

# Daily Nebraskan

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March 31- April 2, 1995

## Man helps woman, child escape fire

By Jeff Zeleny  
Editor

Cliff Kubert's decision to take the day off work Thursday to volunteer at his church is likely the reason a Lincoln mother and her 4-year-old daughter escaped a house fire without injury.

Kubert, a Lincoln Telephone Co. employee, was trimming branches at Grace Methodist Church, 2640 R St., when he saw smoke pouring through trees near 25th and S streets. Kubert said he located the source of the smoke — a blue two-story house at 424 N. 25th St. — and reacted immediately. — and reacted immediately.

"When we spotted it, it was light smoke," Kubert said. "When I got here, flames were shooting."

Kubert said knocks on the house's back door were not answered. The flames, which came out of second-story windows on the southeast corner of the home, touched a power line and sent sparks flying behind the house, Kubert said.

Stephanie Vinson, 28, and her 4-year-old daughter Toneshia were awakened when Kubert banged on their front door.

"It scared me," Vinson said in an interview behind her home, as smoke continued to roll out of the windows. "I never heard nobody knock that hard on a door before."

Vinson said she and her daughter were sleeping on a mattress in the living room when Kubert arrived.

Toneshia remained calm, Vinson said, but they ran out of the house immediately.

"I just panicked and picked her up and walked out the door," Vinson said, as she stood with bare feet in the parking lot behind the house.

The fire was reported by a neighbor at 11:39 a.m. Thursday, Deputy Fire Chief Dean Staberg said. The entire second-floor was engulfed when firefighters arrived, Staberg said.

"There will be no way they can live here," Staberg said.

Fire Investigator Eric Schoen said the blaze remained under investigation late Thursday. The fire started in a vacant bedroom on the house's east side, Schoen said.

Vinson said her five other children, who also live in the house, were at school when the fire broke out. She also said she didn't know the cause of the blaze.

Firefighters controlled the blaze in fewer than 10 minutes, but smoke rolled out of the southeast top corner of the house for hours. Heat rippled the blue house siding, and black, charred debris lay scattered throughout the neighborhood.

Mary Thompson, who lives directly south of the burned house, said electricity to her home went out

See FIRE on 6

## Underwater adventure



Gerik Parmele/DN

A diver watches for sharks above the underwater tunnel in the Kingdom of the Seas Aquarium at the Henry Doorly Zoo in Omaha.

## Elaborate exhibit to open Saturday

By Paula Lavigne  
Senior Reporter

Imagine walking into an arctic cocktail party where the tuxedo-clad waiters swim like bullets through the punch bowl and waddle proudly with their beaks in the air.

Step around the corner under the watchful eyes of an octopus and enter a tropical beach where a rainbow of fish sparkle in the rippling water.

Walk on the ocean floor under 450,000 gallons of water as sharks hover overhead, coral reefs surround you and jellyfish wait for you at the end.

But you don't have to charter a boat to take this worldwide journey. This aquatic adventure unfolds at the Omaha Henry Doorly Zoo's \$16 million Kingdom of the Seas exhibit, which opens Saturday.

The kingdom features aquatic habitats from the polar regions, cold oceans, coral reefs and the Amazon, a tropical reef shark system, beach exhibit, wave tank, Pacific reef and flooded Amazon forest.

The ruler of the kingdom, Zoo Director Lee Simmons, said he had a dream 10 years ago to build a real aquarium.

Once the \$15 million Lied Jungle opened in 1992, Simmons said he "took a breathing spell" and then dived in with plans for the aquarium. Construction began in June 1993.

The Kingdom of the Seas exhibit will rank the Henry Doorly Zoo as one of the top five zoos in the world, he said.

Even as people delight at the childish antics of the penguins and stand awestruck in the ocean tunnel — the longest one in North America — Simmons said he hoped the exhibit would be educational as well.

With many people paying attention to the prairie, Platte River and rainforest ecosystems, Simmons said he wanted to expose them to a world they would miss unless they put on scuba gear.

Without oceans and the hydrological cycle, he said, life wouldn't exist on Earth.

The exhibit also will be a giant classroom and the subject of several scientific papers, he said. Although it will be ready for the public on Saturday, he said, the Kingdom of the Seas, like the Lied Jungle, will never stop growing.

See KINGDOM on 3

## Pfizer bid goes to Pennsylvania

By Paula Lavigne  
Senior Reporter

Lincoln lost its bid for the North American headquarters for Pfizer Inc. Thursday when the company chose to locate in southeastern Pennsylvania.

Pfizer, a research-based, diversified health-care company with global operations, was considering several sites for its new headquarters, including Lincoln. The company reported sales of \$1.3 billion in 1994.

"A Pennsylvania location enhances the continuing integration of our organization," said Robert W. Mullen, area president in the North American region, in a press release.

Pfizer completed its acquisition of SmithKline Beecham Animal Health for \$1.45 billion in January, and operates an animal health products plant in Lincoln.

The company owns or leases two properties in Chester County in southeastern Pennsylvania and is evaluating several other opportunities to buy,

lease or build a headquarters facility. The company will name a specific site within 60 days.

The Pennsylvania location would be close to Pfizer's worldwide headquarters in New York, he said, and would require the relocation of the smallest number of employees and their families.

Bob Fauteux, a Pfizer spokesman in New York, said the decision would have no impact on the Lincoln plant, but the plant's animal vaccine production capabilities were an important acquisition for the company.

"We were very, very pleased at the presentations made by the governor and mayor and business groups in Nebraska," he said. "And certainly all demonstrated the caliber of Nebraska, but our considerations had to be on other issues."

Charles Lamphear, director of the Bureau of Business Research at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, said Pfizer's decision did not surprise him.

Lincoln was probably rejected for

*"For some reasons we simply are kind of stalling out of getting that momentum going."*

**CHARLES LAMPHEAR**  
Director of UNL's Bureau of Business Research

non-economic reasons, he said, such as not being able to provide adequate air transportation.

"Lincoln has a real hard time getting adequate air service," he said, "and it's a threshold problem. We are just below a critical mass level to get more carries in here and schedule flights that can meet the needs of business customers."

"For some reasons we simply are kind of stalling out of getting that momentum going," he said.

## Unnamed public defender assigned to Williams' case

By Brian Sharp  
Senior Reporter

A public defender will be assigned to the case of death row inmate Robert Williams, Lancaster County District Court Judge Paul Merritt has ruled.

The decision came after both Williams' lawyers filed motions to withdraw from the case.

Officials at the defender's office contacted late Thursday said no decision had been made about who would represent Williams in his Lancaster County District Court hearing about possible juror misconduct in his 1978 trial. No date has been set for that hearing.

Williams came within three hours of his scheduled execution last week before the Nebraska Supreme Court ordered a stay.

Paula Hutchinson, one of Williams' lawyers, refused comment Thursday when asked if the decision

was made at Williams' request or with his consent. Vince Powers, Williams' other lawyer, could not be reached.

Identical motions filed by the lawyers in District Court stated that "this matter was filed on an emergency basis" without sufficient time for the court to appoint a lawyer.

Both were appointed in federal courts, but the latest issue will be addressed in District Court.

"Counsel does not believe that it was the intent of Congress to have the federal taxpayers pay for an additional proceeding and work when the state proceedings specifically allow for the appointment of counsel," the motions state.

Williams raised a conflict-of-interest question with the public defender's office in earlier court proceedings. A former employee of that office is a possible witness for the state.