"I like this job," she said. "The only thing that drives me crazy is when people lay on that buzzer."

She said this job does not bother her stomach but if she stands all day her legs and back tend to get sore.

"I get awful nervous easy. I don't like anyone pushing my buttons," she added.

Stimbart thinks operating elevators is a job that that could be easily handled by anyone, with one exception. "It depends on your stomach," she cautioned. "If you have a hard stomach, you can easily do this job."

The three operators agreed that reading helps to fight the boredom when things run slowly. Stimbart admits to being very busy with the passengers most of the time, though.

"I meet very interesting people from all over the world and the United States and I get acquainted with the state senators," she said.



Freda Stroud is the supervisor of elevator operators at the Nebraska State Capitol Building.

Photo by Mark Billingsley

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