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Tonight: Wed., April 15

Officials: Student suicides increasing

By Betsy Miller

UNL's mental health director and the Lancaster County mental health educator agree the suicide rate among 19 to 25 year olds is increasing. But Nebraska students may have more resistance to the problem, according to university health officials.

Dr. Robert Heins, director of mental health at the UNL Health Center, said Nebraska provides "a more stable environment" for students than other places.

According to Heins, many families break up by divorcing or children moving out at an early age. Although this happens in other states, Heins said it doesn't happen as often in Nebraska.

Suicides are increasing in number because more people are going to college than ever before, according to Jose J. Soto, mental health educator for the Lancaster County Mental Health Center.

"People are expected to go through 12 years of school and then continue," he said.

College may be a different experience from high school and primary school, but Soto said it still can be an extension of adolescence.

"College students face the serious pressures that adolescents have," he said.

The increased number of college students also has accounted for the higher expectations of people toward students.

"The expectations that society puts on people for succeeding are dependent on them having a college degree," Soto said.

The increase in suicide rates also could result from the increased reporting of deaths as suicides, Soto said. According to Soto, suicides may be classified as something else because the family, or people close to the victim, don't want the truth known.

Heins said the center treats students who have various personal problems. He said that those with personal problems can run into difficulties in college.

"If anybody has personal problems, this place can really bring them out," Heins said.

One common emotional problem concerns male-female relationships, Heins said.

The center may hospitalize people who have attempted suicide, Heins said. Mental health employees are available to talk with students to try to get the patient's family and friends to help him or her if possible, Heins said.


According to Heins, men seem to commit suicide more often than women. The idea that a man should not cry or show any emotion sometimes leads them to take their lives, but women may try to kill themselves knowing that they won't succeed, and thus gain attention, Heins said.

UNL has had about three suicides annually, according to Heins. He said this is below the national average at colleges.

College life also causes some students to overindulge in alcohol, which can lead to suicide attempts, Soto said.

To escape problems, Soto said, students begin drinking, sometimes heavily. If the drinking doesn't solve the problems, a youth may try suicide and use alcohol "to get his courage up to do it," he said.

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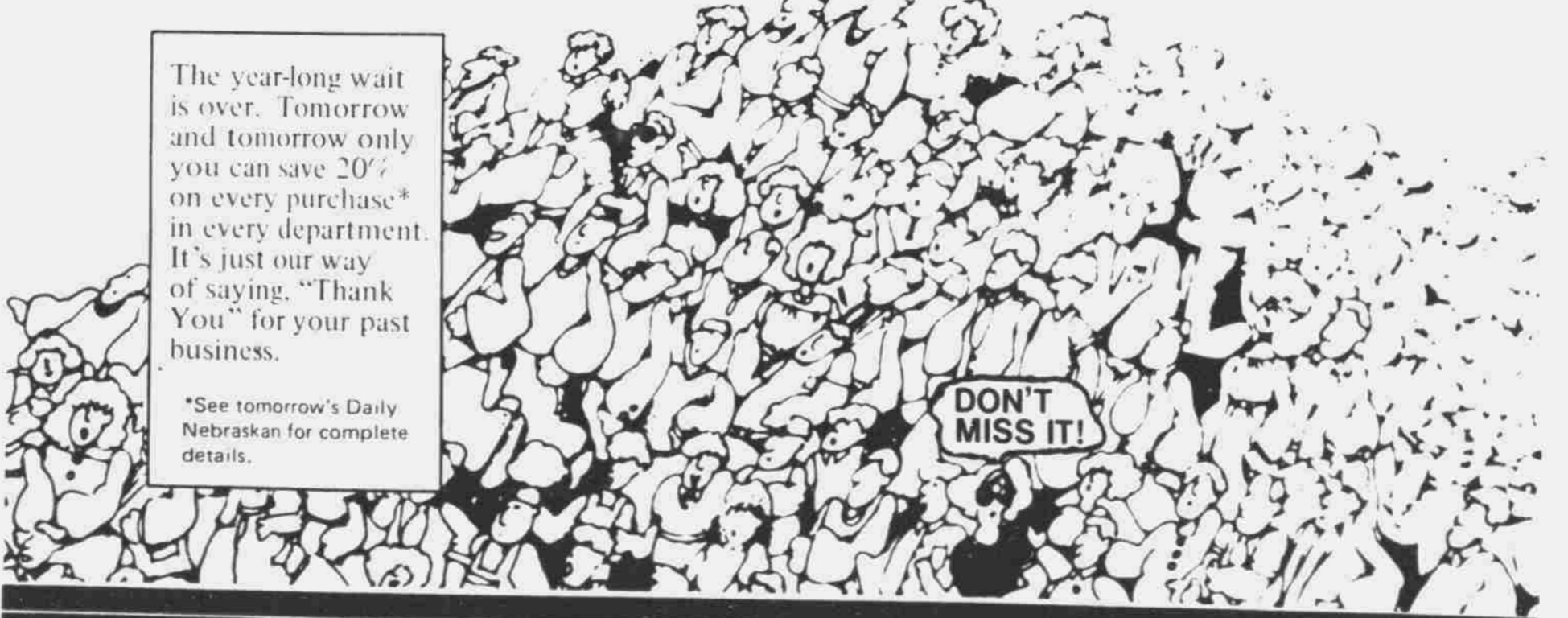
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