

It beats frying burgers

Student says he enjoys his 'highly' unusual occupation

By C.J. Schepers
Staff Reporter

A University of Nebraska-Lincoln senior says he has a "highly" unusual part-time job. He climbs skyscraping radio towers that are as tall as the Empire State Building -- about 1,200 feet.

No, it's not your typical part-time job, says climber Chris O'Callaghan, but it sure beats the humdrum of frying burgers at a fast-food chain or clerking at the local discount store.

And it also helps pay his tuition. O'Callaghan has been scaling and repairing towers since 1987 for Tower Base Inc. He says it's actually one of the safer jobs he has had.

Other jobs he's had include working construction at great heights and clearing thick sections of the Nebraska National Forest at Halsey.

But, he said, he sees his current job as nothing more than a cautious climb up a ladder.

"It's actually safer than climbing a ladder," he says, because a tower never tips.

Climbing cloud-piercing towers isn't for everyone.

In fact, UNL graduate Butch Blankenau, an enthusiastic rock climber and no stranger to heights,

decided to give the job a try. Ascending the tower with O'Callaghan and his boss, Greg Kozisek, Blankenau climbed up to 100 feet and could go no farther.

"It's different," he said, shaking his head.

"There's no rope. At least in rock climbing you have a rope on you all the time."

But O'Callaghan says the trick to fighting the altitude fear is learning a basic rule: Never let go of the tower.

Although once stationed to make a repair, climbers' belts hook on to the tower securely, the journey to the top is made without any safety props.

No ropes. No nets. Just trusty feet and hands.

"Just make sure you have a three-point contact" between both feet and hands, O'Callaghan said.

And that's about it for safety precautions, he said.

What about hard hats?

Forget it, he said.

O'Callaghan recalls one day when a co-worker who, at 300 feet, let a bolt accidentally slip through his finger. It sliced through an opened van door.

Other than remembering not to let go or drop anything, it's just another

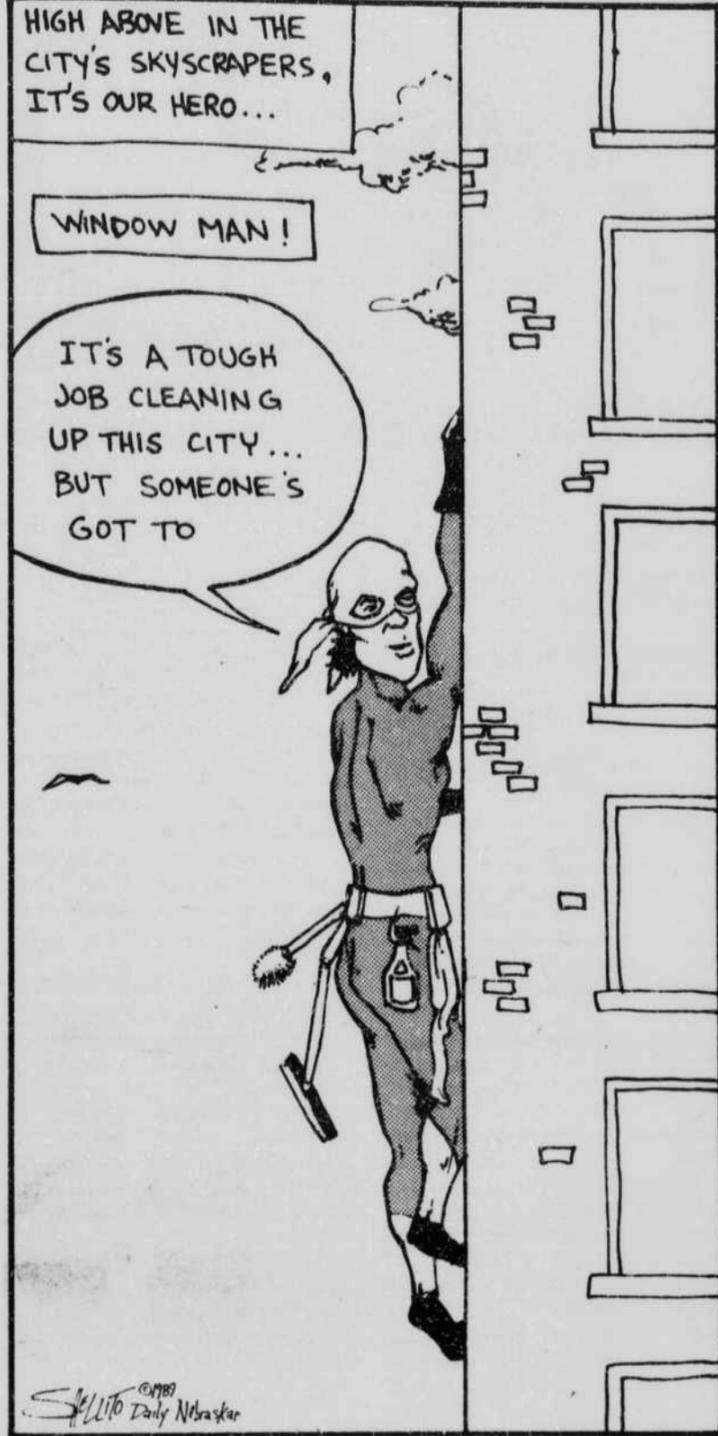
part-time job to O'Callaghan.

The English major says he sees his job as a reprieve from the everyday stresses of school.

He matter-of-factly describes it as "nice up there."

"You can even see the ocean up here," he laughs, shouting down from a Lincoln tower at 200 feet.

In Nebraska? Now, that's a tall tale.



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facility will be covered by tuition, Lucas said. He said he expects a small operating budget to be established to pay the faculty members who teach in Grand Island.

Communications systems will constitute the most expensive part of participating in the park.

Lucas said he believes that most UNL classes will be taught by satellite.

Most other classes at the park will be taught the traditional way, with instructors traveling from their institutions to teach the students, Manchik said.

Some classes will be taught by television through either satellite or fiber-optic communication systems.

Satellites transmit only one-way video and two-way audio communications, Manchik said, while the fiber-optic system would allow two-way audio and video

communication so teachers and students could hear and see each other.

Manchik said that by using television, an instructor can "work with three here, three in Kearney, three in Scottsbluff."

By teaching students in many different locations at once, Manchik said, the university can justify the cost of fiber optics.

Lucas said the university has been involved in talks with Grand Island officials to provide higher education in the area for about a year and a half.

"Technology is allowing us to fill our higher education gap," Manchik said.

Each participating school will be responsible for its own administration, Manchik said, though College Park has a board of directors to negotiate disputes between institutions.

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she said. Rosa Vinsonhaler, retail assistant for the University Bookstore, said her department doesn't have electronic dictionaries or translators. But, she said, she can order Franklin linguistic products from Omaha upon request.

Special orders take about two days, Vinsonhaler said.

Michael Gilmour, electronic sales representative at Nebraska Bookstore, said his department carries some of the 18 products in the Franklin Computer line. He said he can special order products not currently available.

Nebraska Bookstore is one of the few retailers in Lincoln to carry the Sharp Wizard, a new electronic organizer that can perform many tasks, depending on the computer card inserted into the organizer, Gilmour

said. The cards, which look like credit cards, provide not only a new touch-sensitive control pad but give the Wizard a new range of memory.

The original Wizard works as an organizer, capable of arranging such things as personal schedules and phone numbers. But with the addition of the IC Language Card, he said, the Wizard can translate more than 450 phrases in eight languages.

Sharp also offers a card for expanding its organizing capabilities and a card for an electronic dictionary/thesaurus, Gilmour added.

In addition to increasing capabilities with new program cards, extras like expansion ports for printer and computer hookups seem to be the wave in future electronics, Gilmour said.

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