

CHUCK GREEN

Niceness not enough in Lincoln

All things considered, Lincoln is a nice town. Not great, just nice.

"Nice." What a trite word. But this town we call home, for at least part of the year, where we work, play and study, is in need of a few improvements. The city's \$1 billion-plus budget wouldn't have to be tripled to make them happen.

There's nothing wrong with Lincoln in general. After all, it was named the ninth-best place to live in the United States last summer by Money magazine, based on crime rates, clean environment, quality of education, inflation rates and the job market.

The city has lots of trees, fountains, parks and other nice — there's that word again — things that make it a first-rate place in which to grow up or raise a family.

The crime rate is low, and former Mayor Bill Harris' anti-drug youth program has served as a model for other cities across the country. The town is relatively clean, the college atmosphere gives almost every resident an uplift, and the people here are hard-working, wholesome and actually care about stuff, even if many of them drive stupidly.

But through all that sugar-coating emerges a not-so-great aspect of Lincoln. It's called ignorance of reality, and it's widespread and pervasive. It's the fault of everyone, not just the city decision-makers.

One would be hard-pressed to name a U.S. city without problems, in which all residents are happy with their surroundings. Lincoln is no different.

There are several ways Lincoln could be made a much more enjoyable place for people of all ages.

A few:
● Quit building movie theaters and start thinking of other things to do.

Lincoln has more movie theaters per capita than any other city on earth, except maybe Omaha. In fact, I remember reading somewhere that if you lined up all the theaters in Lincoln end to end and rolled them into the ocean, um... well, I don't know, but Lincoln still has too many theaters.

The Lincoln Theater was built last year and is an awfully nice place. But for some reason, that's just not enough. Now the drawing board is filled with a 10-screen theater, or some such thing, that is supposed to become the centerpiece of downtown, the crown jewel of Star City entertainment.

Who cares? In this day and age of video cassette recorders, people generally can watch movies at home for less money whenever they want to.



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People still are going to the movies, but in Lincoln, much of the reason could be because there's not much else to do.

How about a water park on the outskirts of town, for those 110-degree summer days? It would cost money, but it could be built to be the only true waterpark in Nebraska.

Yes, Omaha has a couple waterslides at Peony Park and the Funplex, but those parks are no Wet 'N' Wild- or Oceans of Fun-type places.

A park with two dozen or more slides/rides and a wave pool would boost Lincoln's economy, and would pay for itself relatively quickly.

After all, driving to Kansas City isn't always convenient on a boring Saturday afternoon in June.

● Keep the bars open until 2 or 3 a.m.

This one has been a hot issue for a long time. The usually over-conservative Lincoln City Council, with its infinite wisdom, has time and time again deemed it necessary for Lincoln to stop drinkin' at 1 a.m., so everyone can be fresh for church on Sunday morning.

And, naturally, the horrible image of morally bereft college punks getting juiced up for another hour or so and then hitting the streets in their rolling caskets has everyone shaking in his or her slippers.

However, in comparably sized towns such as Ann Arbor, Mich., and Madison, Wis., in which bars are open later than 1 a.m., there were fewer drunk driving convictions than in Lincoln last year, according to official 1990 statistics.

It could be coincidence, but maybe not. Besides, if people are going to drive drunk, they'll do it no matter what time it is.

● Remember the kids.
Having grown up in Lincoln, I can attest to the fact that there is little to

do here if you are unfortunate enough to be between the ages of 13 and 21. Parties get old, and sometimes are hard to find, and high school kids who cruise O Street are often hassled by business owners and police officers.

But what else have they got to do?

This town is in dire need of a couple teen dance clubs that provide a place to go other than a parking lot on O Street. A nightclub like the Precinct or the Underground, without alcohol, in which teen-agers could dance, listen to music, see a band or just hang out with friends, might even reduce vandalism, drug abuse, underage drinking and other forms of juvenile delinquency city leaders so enjoy complaining about.

● Strive to increase cultural awareness by narrowing the gaps of misunderstanding.

Lincoln is fortunate enough to possess a good mix of cultures. This city has a large Asian population, as well as dozens of other ethnic groups, but few groups know much about the others.

The Lincoln Police Department recently established a program for its officers to become more aware of cultural customs and differences, particularly the religious practices of Southeast Asians in Lincoln.

The LPD program stemmed from a misunderstanding between police officers and a Southeast Asian family whose religious healing practice was misconstrued as child abuse.

A similar program could be initiated within the social sector of Lincoln through more city-sponsored ethnic functions to increase understanding between cultures. Street fairs, exhibits at Pershing Auditorium and inter-cultural festivals are all possibilities.

● Synchronize the traffic lights downtown.

This pales in comparison to the aforementioned issues, but it's important to the mental health of Lincoln's residents. This is one of the few cities I can readily think of whose traffic lights will turn red when the one a block earlier just turned green. Driving is serious business, and stopping at EVERY stop light for eight blocks in a row is a threat to civil harmony.

And that's where niceness ends.
Green is a senior news-editorial major, the Daily Nebraskan columnist.

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