



Nebraskans pioneers in videodiscs

By John Meissner

Nebraska is a state of pioneers — in agriculture, energy alternatives and, since 1978, videodisc technology.

"We're one of the oldest agencies in the business, and certainly have to be considered one of the leaders," said Ron Nugent, director of the Nebraska Educational Telecommunications Center.

Since its inception, made possible by grants from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, the group has demonstrated the flexibility and capability of this relatively new communications innovation, Nugent said.

"The videodisc is a very dense audio/visual storage medium," Nugent said. "Access time to information located anywhere on the disc is less than five seconds, as compared to minutes on a videotape. Plus, videotapes cannot freeze on one frame, while discs can hold a shot indefinitely."

A single disc can store 54,000 still pictures, making its use as a filing system evident, Nugent said.

"Imagine a slide carousel that could hold 54,000 slides," said Charlene Henninger, a unit director in the Nebraska Videodisc Group. "Museums could use discs to store pictures of all their paintings or artifacts."

When still-frames asking questions are keyed to move with a user response, and the videodisc unit is connected to a microcomputer, the system's full potential is realized, Nugent said. The user has

access to computer memory and graphics and can interact in a very sophisticated manner with the program. Real-life situations are generated and decisions are called for, which, Nugent said, is very appealing to educators.

"We've designed and produced over 100 discs for different groups," Nugent said. "Presently, our efforts are channeled into two main areas — post-secondary education and industrial training."

"UNL is using programs we designed in the law school and the physics department," he said. "Testing of additional programs is under way in the physics, life science and chemistry departments."

Henninger said the advantage of videodisc instruction is that it's self-paced. The user cannot proceed until the skill on the disc is mastered. Thus, instruction in any field, from teaching a youngster a front somersault to teaching someone in the military how to use a particular weapon, can be done much more efficiently and, in the latter case, more cheaply," she said.

In the future, Nugent said, computer peripherals are a natural extension of the videodisc. Touch screen (where the user touches the screen instead of using a keyboard) is one example of this. The EPCOT Center in Florida uses touch screen extensively. Also, because of the success of "Dragon's Lair," more games will use videodiscs, Nugent said.

"The videodisc is here to stay," Henninger said. "Our group has been recognized internationally as the best. We're the pioneers."

Shorts

The Great Plains Cribbage Players are sponsoring a cribbage tournament Feb. 5 at the Airport Inn. Registration will begin at 9 a.m. with tournament

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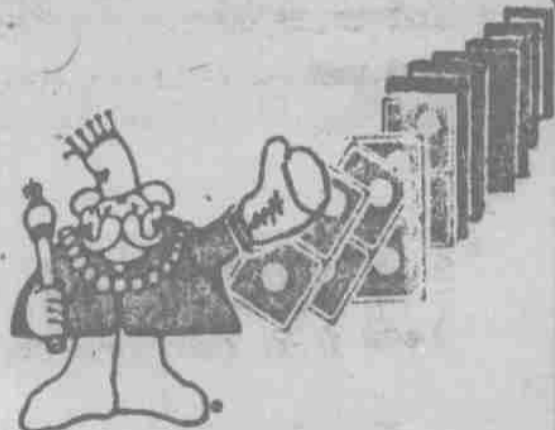
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