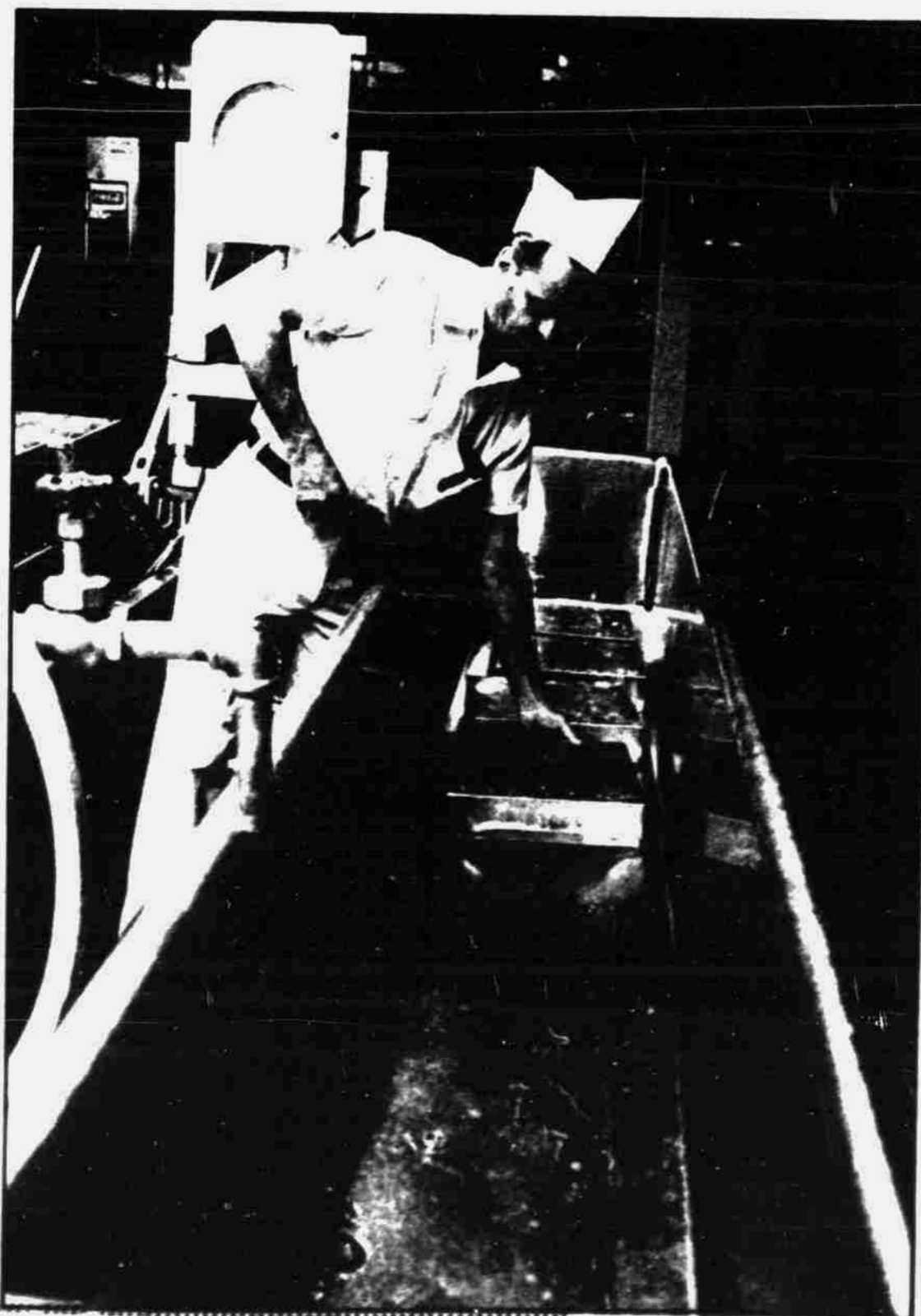


UNL dairy store motto: 'Smile, say cheese'



The screen door at the entrance could be from the Walton's front porch while the white tile walls add to the drug store-soda fountain atmosphere.

It may not be modern but 25 cent ice cream cones and a variety of cheeses keep neighborhood residents and many others coming back to the East Campus dairy store.

The store serves as the sales outlet for the ice cream, sour cream and nine types of cheese produced in the UNL dairy plant in Filley Hall.

The dairy store and plant were started in 1896 and moved to its present location in 1917, said John Rushing, food plant manager.

The plant is a teaching and research laboratory for daily students, in addition to supplying the university with some of its dairy needs.

Operated by the department of food science and technology, the plant manufactures 32,000 pounds of cheese per year Rusing said.

Production of cheese has been increased from one to two batches per day to keep up with the expected Christmas rush, he said.

Most cheese takes four to five hours to produce and is aged from three months to a year, depending on the type.

Husker cheese, developed in the mid-thirties by former professor A.P. Downs, is a light cheese which is only aged for three months. Aging gives a cheese flavor and sharpness, Rushing said.

The cheese production begins by filling a vat with 400 gallons of milk, which is warmed to 88 degrees Fahrenheit. This milk will produce 150-120 pounds of cheese, depending on the type, the rest is waste, Rushing said.

A bacterial culture is added to the milk and allowed to sit for one hour. Next the enzyme rennet is added, beginning the curdling process.

The cheese curd separates from the whey which is drained off as waste. The curd is rinsed with water, cooled, salted and scooped into a press.

After a day in the press, the block is wrapped and sealed and ready to be stored for aging.

Production of ice cream mix also takes about four hours, Rushing said. Fruit or flavoring is added to the basic mix and frozen for a day before it is sold.

The most difficult part of the process is keeping the flavor and texture of the cheese the same from batch to batch, said Merlyn Znamenacek, "Zim," the plant supervisor.

Even when the same recipe is followed, slight variations in the ingredients can change the quality of the cheese, he said.

Story by Sara Martens
Photographs by
Jerry McBride