Program snuffs smoking habit with volts and bucks

By Kim Wilt

If you want to quit smoking, and the possibility of receiving an electrical stimulus doesn't shock you, the Habit Control Center in Omaha is offering a five-day stop-smoking program.

consumer byline

But be forewarned—it's expensive. The full five-day experience runs $375 if you stretch your payments out over a year, and $350 if you pay in full. The two-day program is $120, and the one-day course will cost you $65. The Habit Control Center guarantees you will be completely broken of the cigarette program, or your money will be fully refunded.

The staff members like to think of the cost as comparable with the amount you would spend on cigarettes in one year, according to Raymond Lemke, a psychoterapist at the center. He said the payment indicates sincerity on the part of the participant.

"There has to be 100 percent involvement on both sides," he said, and if a person has invested a great deal of money, he will be certain to be involved.

Predictions differ

Lemke claims a 92 percent success rate in the full five-day program. However, Eugene Olivetti, the center's founder, disagrees with that prediction.

"It's too early to tell how successful the program is," he said. "Fifty or sixty percent would be closer."

The Habit Control Center has existed for about three months, he said. It is based on the premise that smokers who participate really want to quit.

"They have to be convinced that cigarettes are bad for them," Olivetti said.

Lemke agreed.

"If we feel that a person doesn't want to quit, we tell him. There's no use in wasting our time and effort, or theirs," he said. "We're pretty blunt about it."

Lemke explained the reasoning behind the center's use of aversive therapy as pairing an unpleasant stimulus, the electrical shock, with a pleasant experience, cigarette smoking. The therapy works to convince participants that negative consequences exist when they light up a cigarette. The shock is not painful, but extremely unpleasant, Olivetti said.

Shock, rapid-inhaling

"We use a nine-volt battery, and we tested it on ourselves first," he said, adding that he stopped smoking through the program.

In addition to the electrical shock, the center also uses rapid-inhaling techniques, where the subject smokes a pack of cigarettes in an hour.

"That part of it is probably more eimportant than the electrical shock," Olivetti said. "It's the most successful technique."

Susan Willig, from Omaha, who has gone through the program, said the rapid-inhale part of the program was the one that made her quit.

"The ugliness of the cigarettes, the full ashtrays and the smell really got to me," she said. "By the third day I thought I was going to get sick."

Willig said she smoked two packs a day for fourteen years before she quit after beginning the program on April 9. She has not had a cigarette since then.

"I really don't think anything could make me start again," she said.

Success questioned

One Lincoln psychiatrist said he thought the aversive therapy idea was a good one, but doubted that it would be any more successful than any other stop-smoking program.

"Some people would take sharp exception to it," John D. Baldwin said, adding that aversive therapy should be considered as punishment.

"I don't know how effective it is, or how effective anything is for quitting smoking. Like anything else, it will work with some people," he said. "I'm not adverse to anything that will stop smoking."

Olivetti stressed that cigarettes are physically addicting. Nicotine is an addictive drug, he said.

"You will smoke more if you switch to lights (low-tar cigarettes) to get more nicotine."

People who attempt to stop smoking do experience physical withdrawal symptoms, including nausea, tenseness, insomnia, headaches, dizzy spells and anxiety, he said.

Nicotine stimulates the central nervous system, he said.

"If you gave the nicotine equivalent to a pack of cigarettes to a child between three and five years of age, it would probably kill him," Olivetti said.

Oil refiners overcharge—officials

Washington—The Energy Department accused seven major oil refiners Wednesday of overcharging customers nearly $1.7 billion for crude oil during a 5½-year period, in what could be the biggest such government case ever against the oil industry.

Paul Bloom, special department counsel for compliance, said proposed orders were issued to the companies which would require refunds of overcharges upheld after review.

Bloom said Texaco Inc. was accused of $888.3 million in overcharges and Gulf Oil Co. was alleged to have overcharged $578 million.

a.p. datelines

The other alleged overcharges were $101.6 million by Standard Oil of California, $42 million by Atlantic Richfield Co., $29.1 million by Marathon Oil, $24.1 million by Standard Oil of Indiana and $1.7 million by Standard Oil of Ohio.

Sleep danger

Washington—A panel's finding that an ingredient of many nonprescription sleep aids is a "potential human hazard" may lead to a government ban of the drug.

A committee of the Clearinghouse on Environmental Carcinogens concluded Tuesday that the antihistamine, methapyrilene, caused liver cancer in one laboratory study and is responsible for deaths of nearly a fifth of the rats in another test still underway. Among the over-the-counter drugs containing methapyrilene are Compoz, Cope, Excedrin P.M., Nervine, Nytol, Quiet World and Sominex.

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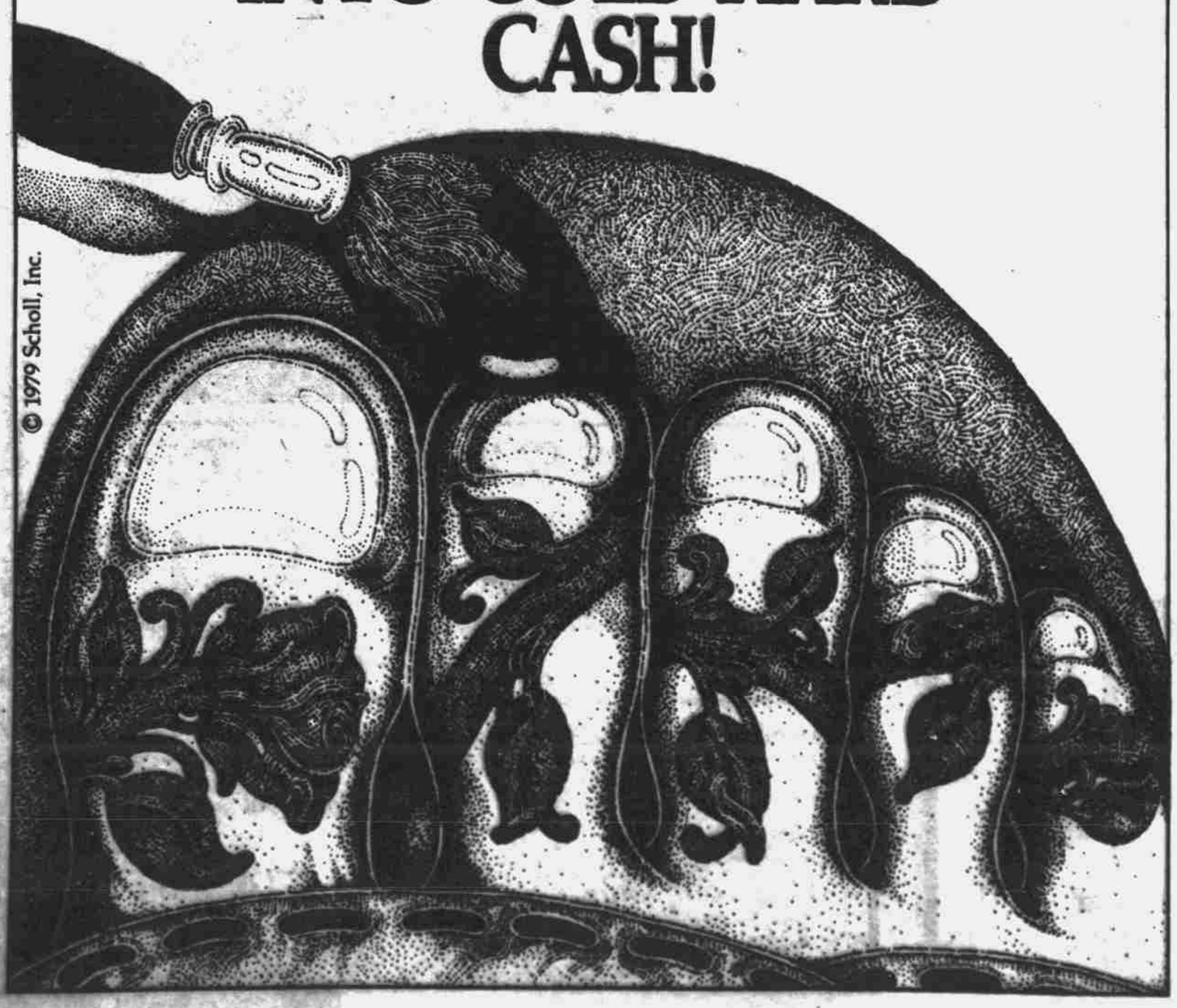

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