

Human relief

Professor heads city effort to aid Cuba

By DeDra Janssen
Staff Reporter

University of Nebraska-Lincoln Sociology Professor Robert Benford and Pastors for Peace are providing human relief to Cubans because the system doesn't.

On July 19, the U.S.-Cuba Friendship Caravan to Cuba will arrive in Lincoln to pick up aid donations for Cuba.

Lincoln is one of 12 U.S. routes through 110 cities organized by the national Pastors For Peace organization, based in Minneapolis. Benford is the coordinator of the Lincoln effort.

"There are many concerned people in the U.S. who are generous with their time and money and are willing to reach out to people beyond their borders," Benford said.

More than 200 volunteer drivers will pilot 80 trucks loaded with 100 tons of material aid destined for churches in Cuba, where the aid will be distributed to natives. The trucks will meet in Laredo, Tex., then cross the border into Mexico where the aid is loaded onto a Cuban ship. The drivers will meet the ship in Cuba and help unload the supplies.

But, because of the U.S. trade embargo against Cuba, enacted in 1960 and strengthened in 1992, the caravan may have problems getting the aid to Cuba, Benford said.

The first caravan to Cuba in 1992 was initially not permitted to cross the border into Mexico. In a day-long stand-off with U.S. customs officials, the drivers of the caravan were accused of violating the trade embargo of Cuba, but after world-wide condemnation and extensive press coverage, U.S. officials allowed the caravan to pass without issuing a license under the terms of the embargo.

Benford said the reasons for the Friendship Caravan to Cuba are twofold: human and political.

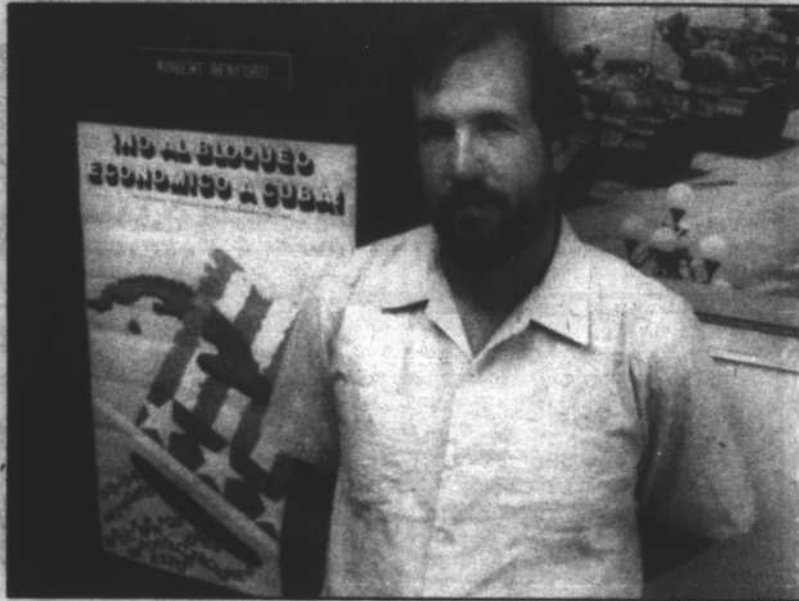
"We want to provide human relief — we want to provide for their needs because the system doesn't," Benford said.

But the caravan also wants to call attention to and openly defy the U.S. trade embargo of Cuba, Benford said.

He said there were a lot of problems with the logic in maintaining the embargo.

"It's a social construction of evil," Benford said. "This is the last vestige of the Cold War. What are we concerned about? There is no threat to the U.S. or to U.S. interests."

He also said continuing the embargo may worsen U.S. relations with Cuba and that a moral question is involved as to whether the U.S. has a



Damon Lee/DN

UNL Sociology Professor Robert Benford

right to interfere in the internal affairs of a sovereign nation.

"To continue the Cold War is a dinosaur. I see no benefit that the U.S. could gain," Benford said. "It's immoral to hold 11 million people economic hostage and deprive them of the quality of life they've worked so hard to achieve; it's in the U.S.'s interest to have a normal relationship with Cuba."

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Benford also has an interest in having a normal relationship with Cuba.

With a long-standing interest in social change, teaching classes on the subject and doing research, Benford said he has always wanted to go to Cuba.

"The more I've learned about U.S. foreign policy, the more I've come to distrust anything my government tells me," he said. "I thought I should go take a look for myself to see what life is really like in Cuba."

What Benford found surprised him. "I never saw the kind of oppressive social control measures that are reported in the U.S. press and by the state department," he said.

exhaustion is only part of a continuum that also includes heat injury and heat stroke.

LaBeau said the most common form of heat disorder is the heat injury.

"In this situation, a person may feel nauseated, tired and experience cramps," LaBeau said.

With heat exhaustion, which is the next step on the continuum, a person may experience profuse sweating, fatigue and shutdown of the kidneys, LaBeau said.

He said he didn't see any soldiers with automatic weapons walking around anywhere.

"I expected to find an oppressive society. Clearly Castro is a dictator, but I found not only a high quality of life but a great regard throughout the society for human dignity," Benford said.

Yet, because of the collapse of the Soviet Union, Cuba's chief source of trade, and the strengthening of the U.S. embargo, Cubans have fallen on hard economic times and suffer from shortages in practically everything, Benford said, which is why the Friendship Caravan is so important.

Benford said the most acute shortages were in currency and petroleum, which affect everything else, such as industrial production, agriculture, transportation and electricity.

"When I was there, I saw a family of four on a single bicycle," he said.

And the diet in Cuba is even more scarce, Benford said. Each person is allotted five pounds of rice, three pounds of beans, two pounds of fish and fruits and vegetables for one month.

And while the caravan provides some aid, it is still not enough, Benford said.

"It's helping, but in a country of 11 million people, it's like spitting in the ocean," he said. "The direct aid provides help to specific human beings, but it's only a band-aid. There's such a great need now."

Still, the people appreciate it. "When you tell them your with Pastors for Peace, they think you're a hero," Benford said. He said people in Mexico line the streets and applaud when the caravan goes through.

Labeau said heat stroke was the most serious of the three heat disorders.

"With heat stroke, a person goes into shock and loses blood pressure; I think this situation definitely requires hospitalization," LaBeau said.

LaBeau stressed that to avoid falling victim to heat disorder it is important to drink plenty of water. He also recommended that people should not push or overwork themselves when they are not yet used to the typical hot, humid Nebraska weather.

UNK

Continued from Page 1

student leaders and have a whole series of meetings for fact finding," she said.

Massengale said Johnston had "favorably impressed members of the UNK faculty, students, staff and administrators."

"The feedback I received from those on the Kearney campus and in the Kearney area who had the opportunity to meet with her was overwhelmingly positive and enthusiastic," Massengale said.

Johnston, who received her Bachelor of Science degree in History from Cheney University in 1963, earned her Masters degree in 1969 in Educational Administration from Temple University.

She was also awarded a Doctorate from Cornell University in Philosophy with emphasis on Organizing Theory and Behavior in Educational Administration.

Massengale said she was well prepared to help lead UNK.

"Her background and experience are outstanding, and we believe these combinations of qualifications will serve her well in her work as chancellor," he said.

Along with her time spent at DePaul, Johnston has served as dean of the College of Education at Arizona State University and chairperson of the Department of Management at Rutgers University.

Johnston said her new position at UNK will be more demanding than the previous jobs she has held.

"I think this job will be more complicated in a positive sense," Johnston said. "There are different constituencies between the public and the universities."

As for moving to central Nebraska from Chicago, Johnston said she is anxious for the change.

"Every place is unique," she said. "The Midwest is definitely middle America; I'm more than excited and look forward to it."

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Sun

Continued from Page 1

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Heat exhaustion is another problem associated with the summer months, LeBeau said. He said heat