

## Police officials claim soured morale now improving

By Val Swinton

A little over a year ago, University Police was in bad shape. Officers mistrusted police administrators and sometimes each other. Police were driving secondhand cars that had been used by another university departments. Police officers would sometimes find themselves in need of a backup, then would discover their police radios did not work. Morale was low.

This dismal portrait of the police was painted by Paul Jacobsen, an investigator with the department and president of Local 567 of the International Brotherhood of Police Officers, the union that would like to become the official representative of campus officers. However, Jacobsen, along with Gale Gade, director of the police department, insists that things have improved in the department.

"I would say morale is higher than it was 10 months ago," Jacobsen said. "Working conditions have become better and equipment is much better. Officers feel more professional. We've created the image we are professional. We're not security guards and door shakers anymore."

### Attitude change

Jacobsen said another morale booster is the administration's change in attitude.

"We never had any problems with the word going down the pipe," Jacobsen said. "It was more of a problem of the word going back up the chain of command."

Jacobsen said the administration is now more willing to listen to suggestions from the officers. He said officers now belong to several different task forces looking into problems and procedures on the police force. The administration accepted the recommendation of one of those task forces, by having police dispatchers on duty 24 hours a day in the police office.

"I think there was an attitude change on the part of the brass," he said. "We're not being treated like little kids. They've been much more receptive to officers in the past few months."

Jacobsen also said Gade has changed his attitude.

"He (Gade) realizes he's got some good, sharp people working for him that want to be police officers," Jacobsen said. "They've got some good ideas and he's listening."

Gade agreed, saying, "I think it's necessary for anyone in my position to take a look at things, and if there are ways to improve things, it should be done."

"Not that they're going to turn us around, you understand," Gade said. "We can't let them run us, but at the same time, we can take the attitude, let them get

involved."

Gade said that the officers have also reacted well to attempts to improve the department.

"I think the response has to be equally shared," he said. "I think they've (the officers) responded to that."

### Past tensions

There was not always the mutual admir-

ation between officers and administration. Last November, three members of the department filed complaints with the State Court of Industrial Relations.

Officers Mary Fleming and Barbara McGill charged they were being reclassified as civilian clerks to keep them from voting in union elections. The third officer, Joy Citta, the union's president at the time,

claimed she was harassed by Gade, and a petition filed with the board asked if the union had the right to become the bargaining agent for the police.

The court ruled in favor of all three officers. The university has appealed the decision to the State Supreme Court, contending the Industrial Relations Court had no jurisdiction in such matters, and also challenges the right of the union to hold an election in the police department.

Gade was quoted at the time as saying he was opposed to the union, but now insists he was quoted out of context.

"I was not opposed to it," Gade said. "I felt I could do as much for the officers as the union could."

Until the issue of union representation is decided by the Supreme Court, Local 567 has an unofficial status within the police department. Jacobsen claims the mere presence of the union helps.

"The union serves as kind of a funnel," Jacobsen said.

He said officers now have an outlet to make complaints.

### Study made

As a result of the hearings, Ray Coffey, UNL's business manager and Miles Tommeraasen, vice chancellor for business and finance, ordered that a study be made of the problems within the police department. Coffey claims that the study, which cost about \$1,000, is now largely outdated, because steps have been taken to correct the problems. He does however, refuse to release the study.

Both Jacobsen and Gade say the problems that remain within the department are minor. A questionnaire circulated among the officers last summer asked them to rate morale on a one-to-ten scale. Gade said the ratings averaged about four. Now both men say morale would be closer to six or seven on a scale of 10.

"We've got the ball rolling now and we want to keep it going," Gade said.

He said other department improvements include new patrol cars and more training programs, along with a cadet training program, which allows commissioned officers to pursue the more important tasks for which they were hired.

The two men could not say whether the increased efficiency in the department has caused the campus crime rate to drop.

Gade said from now on he intends to stay on top of problems within the department, even the minor ones.

"A lot of minor complaints can compound each other," he said, adding that when the administration feels it can sit back and relax because all the problems have been solved, "that's when we fall off the deep end."

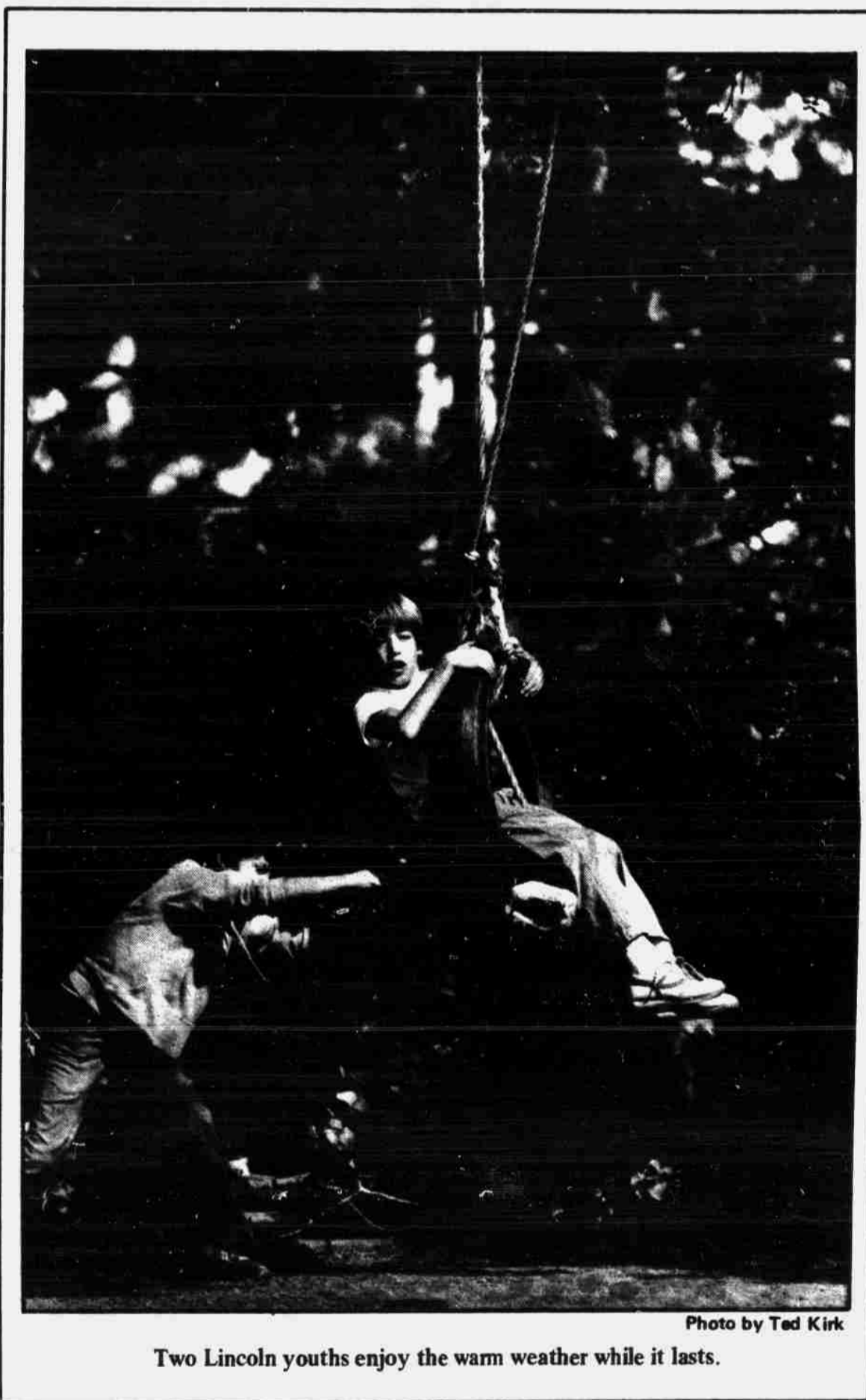


Photo by Ted Kirk

Two Lincoln youths enjoy the warm weather while it lasts.

## Accident-prone meat packers complain of unsafe plants

By Kris Hansen

Time pressures and lack of space are the main problems behind the accident prone meat packing industry, according to a local member of a meat cutters union.

Meat packers have the highest accident rate of any industry. Roughly 35 out of 100 workers are hurt on the job each year, according to a copyright story by the Chicago Sun-Times.

Accidents range from slicing and stabbing to machine-caused amputations, and deaths from ammonia fumes, pneumonia and crushing. Many minor mishaps, including sprains, are caused by slips on bloody floors. Older workers are plagued by arthritis and back problems.

### No room

"There's just not enough room. When everybody is working side by side, people get hurt—they cut each other with the knives," said a representative of the Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butchers Workman Union, who wished to remain anonymous.

"The majority of accidents are from the conditions," he added. "With the speed you have to work, the slippery floors, it's

hard to control. And the only thing the supervisors worry about is getting the meat out."

However, George David of American Stores Packing Company in Lincoln, said his firm is worried about the problem.

"We have redoubled the emphasis on safety in the plant," David said. "We check out new operations carefully, enforce our safety rules and try to protect people against themselves."

### Ignore safety rules

More accidents occur when workers ignore safety precautions, he said.

He referred to the incident involving Vickie Bitikofer, who used a cutting knife to pull meat off the conveyor belt and stabbed her left eye. Bitikofer worked for Iowa Beef Processors Inc. in Dakota City. "She was doing an unsafe action," David said. "You never use a knife to stab meat. That's a standing rule. Hooks are provided for that purpose, to avoid such accidents."

David called Bitikofer's accident an example of the shortcuts people use to save time, which often cause accidents.

However, the representative from Amalgamated Meat Cutters stressed that time is a problem. He said the work comes

so fast on the conveyor belt that any lag soon turns into a major pile-up, with accompanying reprimands from the supervisors.

### Quick process

He estimated that 140 chunks of meat are processed by a worker in an hour, or more than two pieces per minute. In 45 minutes a carcass goes from slaughter to the cooler.

"The main thing is we have to slow the lines down to stop the accidents," he said. "Safety must come ahead of some of this production."

David said production was slightly down for American Stores, however.

"I defy anyone to say we're working too fast," David said.

But he said that workers might be working too close together.

American Stores has a safety committee which reviews the accidents every month and discusses possible remedies. A representative is sent to the national meat packing convention on safety each year to learn other procedures.

### Pressure needed

"It's hard to say if meat packers nationwide are becoming more concerned about this," David said. "But I can't believe that

any conscientious company wouldn't want a safe place to work."

The Amalgamated Meat Cutters spokesman expressed doubt about reforms.

"As a whole, we're not going to get help unless we can get more pressure on them," he said. "There's nothing governing how close we can work, or under how much speed."

"If it's a little thing, they'll fix it," he added. "But if it's a big thing, they're just too reluctant to spend the money."

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