

NY Times says jobs here plentiful but not so

By Reid Warren

First the good news: Lincoln is a clean, healthy city with great potential growth, a good atmosphere to raise a family and one of the lowest unemployed rates in the nation.

Now the bad news: for those looking for high-paying jobs after their long grind through college, the above statement doesn't guarantee you an opportunity in the capital city.

Jobs in Lincoln are either scarce or plentiful, depending on a person's major and amount of experience obtained in his field.

Almost everyone agrees that Lincoln, reflecting current national trends, has good opportunities for engineering and business graduates.

But some other fields are a little shaky in Lincoln's job market.

Just because Lincoln has a large employer in city, state and federal government doesn't mean that job opportunities here are brimming over, said Gene Landkamer, manager of Nebraska Job Service.

Landkamer cited architecture, teaching and some liberal arts areas as lacking opportunities in Lincoln.

Although his office has seen few teaching positions, Landkamer said that is partially because many teachers go through placement offices at their colleges and only use job service as a last resort.

"When we see them they're usually looking for something else," he said.

Liberal arts switch fields

Many liberal arts majors end up in different fields than their majors, Landkamer said, and that fact wasn't necessarily bad.

"I don't feel they have wasted their time. With a liberal arts degree you've learned to learn," he said. "I don't know of any job that you start on knowing everything there is to know about it," he said.

Landkamer said his office has more business and engineering opportunities than anything else for college graduates.

But he cautioned that many business administration graduates with minimal accounting experience come out of college "thinking that they're management level."

Getting management opportunities depends on a student's training and experience, he said.

Many skilled engineering graduates seek jobs outside of Lincoln because of better opportunities elsewhere, he said.

"But Lincoln probably compares with any other college town in the country," he added.

Often students form an attachment to cities like Lincoln and find it hard to leave, Landkamer said.

Some just like the atmosphere, he said, while others find staying in town a necessity because of a spouse still attending school.

While college graduates form one of the most sizable groups at Nebraska Job Service, Landkamer didn't attribute that to the wide publicity Lincoln received as having the lowest employment rate in the nation.

Swamped with job applicants

"Most of the applicants we see are from Lincoln," he said, "but also many college graduates swamp the nation with letters after they graduate."

Don Purcell, UNL director of business research, said Lincoln "is not your typical labor market."

"The conditions are different," he said. "The supply of graduates is so much larger here, the supply has really inundated the job market."

"Some graduates go elsewhere, but many decide to stay," Purcell said.

Lincoln Mayor Helen Boosalis said the city doesn't have many opportunities for college graduates because of budget cuts forced by inflation and a seven percent spending lid.

While echoing the fact that times are ripe for engineering and business graduates, Boosalis said jobs beyond those fields are scarce.

It may not make sense that a city which received so much free publicity as having the lowest unemployment rate in the nation should be low on job opportunities.

It was a national Labor Department survey that showed Lincoln as having a 3.3 percent unemployment rate last Oct. 14, the lowest total among 214 metropolitan areas listed.

This fact was repeated by the *New York Times*, Paul Harvey and NBC's "Today" show.

But some people claimed the unemployment figures were misused because Lincoln's economy is not heavily industry based and unemployment rates are merely estimates. Monthly unemployment changes are more important, they said.

(Figures released by the state Labor Department show Lincoln's unemployment rate rose to 3.6 percent in November, 4 percent in December and 4.3 percent in January, still low by national standards.)

Survey called unfortunate

But Duane Vicary, executive vice president of Lincoln's Chamber of Commerce, called the national survey "one of the most unfortunate statements ever made."

Vicary said Lincoln's building trades have an unemployment rate of 35 percent.

While that figure doesn't compare with Cleveland or Detroit, Vicary said, everything is relative.

Vicary said Lincoln needs a new zoning policy that will allow an extension of industry beyond city limits and entice new industry to Lincoln.

"Unless we have some corrective legislative offers, we'll remain in the pits as far as offering industry to Lincoln," Vicary said. "If we don't turn that around in Nebraska, we'll be at the bottom compared to other states," he said.

Vicary said that if Lincoln is unable to keep and attract college graduates, an "outmigration" of graduates will occur.

But Boosalis said Lincoln doesn't need a change in zoning that there is ample opportunity for growth.

Some born-and-bred Lincolnites are bucking trends and heading for greener pastures, she said, but expanding industry will increase opportunities.

"Part of the crowded situation is because Lincoln is a desirable place to live," Boosalis said.

Vicary agreed and said Lincoln is a mid-sized community that many people like to stay in.

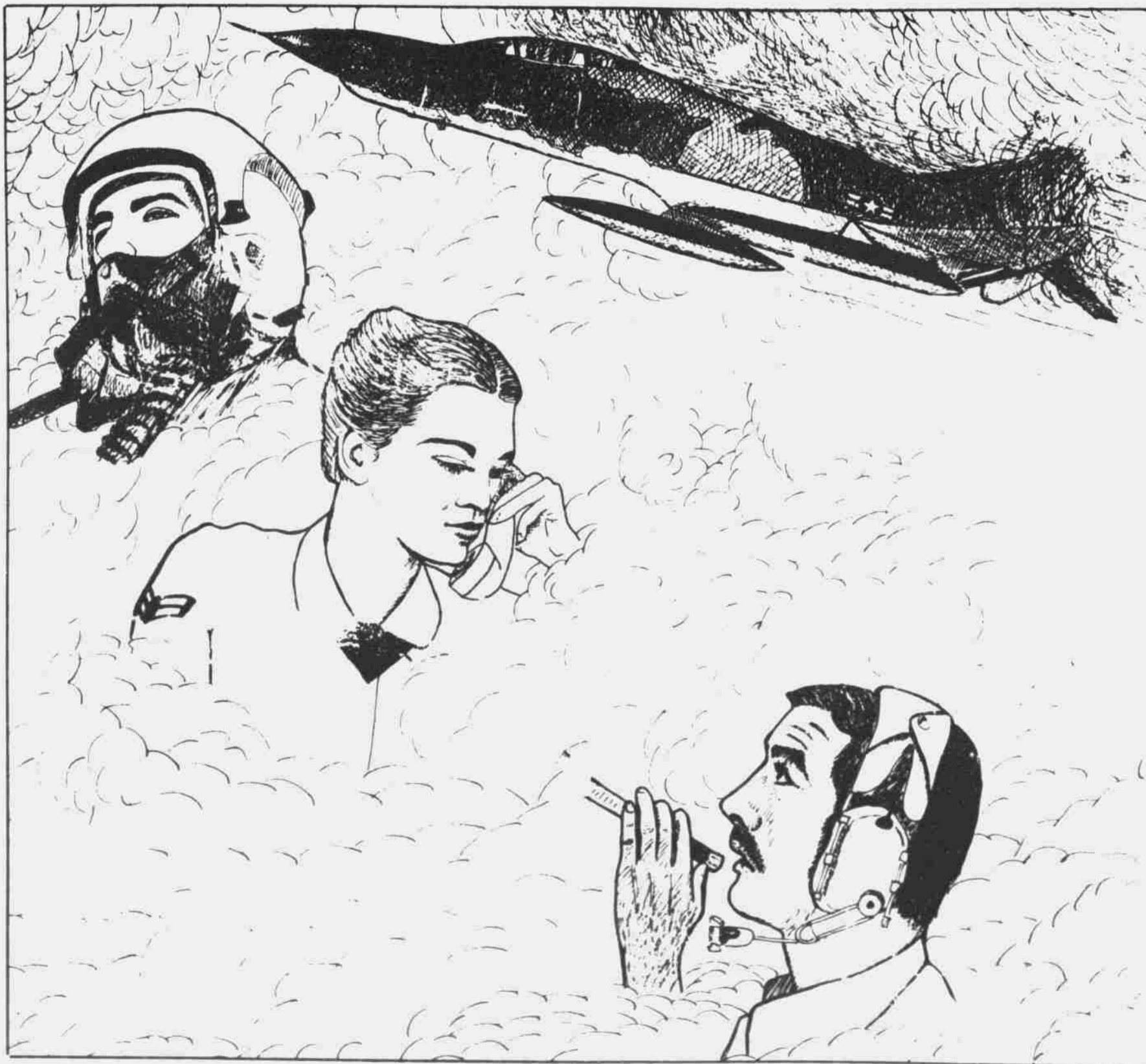
"A lot of people go other places," he said, "but Lincoln as a community offers a lot more than it used to."

There are trade-offs, Vicary said. A person can take a higher paying job in Cleveland, for example, as opposed to staying in Lincoln with a lower paying job.

Vicary said Lincoln has an unusually good climate for insurance opportunities, and predicted that city and state government, along with the downtown area, will become increasingly large employers of college graduates.

Minorities have strong opportunities in Lincoln, Vicary said, because Lincoln has a low minority population and large minority employers in local government and local firms.

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