

Students' tractor plan lifts farmer's spirits

By Tom Prentiss

Thanks to two UNL mechanical engineering students, a paraplegic Nebraska farmer will continue his life-long goal of farming.

Senior Harlan Henke, 24, and graduate Robert Mayfield were responsible for designing an apparatus that uses a hydraulic lift to hoist Scribner farmer Norman Wegner up to the tractor cab.

Controls on the tractor also have been adapted to fit Wegner, Henke said.

Henke of Falls City said Mayfield, currently employed in Tulsa, Okla., became involved in the project as part of their machine design class.

Mayfield could not be reached for comment.

The two were awarded \$250 for placing fourth in the 1979 Student Engineering Design Competition, said Henke.

THE NATIONAL award is from the James F. Lincoln Arc Welding Foundation of Cleveland, Ohio and was presented to the pair for designing the lift and braking tractor modifications for Wegner.

Wegner, 37, was paralyzed from the waist down after the tractor he was driving was struck by a truck in August, 1976.

The accident left Wegner, who is married and has five children, without a way of making a living, Wegner said. "After the accident I realized I might not be able to farm, but I still wanted to," he said. "I didn't give up hope though."

During rehabilitation training, the State Division of Rehabilitation Services tried to find a way to allow Wegner to continue farming, according to an employee of the division.

Otto Link said that after consulting with local mechanics in Omaha, the Division decided to see if UNL's College of

Engineering and Technology could be of any help.

UNL ENGINEERING officials were interested and work on the project began in the fall of 1978, Link said.

"The people at the university were happy to take it on as a class project," he said.

Henke said the project took "quite a bit of time" but the result was worth it.

Henke said both he and Mayfield visited the Wegner farm south of Snyder several times to check measurements on the tractor.

Wegner had to bring his tractor down to Lincoln so adaptations could be made. He said he got his tractor back in April 1979.

Cost of the project totaled about \$1,200, Henke said. He said \$800 was for the hydraulic lift system and about \$400 for hand control adaptations.

Reaction from those involved in the project has been positive.

Wegner described Henke and Mayfield as "two good boys who really knew what they were doing."

"I really appreciate everything they've done because it means so much to me," Wegner said.

Henke said it was personally rewarding to be involved in a project that benefited someone so much.

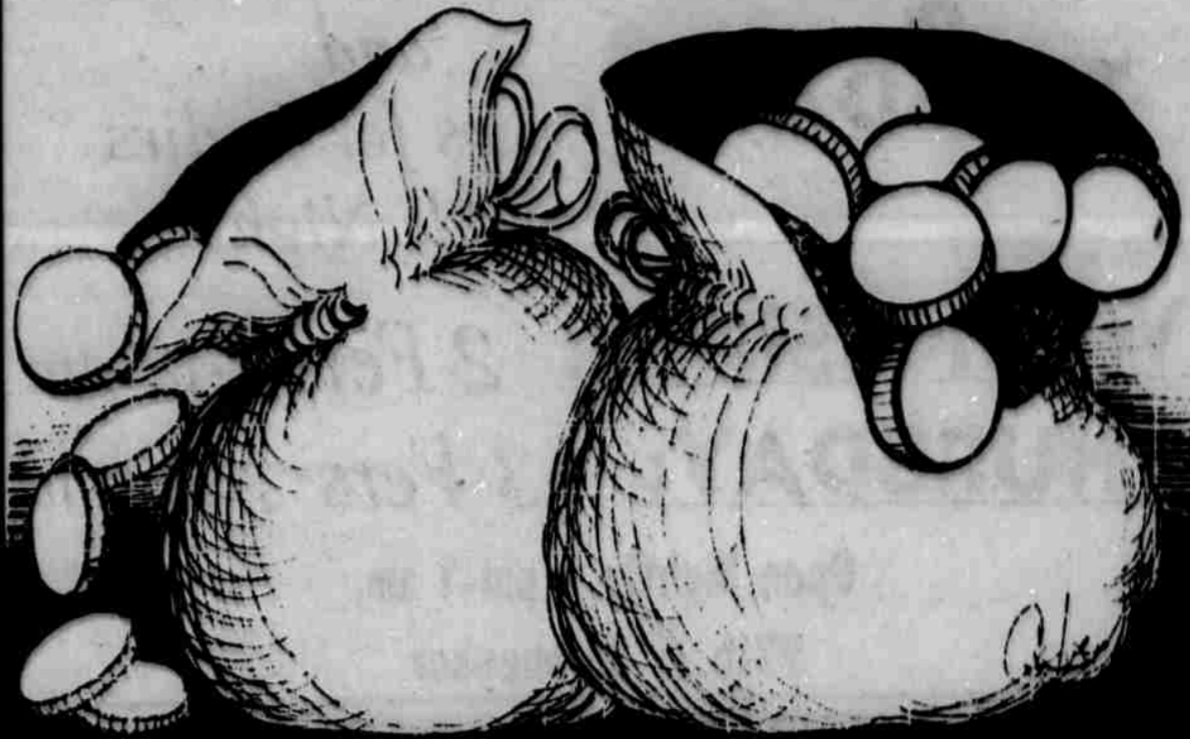
"From an engineering standpoint, it was great to take this from the concept stage, through the design process and to the construction process," Henke said.

"We did everything from A to Z and learned all the aspects of it," he added.

Link said he was pleased at the university's willingness to help out. He said there was a "big potential" for the rehabilitation service using the university to seek answers for many rehabilitation problems.

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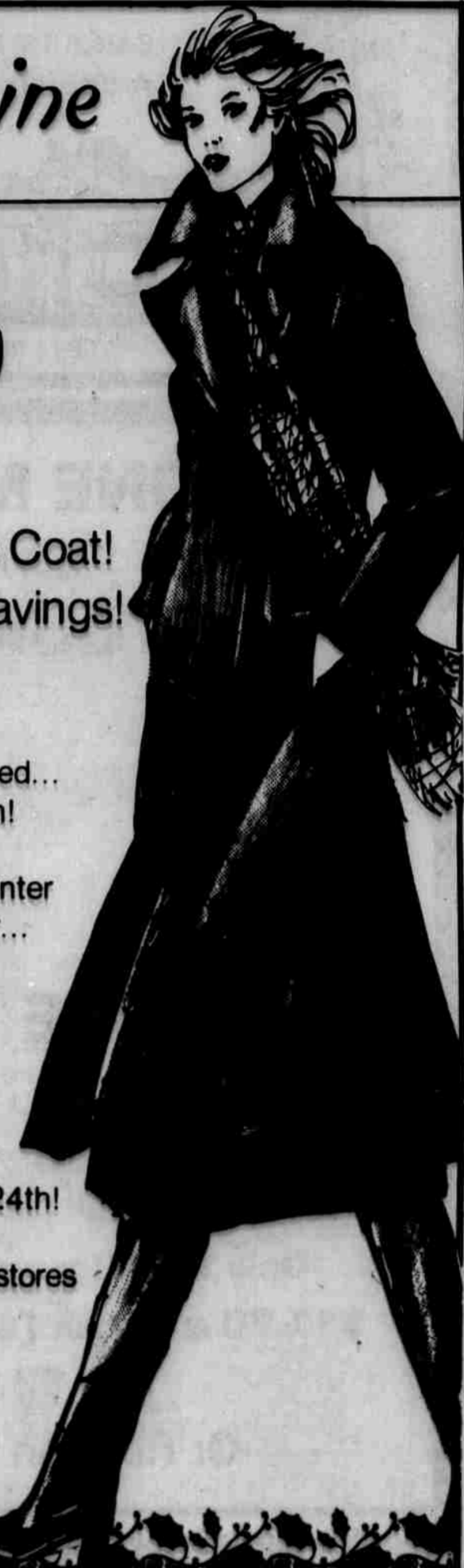
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