

Press wins worldwide acclaim; sets printing, sales records

By Chris Burbach
Daily Nebraskan Senior Editor

A lot of people don't know it, but the University of Nebraska has yet another perennial top-20 finisher. For this team, however, the words block, run, title and sell-out have new meanings.

The University Press, according to criteria of total dollar sales and number of titles in publication, is now the number 12 press of its ilk in the United States.

"It (University Press) is tremendously successful. We're envied all over the country," Editor in Chief Bill Regier said.

The presses have run since 1941. University Press has been through some hard times since then, but it's prospering now. Its presses now churn out about 80 books a year, which return \$2.1 million in sales each year, roughly double the 1981 total income. The press is non-profit. All earnings go back into operations.

According to Regier, they got where they are the old-fashioned way — they earned it through hard work and the able management of Director Dave Gilbert.

"Everybody here works real hard," Regier said. "Every department of the university says that, but few really do."

"Production has increased; we have more books of better quality."

Two such books released this year are "Dust Bowl Descent," a

book of photographs compiled by Bill Ganzel, and "Karl Bodmer's America." Both books have garnered acclaim; the latter has gotten better review attention than any book the press has ever done, Regier said.

Many people — readers and authors — identify the University Press with books like "Dust Bowl Descent," books that tell the story of the American West.

"Our bread and butter has been western America, its history, and regional subjects," Regier said. "In the '70s there was a vogue for Indians — Life magazine did an article on Indians, people wore Indian clothes..."

The press took advantage of that vogue and earned its reputation for work on western America. Such specialization is part of the changing world of most university presses.

"Before, a faculty member wrote a book and the (university) press reviewed it, made suggestions, and printed it," Regier said. "But that's changed. Now, we're no longer simply printers for the university — we serve more as advisers for faculty."

"University presses have begun to establish a list more and more — to specialize — ours is the American West."

While the American West may be the press' specialty, it certainly is not its sole field.

"We are known for that among the people who are interested in

that field," Marketing Director Darla Beckman said. "They may be unaware that we publish other books in other fields. We emphasize the aspects of our publishing program that we need to our various audiences."

They do indeed "publish other books." Their catalog of books in print this year covers 51 pages with authors and titles, books ranging from "Among the Mormons" to "The Recruiting Game: Toward New Systems of Intercollegiate Sports" to a literary criticism of Ovid's "Metamorphosis."

The press' distribution ranges as far and wide as its titles do. It has sales representatives in the United States and Canada, England, Europe, the Middle East, Africa, Asia and the Pacific — salespersons who work on commission, and make money doing it. The press mails its catalogs to about 40,000 people — authors, booksellers and bookbuyers.

They also recruit authors worldwide — a process that, by Regier's count, accounts for about two-thirds of the books they print — spanning the globe to bring manuscripts to Nebraska.

"There's a vast segment of the population that doesn't know books exist," Beckman said. "But among book lovers, we're pretty well-known."

"We're sometimes told we're the second-best known part of the university," Regier said. "The first is the football team."

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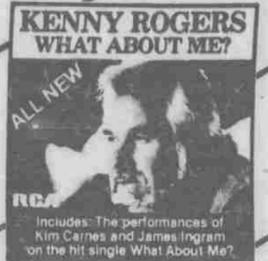
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