

Lincoln parks among the nation's best

By Mick Dyer
Staff Reporter

There's more to a park than trees and grass and flowers and squirrels and birds and fountains and things.

Much more. There is catharsis and respite from the anxieties and frustrations that build up from living in this busy, busy world.

Don Smith, director of the Lincoln Parks and Recreation department, said that parks are a vital part of any community. He said parks provide the community with beautiful open spaces, and also give people a pleasant place to spend their leisure time.

Smith said Lincoln has an outstanding park system. And if you have spent leisure time at any one of the roughly 80 parks in Lincoln -- ranging in size from the backyard-sized mini-parks scattered throughout town to the 1,450 acre Wilderness Park -- you might agree with him.

At any rate, the Lincoln Parks and Recreation Department has been recognized for excellence at the national level.

"I think that speaks well for our department, our city fathers and our citizens," Smith said.

Smith said he is proud of the Lincoln parks department's high marks. He said that when compared to other park systems in the nation, Lincoln's is one of the best.

"I think we rank right up at the top for any community of this size or larger," Smith said.

The park system in Lincoln has a rich history.

When the frontier city was designed in 1865, citizens saw the need for a park in the new community. So civic planners set aside a two-block area for a park. And when the city later was incorporated, the park area became the property of the city.

That park is Cooper Park, located at 6th and D streets.

Since then, the people of Lincoln always have seen the need for new park areas as the community grew and changed, Smith said. But often, the city didn't have the money to buy and develop new parks. It was through the efforts of citizens in the community, either by donating lands or by organizing

the contribution of lands to the city, that much of the park land in Lincoln came into being.

Smith said many prominent Lincoln families have donated park land. The Harris family -- no relation to Mayor Bill Harris -- gave the land for Pioneers Park, at South Coddington and West Calvert streets. The Seacrest family donated Seacrest Park, 70th and A streets, and the Sunken Gardens, 27th and D streets. The Woods family donated land for Woods park, 33rd and J streets.

Other affluent and public-minded individuals also have donated or helped secure park lands for the city, and many of these parks bear their names.

Parks are maintained by funding from general tax monies and also federal and state money when it is available, Smith said. Many of the parks in Lincoln were developed with help from the Land and Waters Program, a fiscal government program funded by off-shore drilling rights. Smith said many parks around the country were developed through funding from the Land and Waters Program, but unfortunately, there is little money left in the program.

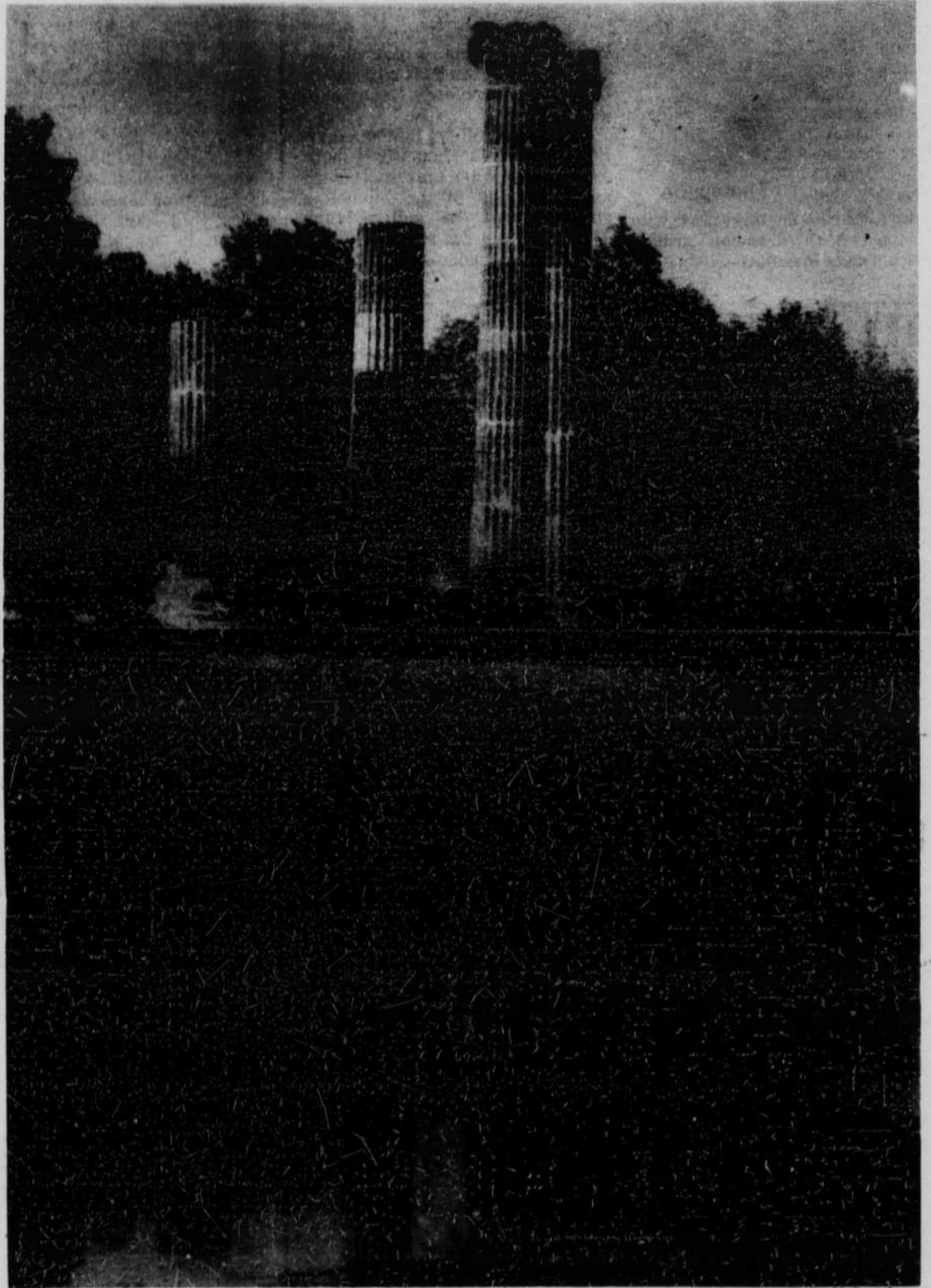
The contemporary goal of the Department of Parks and Recreation is to have parks within a quarter to a half mile of any home in Lincoln, Smith said. There are a few exceptions to this goal, he said, especially in new housing development areas, but the department usually meets its goal.

He said the parks department and the public school system often work together to develop schools and parks close together in new housing areas. Since both often are built and maintained through public funding, it is easy to locate a park and a school close together, Smith said.

And, he said, the community is better served and the neighborhood is enhanced when there is a park located near a school.

Smith said that for a community of its size, Lincoln parks don't have serious crime or vandalism problems.

"Lincoln is really fortunate to be in the place where it is," Smith said. "People really appreciate what we have."



Al Schaben/Daily Nebraskan

The Sandstone Columns at Pioneers Park is a pleasant place to spend leisure time.

Missouri student wins Miss America pageant



Andy Manhart/Daily Nebraskan

ATLANTIC CITY, N.J. (AP) - Debbye Turner, the new Miss America, is a born-again Christian who sang a religious rap song at her first public appearance, promising in rhyming patter to "sing His song ... everywhere I go."

Miss Turner, a veterinary student from Missouri, was crowned late Saturday as Miss America, besting runner-up Miss Maryland, Virginia Cha, 25, of Frederick, in the 68th edition of the popular pageant.

On a dare, the 23-year-old who became only the third black woman to wear the crown started clapping her hands and sharing the same song she gave the other 50 contestants backstage Saturday night before the pageant started:

"Well, I love the Lord ... with all I know ... going to sing His song ... everywhere I go. Going to sing about the love ... sing about the faith ... sing about seeing Him face to face," Miss Turner sang, continuing on with seven more verses.

Even pageant officials clapped along, including 91-year-old Adrian Phillips, a retired pageant director who traditionally escorts the new Miss America to her first news con-

ference.

Phillips has seen new Miss Americas giggle in response to reporters' questions. He has seen some winners touch on controversial subjects.

But a rap song is a first.

"This new Miss America is exactly what I anticipated," pageant director Leonard Horn said afterward.

Miss Turner now puts her education on hold for a year to serve as Miss America 1990. She said she will travel around the country "motivating the youth of this country to excellence."

"My mom taught us how to do things not because we're female or black or southern, but because we have what's on the inside to do it," she said. "I'd like to inspire young children to dream about being an aeronautical engineer ... and I don't care if you grew up in a ghetto."

"Be bold enough to overcome the pressure and not try that drug. Be bold enough to stay in school and study. Be bold enough to be an individual and not a part of a group," she said.

As the third black Miss America, "I don't know if I bring any added dimension," she said. "Being black

is the very least of who I am. I had nothing to do with it, and that's not landmark. I just came that way."

During pageant week, Miss Turner remained quiet about her religious convictions. But as soon as she was crowned, her faith in God became apparent. She said Sunday that she has been a born-again Christian since age 7.

"There's nothing mystical or sensational about it," she said. "It's simply that I believe in God and I depend on him for direction in my life."

For the record, Miss Turner said she:

- Is "politically moderate -- I vote my conscience."
- Has a "very good friend," but not a boyfriend.
- "Right now I'm kind of busy with other things," she said, grinning.
- Is pro-life. "I would hate to see the day when we have what I call 'microwave abortions,' being able to kill life simply because it's inconvenient to have it or because it's the wrong sex."

• Mastered the marimba - her pag-

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