

Businesses peddle no-meat eating, thrive in Lincoln

By Laure Perlinger

If you haven't had any laminaria digitata, nori, kombu or dulse lately, don't feel left out.

For some people, it's part of a daily routine. These individuals have joined the health food craze, and consider seaweed an important part of their diets. Various types of seaweed come from the coast of Maine and are available at Open Harvest Food Co-op at 2637 Randolph.

Open Harvest is not a "store" in the commercial sense, but rather a cooperative enterprise controlled by its members.

"We appeal to a large age span," said Chad Hoelsing, co-manager of the co-op. "Many customers are college- and post-college age or senior citizens."

The store is open to everyone, and all persons buying food items are considered members. Because Open Har-

vest is concerned with "the erosion of small enterprise farming in America," it attempts to obtain whole organic foods directly from the producer.

Depression years

Tempah burgers, raw (unpasteurized) butter, rolled wheat flakes and spinach lasagna are a few of the variety foods available at Open Harvest.

Meatless entrees

All entrees prepared at Union College Food Service, 3800 S. 48th St., are lacto-ovo vegetarian. They contain no meat products, but allow eggs, milk and cheese.

Jane Walgamotte, director of the food service, said many of the foods are like meat foods but a meat replacement is used.

"Stripples" are a bacon-like product with a smoky

flavor. "Veja-Links" appear to be hotdogs, but consist of a combination of egg whites, soybeans and wheat.

A "vegiburger" is a gluten-based product with extra protein added to supply complete protein from a non-animal source. "Chic-Ketts" is a doughy substance which is pulled apart into chicken-sized pieces, breaded and fried.

"We're not saying these substitutes taste like meat," Walgamotte said, "because they're not meat. They are a thing of their own, a protein food made for our enjoyment."

Any substance which requires the killing of an animal is excluded during preparation of food. The service recently changed brands of yogurt because some contain gelatin, which is a by-product of beef.

Most customers are students and faculty members, but guests are welcome during the week. The average cost for each meal is \$1.70, which includes carry-out items like fruit and nuts.

Tug of war

"I don't know where you can eat cheaper than this," said Walgamotte. "And this includes good meals."

A tug of war exists between those who see natural foods as an approach to living and those who promote them as miracle workers, said Mark Vasina of the Glass Onion.

Increasing commercialization draws away from the whole philosophy and builds concepts around a few key words like "health" and "natural," he said.

"There is not a 'health food.' It's a way of eating. There aren't any magic foods, or miraculous drugs to give you health," he said.

Vasina, who is co-owner and co-manager with Terri Bonebright, said he feels that natural foods are popular mainly because of commercialization, vitamin research and the undercurrent of fitness and health that is sweeping the country.

"People are becoming more critical of food and are seeking a better approach to nutrition, but these trends are blatantly commercial," Vasina said.

Americans are more aware of health food stores, but are not putting this knowledge into a coherent life style, he said.

Business is good because the Glass Onion appeals to a clientele that is limited, said Vasina. "Not everyone is interested in trying our food."

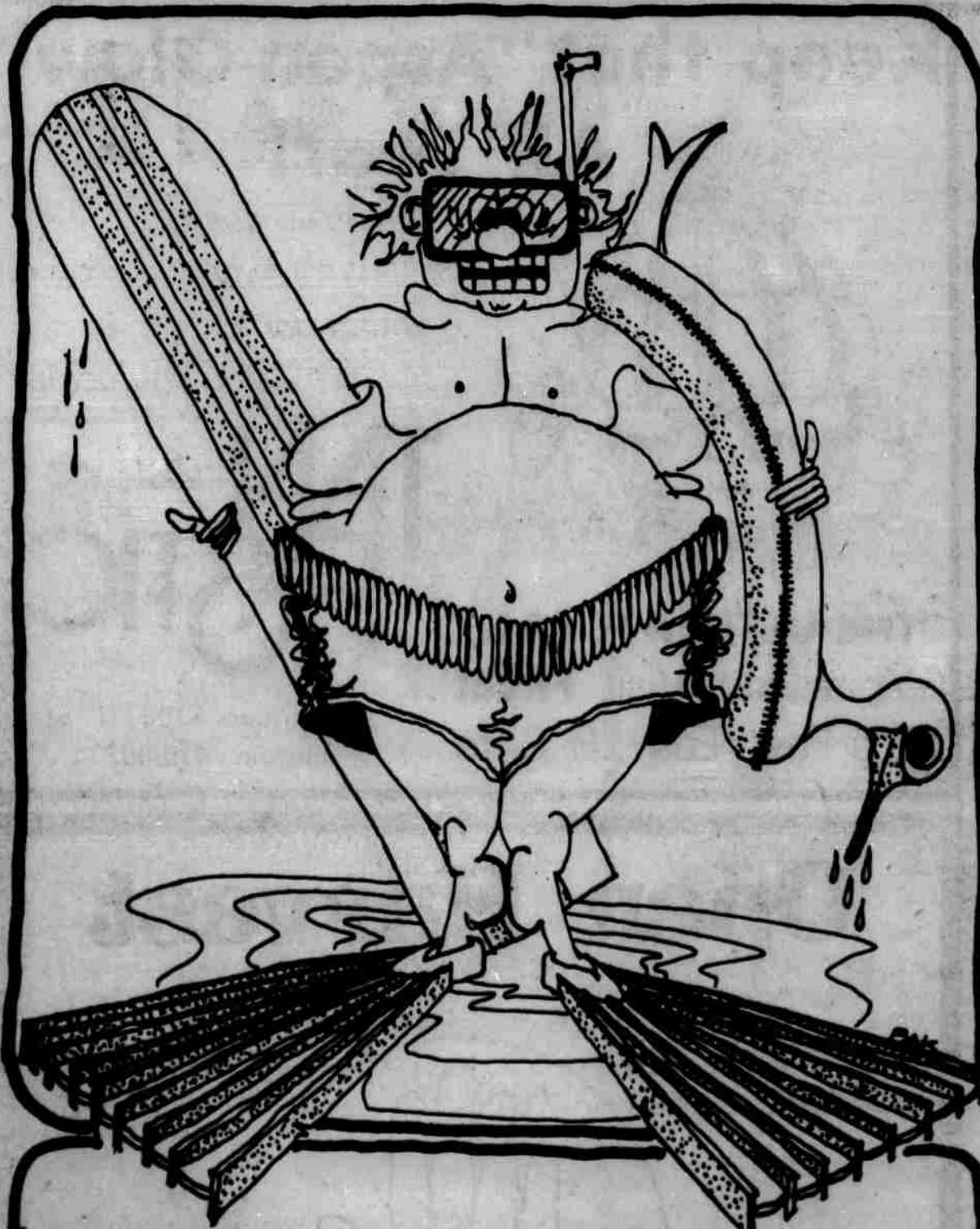
"It's fair to say our crowd would only exist in a college town," Vasina said. "But college students account for less than half of our customers. The business people and college teachers support us very well, but the students who come in are usually older."

In relation to other health food businesses, Vasina said there is no spirit of competition. "We're all interested in seeing more businesses open and more businesses succeed."



Photo by Jerry McBride

These are some of the items available in a typical health food store.



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