

Jobs in demand pay more; offer few benefits

By Tom Prentiss

Yes Virginia, there is life after college. And if you're in engineering programs, chances are things are really going your way.

But while some students on a national level are being offered added fringe benefits to choose one firm over another, it appears that little of that type of recruitment is happening in Nebraska.

So as the college seniors prepare for graduation, job opportunities and interviews become common talk among peers. And it appears that engineers are still staking the claim to king of the hill of the job demand market.

Alfred Witte, interim assistant dean for the College of Engineering and Technology said the average starting salary of last December's graduates was approximately \$21,000 to \$22,000.

Witte said most engineering firms are recruiting with offers of salaries and little in added fringe benefits to lure graduates.

Engineering firms with aggressive hiring procedures may offer a bonus to candidates, Witte said.

Witte said most graduates will take seven or eight plant trips to check out prospective employers and then will choose from about three or four firm offers.

Two engineering students are finding the market right for their pickin's.

Lonnie Abelbeck, 22, is majoring in electrical engineering and wants to go into integrated circuit design.

Abelbeck said the common denominator between most job offers is the salary. Most offer roughly the same in terms of medical plans and benefits, he said.

Dave Hild, 21, is majoring in chemical engineering and says many firms will pay for moving students to their place of employment.

Hild may put several offers on hold so he can go to graduate school and get his master's degree. He has an offer for an assistantship at UNL for next year.

He said there is no real monetary benefit to waiting but he said he wants to stay in Nebraska while his fiance finishes dental school.

Hild is interested in process design work, which involves the designing of a plant. He said designing a petroleum refinery is a typical job he may be involved in.

Both Hild and Abelbeck said they have been able to pick their own jobs.

Abelbeck too, is considering staying in college to get his master's degree.

He said he has an offer from a firm that will pay his tuition, books, fees and give him a half a year's salary to live on.

Average starting salaries for engineers are a reported \$22,000. Hild said he top offer was \$21,250 while Abelbeck's highest was \$24,500.

Abelbeck said the demand for engineers has been especially high because of the growth and new development in electronics.

He said the development of the integrated circuit has opened up many job possibilities.

"Technology breeds new career openings as it grows and grows," he said.

He said colleges can't keep up with the demand for graduates and probably won't in the near future.

Hild said opportunities for chemical engineers are weak in Nebraska but good nationwide. This is because there are not many chemical engineering plants in Nebraska, he said, except opportunities with fertilizer companies, he said.

Both Hild and Abelbeck said they had little idea that salaries would be so lucrative upon graduation. Money wasn't the real reason for choosing their fields.

Abelbeck said he chose electrical engineering because he liked the math and science. "I just enjoyed the field."

Hild said he became aware of the good opportunities in his sophomore and junior years. He sees it as a reward for the work he has put in at UNL.

Careers in nursing, geology and architecture are finding their own levels of demand.

Beverly Cunningham, student affairs advisor for the UNL Division of Nursing, said nursing graduates in Nebraska are trying to stay in the state.

Lincoln is one city in the nation that gets many applications, she said. Omaha needs nurses on a large scale, she said.

She said Nebraska's conservative attitudes don't lend themselves to offering fringe benefits to recruit nurses.

Some hospitals in the Chicago area are offering to pay moving expenses for a prospective employee.

Cunningham said Nebraska has the second lowest rate of unemployment for nursing graduates in the nation behind Alaska.

Geologists are finding jobs in the energy industry said associate professor Frank Smith of the Geology Dept.

Smith said petroleum companies are always looking for qualified geologists and are paying about \$20,000 to \$25,000 a year.

Smith said graduates aren't being offered anything special in fringe benefits saying "they are not athletes,

these people are scientists."

Cecil Steward, Dean of the College of Architecture, said the demand for architecture graduates is not as high as engineering graduates.

Steward said there are about the same number of jobs this year for graduates as there was last year.

Architecture has a strong recovery rate after bad economic periods but even high interest rates have not hurt graduates severely.

This is because few architecture graduates take jobs in the housing market which is affected by high interest rates the most, he said.

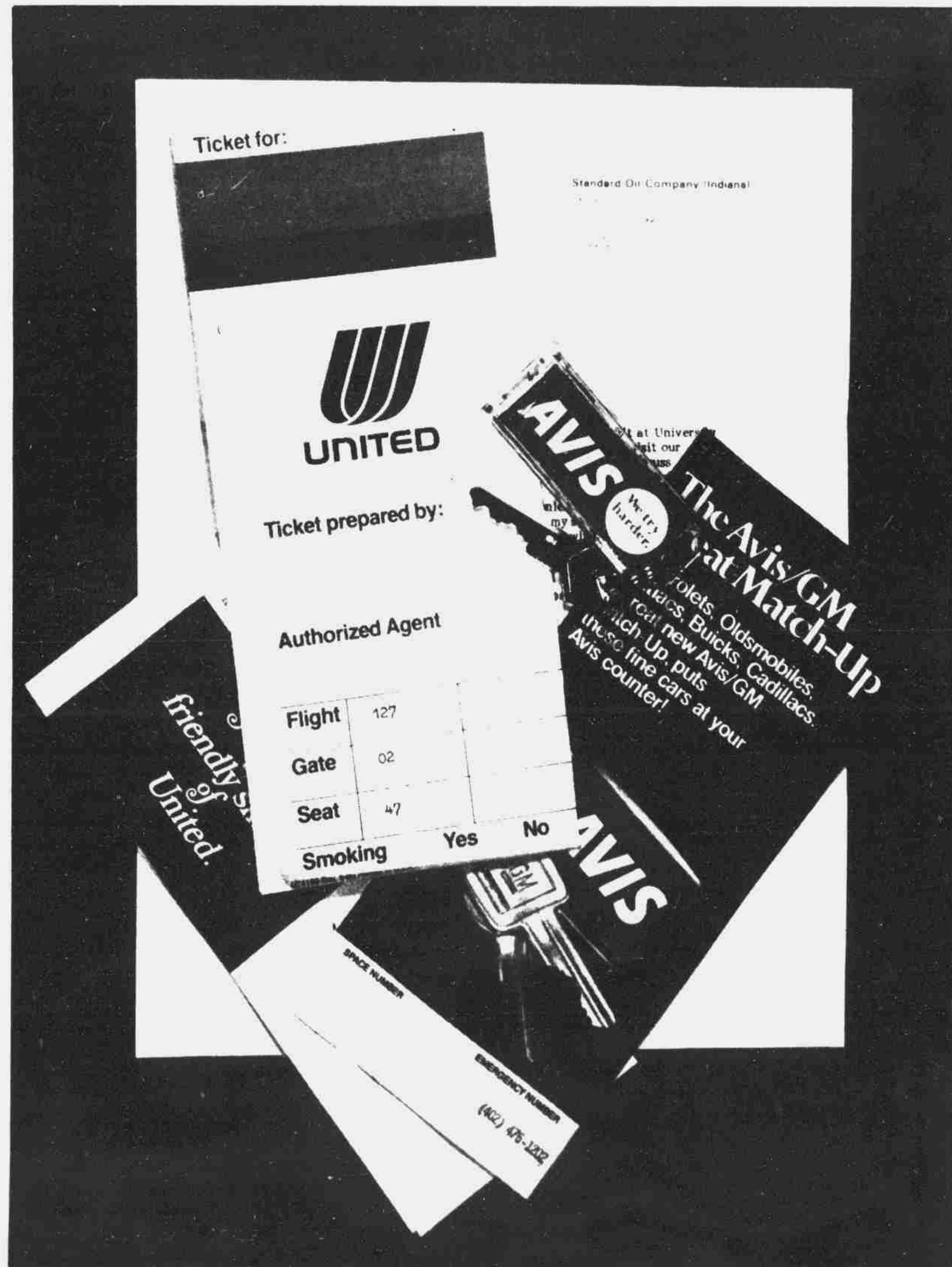


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