

Fired custodian refuses UNL job offer

By Gordon Johnson
and Michelle Carr

Although UNL announced Thursday it would re-hire a black woman who was fired in September from the custodial department, the woman said she will not go back to work under terms offered by the university.

A letter from Ron Wright, UNL vice chancellor for business and finance, said Girlean Woods could have her job back, but would be on probation for three months.

Wright wrote that the Affirmative Action Liaison Committee, which investigated Woods' charges of racial discrimination, found no evidence of overt discrimination.

The committee found, however, that being dismissed was too harsh in light of the charges made against her. "I won't go back to work unless they take away the probationary period," Woods said.

Woods said she did not know whether she would take the job if the probation clause was removed.

"I really haven't given it much thought," she said.

"All I want is to be treated as a human being. I am not a robot or a machine. I want them to treat me like everyone else," she said.

A report by the committee to UNL Chancellor Roy Young points out that other university employees were guilty of the same infraction, but were not fired.

The other workers were guilty of the same rule violations, but they were not put on probation Woods said.

The state ombudsman's office also will be looking into charges of discrimination beginning at 9 a.m. today.

Woods originally took the charges of racial discrimination to Omaha Sen. Ernest Chambers who turned the matter over to the state ombudsman.

According to Ombudsman Murrel McNeil, the university would not cooperate in the investigation. The principals in the case were told by NU attorney Richard Wood not to answer questions about the case.

McNeil issued subpoenas from the ombudsman's office requiring seven university employees, to appear at the capital for a hearing.

NU attorney Wood maintained that the ombudsman's office did not have the right to investigate the matter.

Thursday morning, Wood contacted the ombudsman's office and said the UNL employees would cooperate in

the investigation, McNeil said.

Chambers wrote a letter to NU President Ronald Roskens Thursday complaining of the committee's findings.

"This action by the committee is as bad as (if not worse than) the original racism by the university. Additionally, how can it be justice to place Ms. Woods on probation, when the white offenders have not been placed on probation?" Chambers wrote.

The report to the chancellor states that the treatment of Woods could be the "result of unconscious and covert discrimination, though we have found no objective, clear and explicit evidence of intentional and overt racial discrimination."

Alice Torwirt, a representative for the committee, said the group found no "conscious" discrimination against Woods.

"Within any society there is some discrimination. It (discrimination) is difficult to detect and prove because we can't see into people's minds," Torwirt said.

Chambers said he has no doubt that the university discriminated against Woods.

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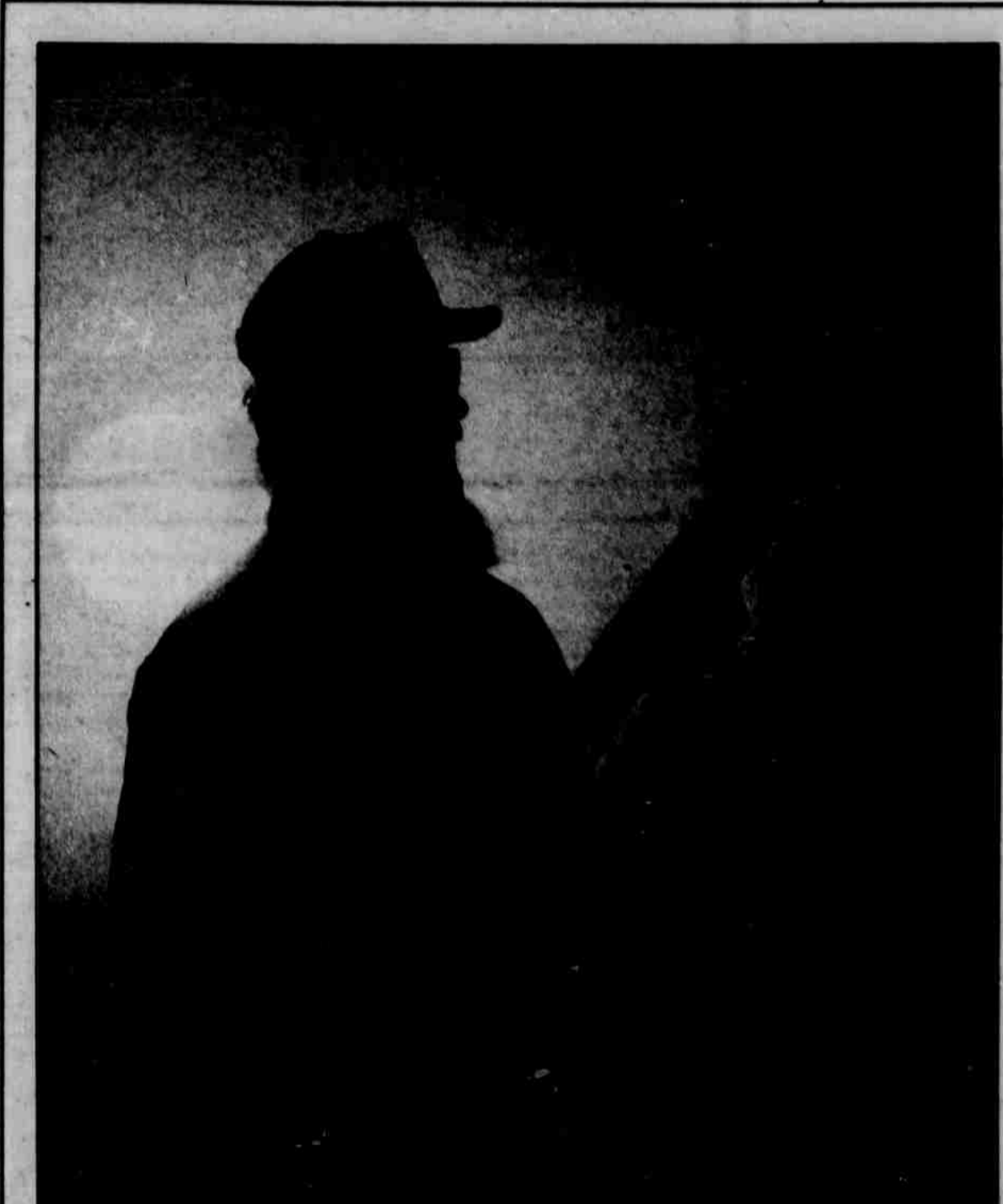


Photo by Jerry McBride

Season dawns

Pheasant season opens Saturday and this hunter plans on being prepared. Hunters across the state will watch the sun rise as they tramp across the open fields searching for birds. Other hunting photos on Page 14.

APU takes stand against handling of Woods issue

By Michelle Carr

Members of the African People's Union (APU) strongly opposed the university's action to rehire a black woman, who was fired in September, on the grounds that the issue of discrimination was not adequately dealt with, and because of the provisions of her re-hiring.

The Affirmative Action Liaison Committee, which investigated Woods' charges, found no evidence of overt discrimination, but recommended Thursday that she be rehired because other employees had made the same infractions and had not been fired.

Shomari Ashebar, APU campus coordinator, said that the university was ignoring the issue of discrimination in rehiring Woods.

"She (Woods) was discriminated against and harassed. The university is not dealing with the reality of the situation," he said.

The university took a "cowardly approach" in handling the discrimination case, Ashebar said. That is why Woods took her complaint to Sen. Ernest Chambers of Omaha, "to try to obtain justice," he said.

Doreen Charles, APU chairperson, said the group anticipated that Woods would be rehired on the university's conditions.

A letter from Ron Wright, UNL vice chancellor for business and finance, said that Woods could have her job back, but would be on probation for three months.

Under the probation conditions, the university did not acknowledge the discrimination point Woods was trying to make, Charles said.

The transcripts of Woods' testimony to the State Ombudsman's Office revealed that she was evidently discriminated against, according to Hodari Sababu, international and national coordinator.

"A crime has been committed, and she (Woods) would be pleading guilty to that crime (if she agreed to the conditions)."

Ashebar said that Woods refused the job because of the probation conditions.

"Under those reasons, she (Woods) did not accept the job or (Wright's) letter, nor do we," he said.

Charles said the group protested the firing and rehiring of Woods not on the simple facts of the case, but because APU is "pushing for an investigation of the system, where obvious discrimination occurs."

The group will discuss the recent action and other possible action to be taken.

"The university is incapable of meting out justice so we will take a higher level of action," Ashebar said.

Other channels of action have yet to be decided, Sababu said.

inside friday

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ASUN asking regents to reconsider speaker funding

By Betsie Ammons

ASUN president Bud Cuca will ask the NU Board of Regents at its Nov. 16 meeting to reconsider a policy prohibiting the use of student fees to finance political and ideological speakers on campus.

The move is the result of Senate Bill 13, passed at Wednesday's ASUN Senate meeting, directing the student regents at UNL and UNO to approach the board on this issue.

The bill reads that campus organizations are financially unable to support a speakers program without student fees and that the University Program Council has made a concerted effort to present a balanced program since student fees use was curtailed.

It also calls for the programming boards at UNL and UNO to work together to devise a balanced speakers program.

An amendment to the bill asks that "The Senate enlist the help of the Nebraska Civil Liberties Union in convincing the administration and the regents. . . to change the current speaker's policy."

Hubert Brown, ASUN first vice president, said the NCLU will act as consultant on legal aspects of the Regent's decision to curtail the speaker's program.

He said the constitutionality of the regent's policy is questionable for at least two reasons.

It is difficult to define exactly what constitutes a political or ideological speaker, Brown said, adding that "you could call anyone from Carroll O'Connor to Muhammad Ali a political or ideological speaker" because of isolated comments they have made.

He said the regents' definition of speakers is "vague, and intentionally vague."

Also, he said, the policy operates as a prior restraint, preventing dissemination of an idea before it has been stated.

Although he called prior restraint a violation of the First Amendment, to the U.S. Constitution, said that it will not be a major thrust when they present the senate's ideas to the regents.

He said the main concern will be convincing the regents that it would improve the quality of education at UNL to reinstate a fees-supported speakers program.

Student regent Cuca would not comment on the possibility of the NCLU helping the senate initiate legal action against the regents, but said he thinks some ASUN senators may be thinking of filing suit if the board refuses to reconsider the policy.

Brown said he thinks the time is right to reopen the speakers issue.

He said ASUN's main concern this fall has been quality education, as shown by its protests against higher tuition. Reinstating the speaker's program would be another way to improve the quality of education, he said.

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