

Daily Nebraskan

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University of Nebraska-Lincoln

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Weather: Snow likely today, beginning mid-morning, with a high of 26 (-3C). Thursday night snow continuing with a low of 16 (-9C), 2 to 4 inches possible. Friday, cold with snow ending and a high of 25 (-4C).

Bob Brubacher/Daily Nebraskan

What's in The Mag today?...Page 5

Nebraskans trap, skin Badgers...Page 14

Robots boost product quality, but threaten workers' jobs

By Matt Okerlund

Special to the Daily Nebraskan

America's industries are on the cutting edge of a change. It is a change that weaves itself into the social and work fabric of the nation, matching man and machine.

For manufacturers, it is a change that comes in the name of higher productivity, lower labor costs and increased product quality. For workers, it is a change that threatens their jobs.

Even in Nebraska — where industries often are insulated from change — robots are entering the workplace.

"A robot excels over a person because of its consistency and quality," said Joseph Le-Cointe, senior automation engineer at Square D Company in Lincoln.

"If you have a situation where an operator is building something by hand," Le-Cointe said, "then you have to deal with unions, you have to deal with moods and you have to deal

the momentum of robotics has swelled in the past few years.

The international report notes that in 1982 the global stock of robots was estimated at 31,000, more than double the 13,700 in 1980. The organization predicts that by 1990, robot numbers will climb to 330,000 with an annual-volume gain of 30 to 35 percent in the next decade.

At Cushman OMC Lincoln, a manufacturer of utility vehicles and turf maintenance equipment, two robots have been purchased since 1982 to work in welding operations.

Gerry Ogren, manager of manufacturing engineering at Cushman, said the robots are producing twice as much as a human worker because, unlike a worker, they do not have to spend time loading and unloading the materials welded. And since robots make each weld the same, they have a higher degree of quality than workers, Ogren said.

A producer of electrical circuit breakers, Square D company soon will have a robot in operation. As a past developer of robots for General Motors and Ball Aerospace, Le-Cointe said Square D's first step is to study what the robot can and cannot do before deciding where it best fits on the work floor.

Gilbert G. Laws, president of the United Rubber Workers of America in Lincoln, said that by early next year, a robot will be set up at Goodyear, a plant that largely manufactures rubber belts and hoses for automobiles, appliances and machinery.

In line with other union leaders, Laws questions the prospect of a robot progressing onto the industry floor, but he accepts it as a move that must be taken if U.S. industries are to remain financially sound.

And while "more and better" are the standard words being issued by manufacturers when introducing robots to the workplace, not all workers are so quick in welcoming the programmable machines.

The OECD report outlines why workers are skeptical. Currently, most robots have performed simple pick and place tasks. The report says each of these robots displace 1.4 to 1.6 human workers. But the speed of robotic sophistication and application is blinding, and a legion of robots with the mechanical expertise to see and feel is foreseen by the mid-1980s. The OECD study notes that each of these robots will displace four to six workers.

In coming years, industries involved in the mass production of goods increasingly will install robots and automated machinery, said Jack Siegman, a sociology professor at UNL. As a result, some workers in these factories will lose their jobs, he said.

Richard Schonberger, a management professor at UNL said many of the companies that are bent on putting in robots are those which have had trouble with workers and unions.

"Much of the interest in robots is based on situations where labor and management haven't gotten along well and labor is viewed as a problem rather than an opportunity," Schonberger said.

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Phil Tsai/Daily Nebraskan

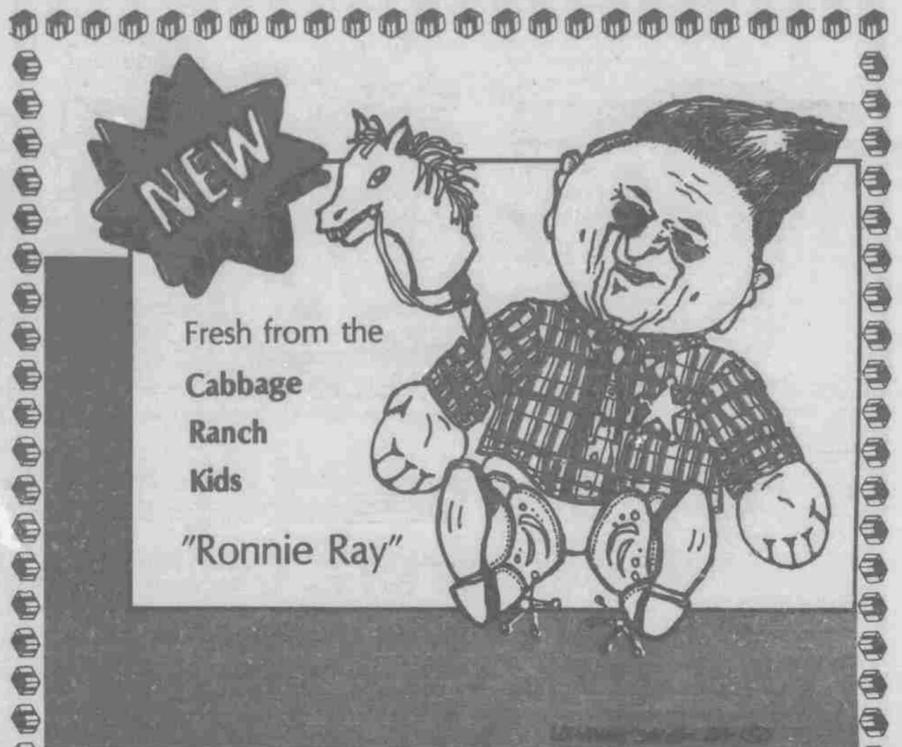
with holidays and coffee breaks. But with automated machines, you have control over the quality. And that's a big plus with robotics."

Le-Cointe echoes the thoughts of many manufacturers who view robotics as a defense against the keen foreign and domestic competition of a world market.

In Lincoln, two manufacturers — Goodyear Tire and Rubber Co. and Square D Company — are on the verge of installing robots in their production lines. One industry — Cushman OMC Lincoln — already has two robots in operation.

"We felt that in a world economy, in order to be as efficient as we can possibly be, we're going to need the best tools, the best machines available. And in this case it means robots," said Ron Maulsby, spokesman for Goodyear.

Goodyear is not alone in its drive for efficiency. An Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development study tracks how



Fresh from the
Cabbage
Ranch
Kids

"Ronnie Ray"

Unusual Christmas gifts help cure gift-giving woes

By Beth Thompson
Daily Nebraskan Staff Reporter

Editor's note: This is the fourth article in a five-part series on the fun, festivities, economics and headaches of the holiday season.

In a rut about what to buy family and friends for Christmas?

Using a little imagination and knowing what the hot gift ideas are may turn an otherwise drab gift into a festive surprise this holiday season.

For unusual friends with extraordinary tastes, Judy Wilson, director of Haymarket Art Gallery, said, "We're loaded to the gills with stuff." Wilson's merchandise, ranging from \$2 to \$2,500 consists of only handmade items — nothing she sells is made from a pattern.

Haymarket, 119 S. Ninth St., has gifts for those hard-to-choose people — things like hand-woven scarfs, paintings, metal sculptures or stuffed teddy bears and pigs.

Wilson also carries wooden antique car puzzles ranging from 15 inches to 5 feet long. Also, for the food-lover, homemade mulberry and elderberry jams can be purchased

in six-packs.

Janie Lane, owner of Fringe and Tassie, now located at 735 O St., suggested the latest rage in nostalgic fashions as a special — if unusual — Christmas surprise. For men, fedora hats of the '30s and '40s are selling for \$30 to \$40. Thin-striped, narrow ties sell for \$3.

For women or men, long tweed overcoats are popular for \$20 to \$30. And the famous, full-length racoon fur coats are selling for \$50 to \$125.

Catching up with the times, Caryn Clinton, of Richman Gordman's home entertainment department, 4600 Vine St., said video games still are popular for Christmas this year.

While Frogger, Popeye and Zaxxon are popular Atari games, Target salesclerk Bob Glenn said Trivial Pursuit for \$23.86 (\$18.99 for the smaller editions) and Cabbage Patch dolls for \$29.99 still are popular with kids.

Glenn said the craze for such games and toys begin by "word of mouth. It's kind of like a domino theory." When a child owns a popular toy, all of his friends want one.

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More than \$500,000 tagged

Kerrey announces aid for bankrupt farmers

By Gene Gentrup

Daily Nebraskan Senior Reporter

Bankrupt farmers can get help finding a new career through a program announced Tuesday by Gov. Bob Kerrey.

The "Farmers in Transition" program will offer career counseling, assistance in resume writing, pre-employment training, on-the-job training, classroom training, supportive services and relocation assistance for bankrupt farmers.

Kerrey said the program is designed to help the increasing number of bankrupt farmers, and

said he disagreed with U.S. Secretary of Agriculture John Block and former Agriculture Secretary Earl Butz about the status of bankrupt farmers.

"They're saying the number of people leaving the farm today is no greater than in the past. That's foolishness. There is a far greater number than in any other period of time," Kerrey said.

Labor commissioner Ron Sorensen said more than \$523,000 has been budgeted for the program. The Greater Omaha Area would receive \$174,028, the Greater Lincoln area would get \$50,000 and the rest of Nebraska

would get the remaining \$299,281.

"It's our responsibility to not only deal with the factors which are causing this, but to also help assist those farmers who are now seeking to enter a sometimes very different work place," he said.

Kerrey said the state will help farmers as much as possible but said the state will not loan farmers money "so that they could try and start up an already failed business."

"The state can't afford to become a lender of last resort," he said. "In the area of credit, it is a private and federal responsibility. The state just can't afford to do it."

Sorensen said that to become eligible for the program, farmers must show evidence of permanent business dissolution through foreclosure, bankruptcy, inability to secure capital necessary to continue a business operation, or proof of voluntary foreclosure. Persons formerly employed by a now-dissolved business would also be eligible, he said.

Kerrey said the program also is an attempt to help federal government officials better recognize the problems in the farm sector. He accused the federal government of taking a "market-level

approach" to the country's agriculture problems and criticized U.S. Budget Director David Stockman.

"David Stockman is doing the same thing he did in 1981," Kerrey said. "He put together a budget bill and not a farm bill. His approach is to let the 'law of the jungle' determine who is successful and who is not."

More information on the program, which is funded through the Job Training Partnership Act, can be obtained from local job service offices and county extension offices.