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inside **T** Thursday

Sports

Huskers upset Missouri in Columbia, page 7

Arts & Entertainment

Theatrix presents "Bright Girls, Stupid Lives," page 9



February 23, 1995

Officials speed efforts to lure Micron plant

NU leaders plan aid for company

By Brian Sharp
Senior Reporter

OMAHA — Under normal conditions, upgrading the Omaha engineering program might have taken up to three years, NU President Dennis Smith said Wednesday.

But these aren't normal conditions.

With the possibility of Micron Technology Inc. locating a \$1.3 bil-

lion computer chip plant in Omaha, most of the proposed changes will be implemented by fall, he said.

"It clearly has accelerated our efforts," Smith said in an announcement at the University of Nebraska at Omaha.

Smith talked of a bold step to interact and plan curriculum with industry, specifically mentioning Micron.

"We will tailor courses and curricula to meet Micron's needs in chemical engineering, materials processing or any other area in which we have the expertise," Smith said.

See MICRON on 6

Micron

Developments Wednesday in bringing Micron to Omaha:

- The Legislature advanced LB830, one of three economic incentive bills aimed at luring the microchip firm to Omaha.
- NU President Dennis Smith said most upgrades to UNO's engineering program would be in place by next fall.
- UNL Chancellor Graham Spanier said UNL would provide lab facilities and faculty for joint projects.

Incentive bill passes round 2

By John Fulwider
Staff Reporter

State senators gave second-round approval late Wednesday night to a bill designed to lure Micron Technology Inc. to Nebraska.

After more than six hours of floor debate, senators pushed LB830 through on a 29-6 vote.

At 10:24 p.m. Sen. Ron Withem of Papillion brought a motion to sus-

pend the rules, which ends debate on a bill and brings it to an immediate vote. After more than one hour of debate about the rules suspension, LB830 was approved at 11:31 p.m.

LB830, the Nebraska Redevelopment Act, is one of three bills designed primarily to lure Micron Technology Inc. to build a computer chip plant near Omaha.

The bill would allow cities to designate property as "blighted or substandard" so that companies wishing to develop it could receive tax incentives.

Wednesday evening's debate was

See LEGISLATURE on 6

In the lobby



Lobbyist and UNL senior business administration major Dustin Ruge stands in the Capitol rotunda Tuesday afternoon. Ruge is a lobbyist for the Nebraska State Rifle and Pistol Association.

NRA lobbyist wields big guns to end stereotypes

By Sean McCarthy
Staff Reporter

Along with juggling the stresses of a college senior, Dustin Ruge faces a responsibility that normally is given to a person twice his age.

Ruge, a finance major, is the head lobbyist for the Nebraska State Rifle and Pistol Association. His efforts have taken him to the State Capitol and the Omaha City Council.

Ruge, the head lobbyist for more than two years, describes his responsibility as providing information for legislators who don't understand the issues his organization supports.

Ruge said he knew the stereotypes about lobbyists.

"Most people think that lobbyists are the scum of the earth," he said.

But Ruge still loves his work. One of his biggest motivations is his belief in the organization.

"Wielding that power in the Capitol building is an incredible thing to do," Ruge said.

Ruge's career began in 1993, when he testified on a gun bill in the Legislature. He caught the attention of Jack Lenzi, the head of government affairs for the Philip Morris corporation.

Lenzi, a lobbyist for the National Rifle Association, asked Ruge if he would like to work for him. Ruge then worked beside Lenzi whenever Lenzi came to Nebraska.

Though Ruge meets with national representatives from the NRA, he works mainly within the state. Part of his responsibilities include interacting with the constituents of his organization and organizing people to testify about bills.

The NRPA has remained on the offensive in its lobbying since 1992, Ruge said. One of the bills that the organization is currently lobbying against is LB779. The

bill would make it an offense to carry a firearm on public grounds.

One part of the bill Ruge said he disliked was the mandatory placing of trigger safety mechanisms on guns. That provision, like others on gun control, may sound good to some, but may do more harm than good.

"For instance, trigger-lock distributors have actually said that their trigger-lock devices are not to be treated as a safety mechanism," Ruge said.

Ruge said his work usually fit in with his school schedule. Ruge is also a member of the Sigma Alpha Epsilon Fraternity.

Sometimes things interfere, and he may work on a bill for more than two weeks.

Ruge said he had not ruled out the opportunity to lobby nationally for the NRA after he graduated. He also is interested in working overseas in finance, he said.

"Even if I don't work with the Nebraska State Rifle and Pistol Association, I'll always be interested in it," Ruge said.

"Our inalienable rights to liberty are our only protection against governments that may not always remain benevolent," Ruge said.

Partnership with Pfizer may expand

By Paula Lavigne
Senior Reporter

The University of Nebraska-Lincoln would expand its partnership with Pfizer Inc. if the company relocates its headquarters in Lincoln, university and city officials said Wednesday.

The city of Lincoln said the university was a strong selling point for the company, which would bring about 250 executive-level jobs.

Pfizer has a plant in Lincoln, which it purchased from SmithKline Beecham on Jan. 20. Lincoln is a potential site for their corporate headquarters, now located in New York. Pfizer specializes in pharmaceuticals for livestock and domestic animals.

Charles Lamphear, director of the Bureau of Business Research at UNL, said the Beadle Center's work with biotechnology would make the university a strong partner with Pfizer.

"It's got most of the basic ingredients in place," Lamphear said. "This is just the beginning of more to come."

He said the partnership's main emphasis would be on moving research technology into the marketplace.

The partnership also could involve funding grants at the university, he said, and having Pfizer staff members work with researchers at UNL.

Donald Helmuth, associate vice chancellor for research, said UNL also would rely on its long relationship with SmithKline Beecham and its relationship with Pfizer to expand its commitment.

The university has shared equipment and resources with both companies, and has offered joint seminars and on-site education, he said. UNL also worked with SmithKline Beecham on research project patents in the '70s.

Helmuth said the university was engaged in about six contracts with Pfizer. He said strong faculty members in the veterinary and biomedical sciences made UNL an excellent area for animal health.

Mayor Mike Johanns said that along with Lincoln's quality of life and low cost of living, UNL's contribution to the community was a selling point.

The mayor said he hoped corporations like Pfizer would feed back into the university.

By strengthening Lincoln's business offerings, Johanns said he hoped more university students would stay in Lincoln after graduation.

Mark Essman, vice president for economics-research development with the Lincoln Chamber of Commerce, said the university was a highlight of packages the city put together to attract corporations because of its research base and willingness to work with businesses.

"The university is one of the major players in town when it comes to recruiting," he said. "It's also one of - if not the - largest employers in town."