

Union dining room is source of pride and frustration

Editor's note: This is the third article in a four-part series on the Nebraska Union food services.

By Ward W. Triplett III

The Colonial Dining Room has been a source of both pride and frustration for Union Board members and union staff officials. Despite what Ronald Pushcar, director of food services at the union, calls the "best salad bar extravaganza in town, the CDR still is not attracting a major proportion of its most likely customer group — students."

"We need to make students more aware of it," Nebraska Union Director Daryl Swanson said. "I think that students sometimes come near (the \$3.50 CDR all-you-can-eat price) . . . going through the Union Square."

The soup and sandwich service, open from 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m., is virtually the only one of its kind in the downtown area.

For the \$3.50 entry price, the customer can serve him or herself from more than 80 salad entrees, including three greens. Fruit cocktail, strawberry and chocolate mousse, oriental fried noodles and marinated beans are among the extras included. Four meats — ham, turkey, roast beef and corned beef — are available along with Swiss, husker or sharp cheese for making sandwiches on rye or white bread. Steak soup and a soup-of-the-day also are available.

"It's highly possible to go in there three different days and fix three totally different salads without repeating yourself," Swanson said.

The CDR was formally a sit-down-and-be-served business but seemed to attract only university administrators and staff. While the CDR developed steady customers, the room was too much of a financial burden to bear that way, Swanson said.

"I had some reluctance to change," he said. "I knew there was a certain group that would object to any change, and that any change would have to be permanent."

Pushcar suggested the soup and salad format. The room closed for one week last March and, working under a \$3,000 limit, opened the next week with the new format.

The fixed price was the last touch Pushcar suggested. This way checks will be predictable from day to day and not run lower in actual amount like those in the old CDR often did, Swanson said.

"There's both good and bad in that," Swanson said. "But, basically, it's done what we wanted to do."

The CDR has been hosts to guests involved in food service, Pushcar said, and all of them have said it is an excellent service.

"There are two areas here I feel very proud about," he said. "The first would be the (Union) Square, with that being the first project we've had to build from the ground up. The other is the quality service we've been able to give in the Colonial Dining Room."

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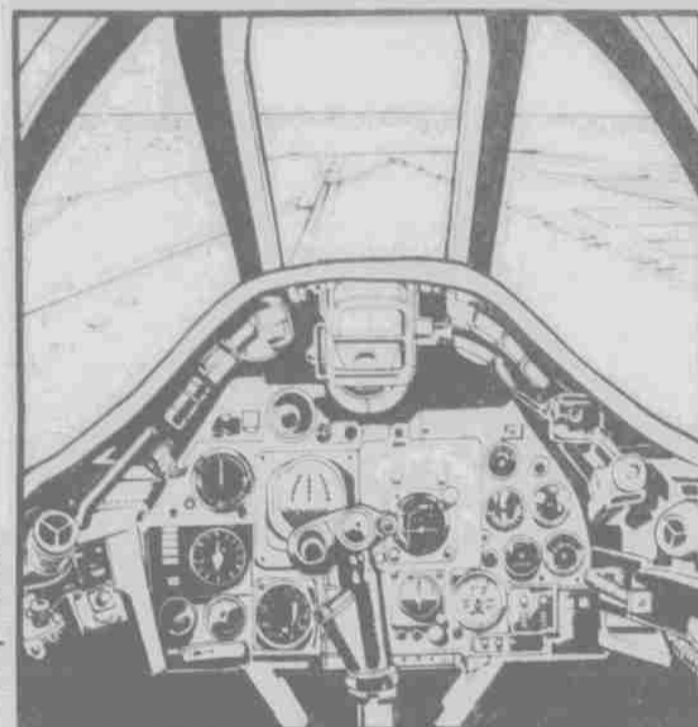
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