

Daily Nebraskan

COVERING THE UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA SINCE 1901

VOL. 94 NO. 34

INSIDE MONDAY

SPORTS

■ Huskers roll over Oklahoma State, Page 6-7

ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT

■ Professor takes combat seriously, Page 9

PAGE 2: U.S. to send 50,000 troops for Gulf duty

OCTOBER 10, 1994

Quiet remembrance



Michelle Paulman/DN

Veronica Santillan listens as Jose Soto reads a letter he wrote to Lincoln Police Chief Tom Casady at a vigil for Francisco Renteria Sunday evening. "Our community is outraged," Santillan said. "I'm really glad there's such a show."

March on mall honors Renteria

By Matthew Walte
Senior Reporter

Participants at a candle-lit march in honor of Francisco Renteria gathered in front of the Lincoln Police Department Sunday night.

"Viva la Raza," they shouted. "Vivan los Renterias."

Long live the Mexican people. Long live the Renterias.

More than 200 people marched from the steps of the State Capitol to the Lincoln Police Headquarters.

The crowd stopped at the County City Building where members of the silent march stood displaying Mexican flags.

The marchers gathered in memorial to Renteria, 30, who died Oct. 1 after a struggle with police. Witnesses have said police beat Renteria while they attempted to take him into custody.

Renteria was mistakenly identified by a University of Nebraska-Lincoln police officer as a man violating a protection order.

The state patrol is investigating the incident. The mood among the marchers and the family was calm and somber. Few displayed signs or spoke as the group moved along Lincoln Mall.

Among the marchers, University of Nebraska-Lincoln professors Helen Moore and Moira Ferguson said a special prosecutor should be appointed to investigate Renteria's death.

"We need good answers, solid answers about what happened," said Moore, an associate professor of sociology. "We're concerned about issues of racism and how this community responds."

Moore compared Renteria's situation to the arrest of Gerald Schlondorf, a white UNL student, who was arrested in the shooting of a UNL police officer.

Schlondorf, who police knew was the right suspect, was armed and allowed to surrender, Moore said. Renteria, she said, was the wrong man, unarmed and died while in police custody.

Members of the Latino community were

resolute that their questions be answered about the incident, Moore said. She said she hoped Lincoln Police and UNL Police worked to answer to the community.

Ferguson, an English professor, said that if a special prosecutor was appointed, he or she should not be a member of the state or county legal community. She said she was pleased with the formation of a university committee to review UNL police procedures.

Marty Ramirez, a counseling psychologist at the University Health Center, said the Latino community was feeling a combination of anger, frustration and a faith in the justice system.

"There is an allegiance side of us," he said. "Don't misconstrue what we are doing as anti-American."

Renteria's death brought many members of the community into reality, Ramirez said.

"It's something we recognized, but it's still (a) shock," he said.

See VIGIL on 2

Bjorklund won't face more charges

From Staff Reports

Roger Bjorklund's death sentence has prompted prosecutors to drop eight felony charges against the convicted murderer.

Lancaster County Attorney Gary Lacey said he decided Friday to drop the robbery and theft charges because it would be a waste of taxpayer money to pursue them.

Bjorklund was sentenced Sept. 20 to die in the electric chair for the abduction, rape and murder of Candice Harms, a University of Nebraska-Lincoln freshman.

Lacey said the charges would have resulted only in more prison time for Bjorklund. Bjorklund already will be in prison for the rest of his life, Lacey said.

Bjorklund and Scott Barney were charged in the robberies that occurred around the time Harms was murdered.

Barney was sentenced to life in prison for the murder. The robbery charges against him were dropped after a plea agreement with prosecutors.

Hall officials clarify new flame rule

By Chad Lorenz
Staff Reporter

A housing official met with residents at Neihardt Hall Sunday night to discuss housing's new policy banning open flames.

Seven residence hall directors and residents from Pound, Selleck and Neihardt halls attended.

The meeting was held to show students the policy's rationale and to hear residents' opinions, said Glen Schumann, housing director.

After two fires in Abel residence hall last year, housing decided to ban the burning of candles and incense in residence halls, Schumann said.

Housing was reluctant to make another restriction for students, he said, and another rule for student assistants and residence hall directors to enforce.

He originally opposed the policy, Schumann said, but he finally agreed there was a need for it.

"It's hard to turn our backs on what happened last year," he said.

Some residents at the meeting asked why cigarette smoking was not prohibited as part of the policy. They said cigarettes were as dangerous as incense sticks, which are banned.

See FLAME on 2

Officer says police should expand cultural knowledge

By Brian Sharp
Senior Reporter

As society becomes more diverse, police must learn to speak society's language and work within its terms, an Omaha police officer said.

Sgt. George Cardenas has been with the Omaha Police Department for 28 years. He now works in the gang unit.

Understanding different cultures helps police understand why people do things a certain way, Cardenas said. Police in Lincoln may not have shown that understanding on Sept. 30, he said.

That night, Officer Charlotte Veskma of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Police Department tried to stop Francisco Renteria at 24th and Holdrege streets. Renteria did not speak English.

A scuffle ensued, and it involved five Lincoln Police Department officers. After the scuffle, Renteria had a seizure and went into a coma. He died on Sept. 31.

Cardenas, who is Hispanic and speaks only Spanish, said the encounter violated two traditional Hispanic customs.

First, placing Veskma, a female police officer, in a position of authority over a Hispanic man could be interpreted as disrespect, Cardenas said.

Hispanic culture places great emphasis on respect, especially for men, he said.

"The 'machismo' with Hispanic men, that's very much in the Hispanic culture," Cardenas said. "And the more the culture is in you, the more you feel it."

Cardenas said he thought the culture was strong in the Renteria family, after he heard them speak last week.

At that time, Carlos Renteria said his brother, Francisco, had respected and feared the police. Cardenas said that fear of authority was prevalent throughout Hispanic communities.

Police violated Hispanic custom a second time by looking Renteria in the eye, Cardenas said.

Police are taught to establish eye contact to judge a suspect's guilt or innocence, he said. But in Hispanic culture, eye contact is seen as a challenge.

Many Hispanics would view both acts as robbing Renteria of the basic respect a human being deserves, Cardenas said.

"It's an ugly thing," Cardenas said. "You just don't address another Hispanic in such a way to make him feel like he's an animal."

"If you do, there's going to be a confrontation. If it would've been a man there ... the

chances of something occurring would've been lessened."

Police departments throughout Nebraska have faced increasing language and cultural barriers in their communities in the past six years, some police chiefs said. An increasing number of Hispanics have moved from Mexico to the Midwest for jobs.

Norfolk Police Chief Bill Mizner said the barrier had been most noticeable with Spanish-speaking individuals. Of the 36 Norfolk police officers, he said, one is Hispanic and two are fluent in Spanish.

The department first tried using interpreters, Mizner said, but that was not helping on the street. The department then advertised to hire bilingual officers, he said, and it calls them even when they're off duty.

See POLICE on 2