

Sleepout raises money and awareness for homeless

By Nick Wiltgen
Staff Reporter

Cardboard boxes, each containing a blanket and pillow, flanked a stage at Antelope Park on Friday.

To the 250 area residents who attended the Great Plains Winter SleepOut, the boxes represented what some people call home. The third annual event is designed to raise money and awareness for the homeless.

About 100 of the participants stayed overnight in the park. Some even slept in the cardboard homes.

Among those attending were about a dozen political figures, including various public officials and candidates in the upcoming election. The event featured gospel music from singer Annette Murrell and role-playing games designed to help participants understand the problems the homeless face.

Sue Ellen Wall, chairwoman of the sleepout's planning committee, said the sleepout was held for two reasons.

"First of all, we want to educate people in Lincoln about the issue of homelessness," Wall said. "There are homeless people here in Lincoln, and many people don't understand that that's the case."

Wall said she also wanted to raise money for homelessness. Money raised from this event goes directly to services for the homeless such as food and shelter, Wall said. None of the money raised Friday goes toward the



Bruce Schlieder, a Great Plains Winter SleepOut participant, prepares to go to sleep. Schlieder joined more than 125 people who slept out Friday night to raise money for the homeless.

Jay Calderon/DN

administrative costs of homeless services.

Wall said corporations contributed \$10,000 this year. She expected more funds to be collected from individual donations. In each of the past two years, the sleepout has raised about \$26,000.

Several Lincoln police officers donated their time to provide security during the sleepout. Wall said the

previous two sleepouts had been held at Centennial Mall in late October.

Wall said the organizers also found a new place for the event because of the potential problem of having the event the night before a Nebraska football game.

"We worried about downtown traffic and, especially the night before a game, the safety of the participants," she said.

Michael Carpenter, chairman of the Lincoln Homeless Coalition, said a significant homeless problem existed in the Lincoln area.

"Over 3,000 individuals will become homeless in Lincoln and Lancaster County each year, and over half of those will be women and children," he said.

Carpenter also said not all homeless people were alike.

"You know, a person who is a cashier in a quick shop or a person who is serving you your lunch in a restaurant, all of those folks are potential homeless individuals," he said. "Many of us are about a paycheck away from not being able to support our existence in terms of shelter and basic needs."

Barry and Lisa Forbes spent the night at Antelope Park. The two, who have attended the event before, said even though sleeping in the park wasn't like being homeless, they still learned a lot from the experience.

"The first year I was out, I talked to a homeless person," Lisa Forbes said. "They told me, 'Well, this really isn't anything like it.' I don't think that's the point."

"It's increasing awareness that's really important, because as long as people know about it, then we can do something about it."

Julie Fults, a student volunteer with the Joe Mertz Center for Volunteer Services at Union College, said students sometimes didn't think they could help raise money for the homeless. Students have a hard time getting pledges from other students, whom Fults said usually were broke.

The sleepout, however, gave them an opportunity to show support, she said.

"I encourage them to come and sleep out or at least come to the program, because the larger a number of people we can get to show up, the more the city of Lincoln will realize this really is an issue."

Engineering

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only as a basis for discussion, Smith said, and will provide a strategic plan for meeting the engineering needs of the state, including a plan for implementing a separate engineering college.

"The task force is not charged with delivering recommendations or alternatives," Smith said. "The task force report is to come to the president. I will study it and make a recommendation to the board."

The task force also will provide a detailed analysis of engineering needs in the state and in Omaha, he said.

Regent Robert Allen of Hastings said researching the need for another engineering college in Nebraska was wasting time and money.

"We know we have a good engineering school," Allen said, referring to the high marks the University of Nebraska-Lincoln engineering college received on its recent accreditation report.

But the report also showed that the college had equipment that was in bad shape and needed to be refurbished, he said.

"We had better protect what we have ... (before) we start going off wasting all this time on this expensive study," he said.

Smith said it was impossible to say

whether the university was wasting time until the report was finished. When he makes his recommendation to the board, there will be plenty of time for discussion, he said.

Regent Rosemary Skrupa of Omaha said she didn't think researching the issue was a waste of money.

She said she was troubled that so many regents had spoken out about the issue before getting information from the task force or hearing Smith's recommendation.

In the courts, that's called backdooring the judge, she said, and the judge could hold them in contempt of court. The recommendation will come from Smith, she said. Regents should stay out of the discussion until that time.

Smith said the task force would analyze enrollment, faculty/student ratios, funding, space and trends in both graduation and employment in engineering.

In other board action, a curricular review in the College of Architecture, which was on the agenda for discussion, was passed over. The revision will require students to purchase computers in the fall. The cost of the computers is estimated at \$3,000.

It was erroneously reported Friday in the Daily Nebraskan that the regents would vote on the matter. However, because the decision is about curriculum, it does not need regents' approval.

Enrollment

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Other universities, however, have actively tried to find those students, he said.

"You hear stories like 'Nobody at UNL ever contacted our child,'" Spanier said. "All you have to do is wink at us, and we'll be all over you. The problem is, many of those students have never winked."

The result is that UNL is not getting its share of the top 3 percent of high school graduates, Spanier said. Below that, however, UNL does well, he said.

Spanier laid out the following revisions to improve UNL's recruitment:

- A team effort in recruiting, involving more faculty and undergraduates.
 - A special honor recruitment team that looks at the top 10 percent of high school graduates.
 - Individual campus visits for honor students.
 - Honors Program textbook scholarships.
 - Earlier awarding of scholarships.
 - Scholarships for transfer students to try to recapture Nebraska students who leave the state or go to community colleges.
- "You can't buy good students," he

said. "A good student is not going to come here no matter what the monetary fund unless they're going to get a quality education."

A recent U.S. News & World Report ranking that placed UNL ninth in efficiency is a double-edged sword, he said. On one side, it is good public relations, he said. On the other, part of the reason UNL got such a high ranking is because of the small budgets it provides its faculty.

Spanier said prospective students constantly were hearing about possible budget cuts, and that hindered recruiting. Students worry that the university will eliminate, downsize or sacrifice program quality.

To combat those fears, Spanier said the university needed to emphasize communication by responding more quickly to student inquiries.

Spanier said undergraduate enrollment was expected to stabilize during the next five years, while the number of graduate and transfer students should increase.

Spanier said he attributed part of a 42 percent drop in enrollment in the Division of Continuing Studies to the opening of a branch of Southeast Community College in downtown Lincoln.

That effect was seen mostly in the lower-level classes, he said, while enrollment numbers in the higher classes remained stable.

Regents approve UNL bid to buy fraternity house

From Staff Reports

The university will move quickly to begin renovations on the former Beta Sigma Psi Fraternity house, a UNL administrator said Friday at the NU Board of Regents meeting.

James Griesen, vice chancellor for student affairs at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, said he expected the university to begin issuing supplemental Student Fees and Facilities 20-year Revenue bonds to pay for the building at 2224 U St.

The regents unanimously approved UNL's \$430,000 bid on Friday. The fraternity agreed to sell the house to the university pending the board's approval.

Griesen said a tax appraisal valued the house at \$489,000. A separate appraisal by UNL valued the house at \$435,000. UNL was one of seven bidders on the house, he said.

Griesen said he would return to the board next month with a request to withdraw \$900,000 from the Facilities Bond Surplus Funds for campus building maintenance and repair.

Investigation

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Colborn said a Lancaster County grand jury would convene within the next month or two to examine evidence from the state patrol's investigation.

Although the county attorney's office had filed no charges as of Sunday, Colborn said it could decide to press criminal charges before the grand jury met.

The officers involved in the incident all were placed on administrative leave, which is procedure in such investigations. This is the first time in at least 40 years that a UNL police officer has been placed on leave, Cauble said.

Although she will continue to be paid, Veskna has been relieved from duty until further notice, he said. UNL police will review her case today.

"I've never had a complaint filed for any type of misaction," Cauble said. "I feel that the actions the officer took were proper at the time with the information she had available."

Editor Jeff Zeleny and The Associated Press contributed to this report.

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