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## Pitchers wind up for summer in sun

By JUDI NYGREN

It's that time of year again. Thousands of family members and friends are piling into their cars — the water jug and kids in the backseat — and heading to the city's softball diamonds.

According to Lincoln Parks and Recreation Department figures, about 12,000 Lincolmites play slow-pitch and fast-pitch softball each summer. The sport has more participants than any other intramural sport in Lincoln, said Steve Hiller, the department's assistant superintendent of athletics and aquatics.

Because so many people participate in softball, it is one of the season's biggest social events.

"Wives, husbands, girlfriends and boyfriends come along (to the games) and afterwards they stop off for a soft drink, ice cream or at a local tavern," Hiller said. "During the summer, people are more mobile.

They're out and about and more involved in everything. They just want to enjoy the summer atmosphere."

Both slow-pitch and fast-pitch softball are popular with fans who bask in the atmosphere, but Hiller said the players prefer slow-pitch softball.

"Slow-pitch is by far the most popular — primarily because it doesn't take highly skilled athletes like fast-pitch does," he said. "And a team doesn't have to scour the country looking for a fast-pitch pitcher."

Stan Campbell, UNL's director of campus recreation, said the pitching style in slow-pitch makes the game popular. Campbell, who plays outfielder for a UNL co-rec team, said he prefers slow-pitch because in his position he gets in on a great deal of action.

"In fast-pitch, the pitcher dominates the game," he said. "Outfielders swat mosquitoes."

Whether players choose slow-pitch or fast-pitch, they face expenses. In order for a team to play through UNL's recreation department, players must pay \$20, \$10 of which is refunded at the end of the season if the team has not forfeited a game. UNL supplies the field and bats and players can rent other equipment for a small fee. All UNL teams are co-ed.

The city's entry fees are \$80 for co-ed teams, \$150 for slow-pitch and \$170 for fast-pitch. The city supplies the field, but players must provide uniforms and all other equipment. Each player also must pay \$5 for field upkeep.

Hiller said some teams spend up to \$3,000.

To combat the cost, most city teams find sponsors. Hiller said some sponsors buy the uniforms, some pay the entry fee and some pay for both the uniforms and entry fee.

Craig Kingsley, manager of P.O. Pears, 322 S. 9th St., said the bar sponsored three slow-pitch teams last season. The bar paid for the uniforms and entry fees, he said, and often allowed the players to buy half-priced pitchers of beer after a game.

Although softball is the hottest sport of the season, the recreation departments offer other activities. UNL sponsors a faculty golf league, singles tennis league and outdoor volleyball. The city offers tennis and horseshoes.

For people who do not want to participate in weekly games but want to enjoy the outdoors, UNL offers nine trips ranging from rockclimbing in Colorado to canoeing in Utah.

Mark Ebel, the department's assistant director, said the trips appeal to many kinds of people. The trips are open to students, faculty members and alumni, but he said 90 percent of the travelers are students.

People go because the trips are challenging, Ebel said.

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