

NU's attorney serves as regents' legal guardian

By Patti Gallagher

He serves all three branches of NU. He has the central administration looking over his shoulder. The NU Board of Regents is his boss. He's NU's attorney, and he agrees that the all-inclusive title covers most of what it implies.

Officially-titled NU general counsel, Richard Wood admits that he does have a little help in being legal guardian of the university, but that he remains responsible to the regents for everything filtered through his office.

Filtered through last semester: the Josh McDowell case. It was Wood's legal advice to the regents that their existing prohibition of religious speakers at the university was unconstitutional under the First Amendment.

Filtered through last spring: a UNL track team member attempting to sue the university and the Big Eight Conference in what Wood called a reverse discrimination case. After three days in federal court, NU and the Big Eight triumphed.

Filtered through daily: requests for legal advice, preparation for litigation and drafting of legal documents.

"One of the frustrating things is my inability to stay on top of everything . . ."

Working primarily with the administration and the regents, Wood also provides legal services to NU faculty and staff. He is aided in his duties by senior UNL law student John Wiltse, and two law firms, from Lincoln and Omaha.

Wood said the university may be involved in 12 to 18 legal cases at any one time, but that only one-third of the cases are handled by him personally.

Responsible to regents

"But I am nonetheless responsible to the Board of Regents to the progress of the case," Wood said.

In addition to providing legal advice and litigation, Wood works with NU collective bargaining units. The sole unit currently operating in the university system is UNL's faculty bargaining unit, the American Association of University Professors. NU's Omaha law firm is presently helping the AAUP negotiate salary terms and conditions with the regents.

Some UNL faculty members began efforts to form a bargaining unit last year, but Wood said he was not aware of the current status of their efforts.

As university attorney, Wood is also required to attend all meetings of the regents, to serve as an on-the-spot legal referee. Cases of tort claims—personal or property damages—are handled by the legal representative of the university's liability insurance.

Wood said it is rare that a case involving a student will reach his office. Most student cases are handled on lower

levels or settled out of court. He said, however, that students have the right to go before the regents with their petitions and concerns, providing they have properly secured a spot on the board's agenda.

Successful 'so far'

Has Wood been successful as the university counsel?

"So far . . ." he said. But then, "not all litigation goes to final judgment." He conceded that he's got one or two losses on his record.

Accepting the appointed position from NU President Ronald Roskens in January of 1979, Wood previously had a private legal practice in Lincoln. Before beginning his practice he served as a city attorney in Lincoln.



Daily Nebraskan Photo

Richard Wood, general counsel for NU

ASUN tables appellate body act

By Patti Gallagher

An act to adopt the University Appeals Board as the appellate body to Student Court was tabled on a 16-8-0 vote Wednesday night at the ASUN Senate meeting.

The act, introduced last week, would provide a second level of hearing to Student Court, which hears cases involving student organizations. Student Court has been without an appellate body for several years, violating the ASUN constitution, which mandates one.

The act was tabled to review an outline proposed by Student Court Chief Justice Scott Cook. Cook's proposals specify procedure guidelines for the appeals board if it were acting as the Student Court appellate body.

Cook said the guidelines do not attempt to change the role of the appeals board, but would exist to insure smooth operations between the board and Student Court, if the act were passed.

Because of the length and complexity of Cook's guidelines, some ASUN members said they wanted the original act passed without them. Other members, said that because appeals board members have not even been selected yet, additional time should be given to study Cook's proposals and determine how to best implement them.

The need for an appellate body arose last semester when four student groups were tried in Student Court for a violation of NU Board of Regents religious policy on speakers. The groups, sponsoring religious lecturer Josh McDowell, were placed on organizational probation for one year when no appellate body was available to rehear the case.

In other discussion, the senate rallied for ideas for Students' Day. Students' Day is an ASUN-sponsored event held on a football Saturday to bring student concerns before their fellow students to wear blue on Students' Day to denote their concern in student issues. Senators debated on whether to increase or decrease the "political overtones" of the day.

According to First Vice President Mark Hirschfeld, last year's Students' Day produced much negative reaction. Senator Tim Rinne said the event should not take the "nice guy approach," but instead inform Nebraskans of the university's critical financial needs and the student body's awareness of those needs.

ASUN has to decide whose reactions and respect are being sought on Students' Day, according to ASUN president Renee Wessels.

"We have to decide whether we want the respect of the faculty and the administration behind us or the respect of the regents," Wessels said.

She advocated a more verbal approach to Students' Day.

"If you yell and scream loud enough someone is going to hear you," she said.

She added that hopefully persons within hearing distance are those coalitions or individuals—such as senators—who can bring student concerns before the regents most effectively.

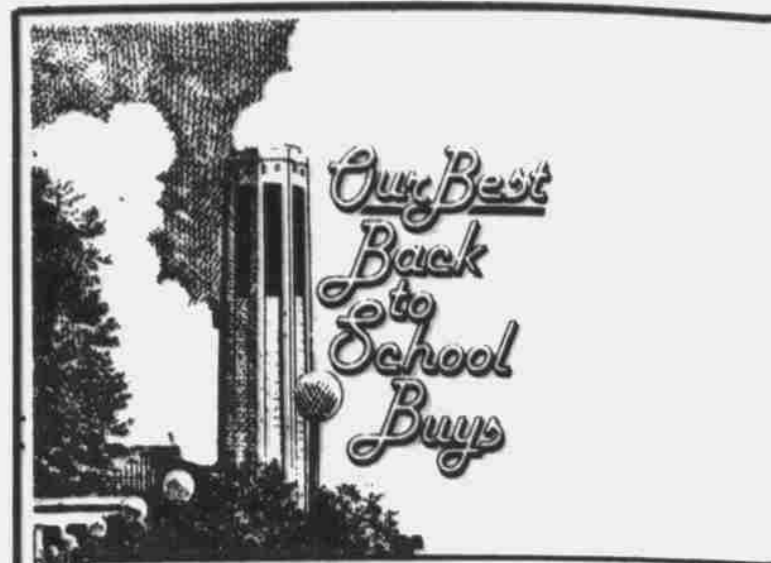
Other suggestions for Students' Day activities included moving it to mid-week, using displays; speakers and presentations, and changing the day's philosophy to honoring students.

With an undergraduate degree from the University of Iowa, Wood graduated from NU's College of Law in 1964. He also spent two years in the army after law school. Wood is married and has four children.

Wood said he enjoys his post and association with the faculty and administration, but that his workload seems endless.

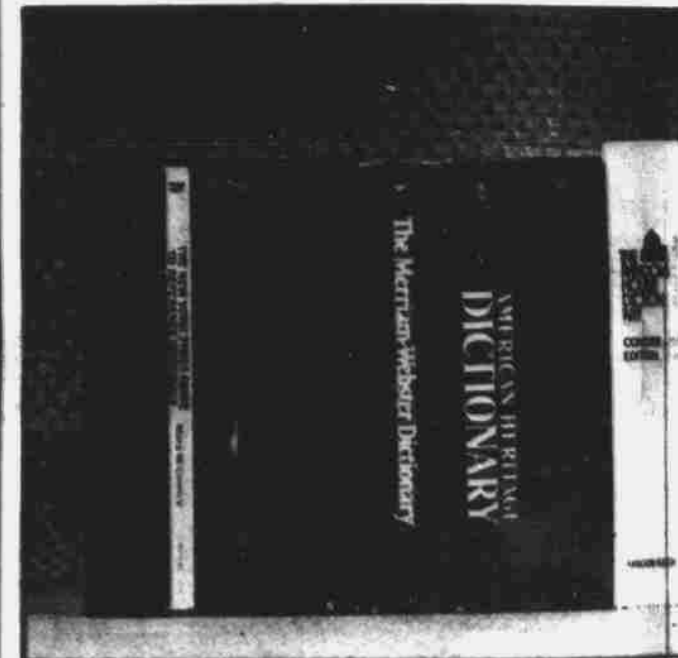
"One of the frustrating things is my inability to stay on top of everything that comes in," he said.

But he said that he does close his office door in Regents Hall often enough to find some free time for himself. Part of the free time is consumed, however, by his gubernatorial appointment to Nebraska's Power Review Board.

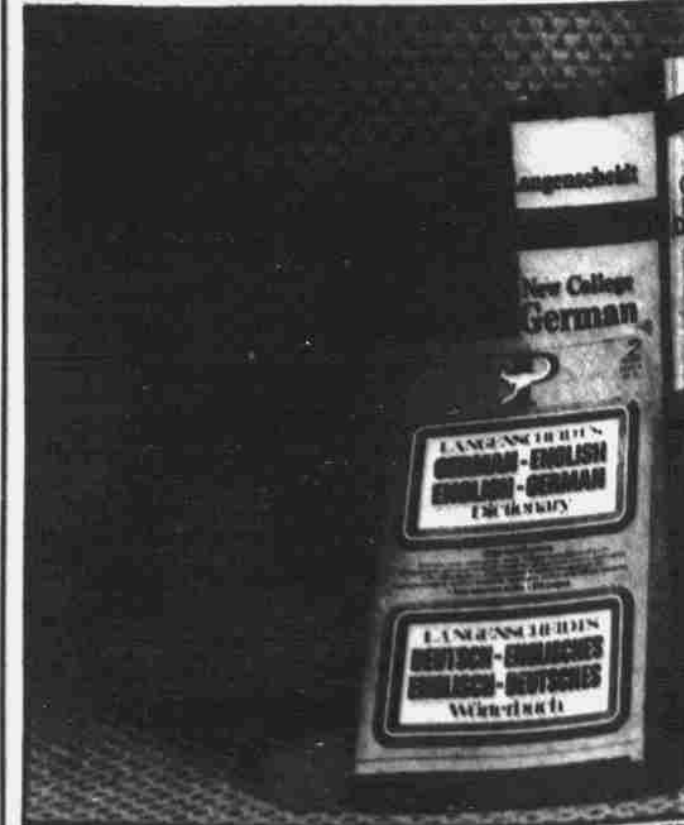


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