



Photo by Dave Bentz
Gina Ginsberg Riggs talks about her gifted child and how she had to deal with him to an audience at the Lincoln Hilton.

Conference aims at better understanding of the gifted

By Lorna Nissen

"I want to make a difference — at least I want to try and that's why I'm here — to make a difference," said Gina Ginsberg Riggs, executive director of the Gifted Child Society.

Riggs is a New Jersey native and columnist for *Gifted, Creative, Talented* magazine. She spoke Thursday morning to nearly 500 people attending the Nebraska Association for the Gifted annual conference in the Grand Ballroom of the Hilton, 9th and O streets.

Addressing her third Nebraska state conference, Riggs talked about the dilemmas faced by teachers, parents and students and their attitudes toward having a gifted or exceptional child.

Riggs said she hoped that those attending the conference would learn and draw strength from each other so they could go home with a new vigor and understanding of exceptional children.

Gifted children have a greater potential to become more productive than the average adult, but they need adult support in gaining necessary experience, wisdom and maturity to become productive, Riggs said.

In order to help gifted children get the proper attention, teachers, parents and other students must feel comfortable with them, Riggs said. She expressed a need for change in thoughts, attitudes and feelings toward gifted children.

Gifted children should be accepted as they are and in order for others to feel

comfortable around them, people must first feel comfortable with themselves, Riggs said.

Teachers have a problem feeling comfortable with a gifted child in the classroom, especially if that child has answers to all of the questions asked by the teacher which may go beyond the teachers' trained knowledge, he said.

Riggs said teachers don't know if they should take a chance and call on a "belly-button-high walking encyclopedia" to answer a question with an answer that is "different, divergent, creative, full of humor and definitely not part of the curriculum."

Even though gifted students enrich a classroom, they don't get the opportunity to expand and often become lonely children, Riggs said. Gifted children need to be with other gifted children so that there is some competition.

"We all need to know that we don't know it all," Riggs said. Taking a gifted student out of an ordinary classroom allows another student to rise and shine and become the best student.

If a teacher is comfortable with a gifted child in the classroom, then students will feel comfortable with the gifted child, Riggs said. Sometimes the gifted child is uncomfortable with himself.

"Elitism, giftedness and superiority are good things to have," Riggs said. "We need a return to old-fashioned excellence because excellence has been compromised long enough."

SSA membership ranks expanding; lobbyist, director to be introduced

The new lobbyist and the new executive director of the Nebraska State Student Association will be introduced at an SSA legislative assembly Sunday in the Lincoln Hilton Hotel, said Nette Nelson, a board member of the statewide student lobbying group.

The SSA was formed last year. UNL and Peru State College were the original members. Students at UNO have since voted to join the SSA next fall. Wayne State College students will vote on joining the organization in a special election Feb. 10 and 11.

"We've been up to Wayne a couple of times to talk about the SSA," Nelson said. Wayne State student leaders such as Dave Shively, student president, have supported SSA informational efforts, Nelson said, and the Wayne State student senate voted to endorse the student group. Wayne State will send five or six people to the assembly Sunday, Nelson said.

"We'd like to emphasize that people

from all the potential member campuses have been involved from the beginning," Nelson said.

Shively said that student reaction at Wayne State has been generally positive. "We had a student forum on the SSA just recently. Some students had the concern that the SSA would be dominated by the university system, but most of them felt we would have pretty equal representation in the (SSA) board of directors," he said.

Shively said the SSA could have an impact in making students more visible and influential in government issues affecting them.

"I think if state legislators see a unified student concern from across the state, it will have a strong impact on at least some of them."

The student senate at Kearney State College voted to put the question of whether to join the NSSA to a vote of the students at large on its regular student ballot in March, Nelson said.



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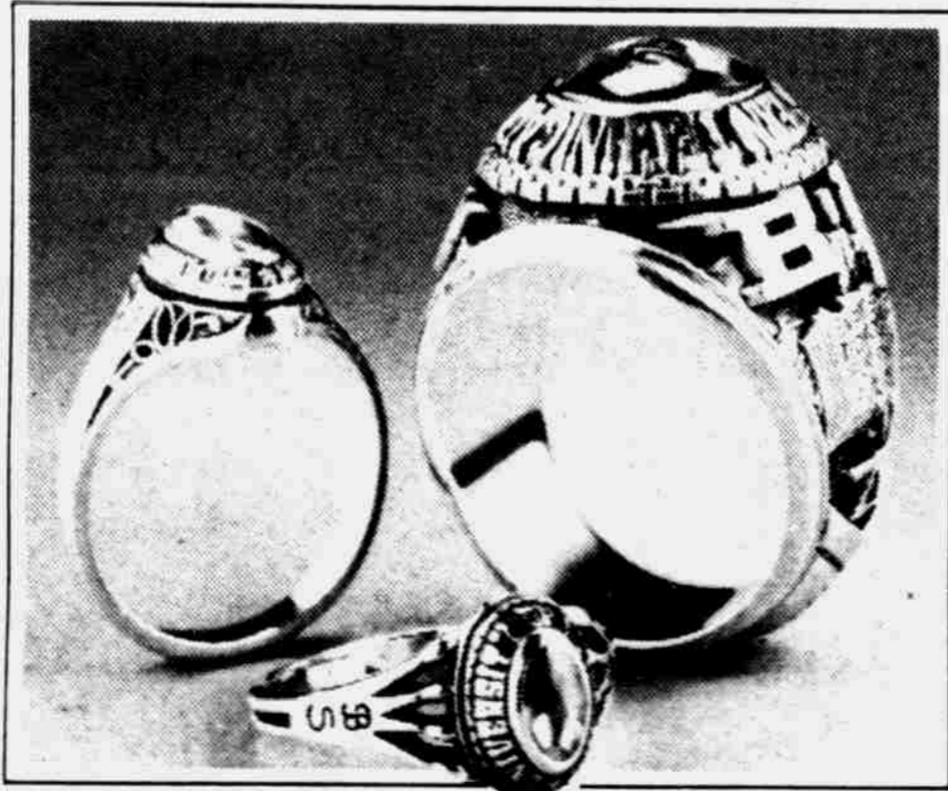
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