

UNSTA students get a taste of rural life

By Ad Hudler

CURTIS — They're building farmers in this small southwestern Nebraska town.

Ag mechanics. Ag businessmen. Ag producers. This is where people go to get hands-on experience in Nebraska's leading industry.

The University of Nebraska School of Technical Agricultural — called "Unstuh" by local natives — has been a part of UNL's College of Agriculture since 1965.

The 68-acre campus sits at the bottom of a hill in north Curtis. Winding sidewalks connect old red-brick buildings. A small barnyard encloses cows and horses on the east side.

Administrators at UNSTA take pride of the fact that many of their graduates return to help on Dad's farm, or leave to work at the local Co-op. Nearly 90 percent of UNSTA's 3,000 graduates now work in Nebraska, says Gerald Huntwork, associate director of UNSTA. Several work in Lancaster or Douglas counties — mainly because that's where the jobs and people are, he said.

Most of the 240 students at UNSTA come from the eastern half of the state, Huntwork said. All for different reasons.

Dean Dvorak from Valley is here to study ag business, one of UNSTA's six majors. Dvorak says he didn't grow up on a farm and doesn't know much about farming. Curtis fills that void.

Amy O'Connor of Omaha came to become a veterinary technician, the equivalent of a nurse for doctors. UNSTA has the only accredited vet tech program in the state. She likes the small rural atmosphere.

Ask any student on this hilly campus what they like about UNSTA, and they'll probably mention hands-on experience.

That experience, Huntwork said, is what makes UNSTA different from UNL's ag programs. Students here spend about 50 percent of their time on theory and 50 percent on practical experience, mainly because it's a technical school, he said.

A January day finds veterinary technician students inside a sterile concrete room, studying the muscles of dog cadavers. In the greenhouse, horticulture students work with

See **STUDENTS** on 8



Ed Qualley, Frank Collins, Dave Dankert, Tom Vogt and Brian Doernemann stand in front of the FarmHouse fraternity on Center Street. UNSTA was the first 2-year college in the country to charter a major fraternity.