

Wilke testifies his innocence, jurors acquit

By Catherine Blalock
Staff Reporter

Lincoln Police Officer Luke Wilke has been found not guilty of third-degree misdemeanor assault in the arrest of Francisco Renteria.

Testimony in the days prior to the verdict concentrated on both autopsy results and Wilke's own testimony.

On June 16, Officer Wilke took the stand to testify in his own defense. As Wilke approached the witness stand he appeared very nervous before a packed courtroom of his family, fellow officers, the Renteria family and the media.

Under direct examination from John Stevens Berry, Wilke said it had been a longtime dream of his to become a police officer.

"I told him in a loud voice he was under arrest."

LUKE WILKE

Lincoln Police Officer

He went to school in Kearney, majored in Criminal Justice, with the goal of becoming a police officer. Right after graduation he went to work for the Norfolk Police Department. He worked there for three years and then came to Lincoln.

Wilke testified about the night of Sept. 30.

He said that about ten minutes before ten in the evening, his dispatch assigned him to a disturbance call in the area of 24th and Holdredge.

When Wilke arrived at 24th and Holdredge, he saw Officer Charlotte Veskna backing away from Renteria in a defensive manner.

He yelled for the man to stop, but there was no response. He grasped the left arm and Renteria pulled away.

Wilke thought that Renteria was drunk and was Martinez, the man in question. He began to arrest him for violating a lawful order.

"I told him in a loud voice he was under arrest," Wilke said.

He said Renteria was a lot stronger than Wilke was and so he decided that the Lateral Vascular Neck Restraint (LVNR) was a good choice.

Wilke demonstrate the technique on Officer Mike Woolman.



Officer Luke Wilke stands outside the city-county building, 555 S. 10th St., after closing statements on Monday.

Tanna Kinnaman / DN

First, he began to place the left arm around the neck to protect the trachea. Next, he began to bring the two palms together and encircle the neck. Then, he pushed his knees into the subject's legs to make the subject lose balance.

"I was never able to get far enough to get my hands together," he said.

Renteria used movements similar to rear escape techniques that the police are taught, Wilke said.

Wilke became scared that Renteria might throw him so he tried another technique.

Wilke notice they were now on grass, so he began trying to trip Renteria. It didn't work. He then tried LVNR again.

There are three levels of LVNR:

- 1) Mild pressure (encircling the neck)
- 2) Sight pressure on the neck

3) Firm pressure on the neck

Wilke was only able to get through level one and was starting to use level two, but never got that far.

The second LVNR was unsuccessful so he held onto the clothing of Renteria until someone else arrived to help.

While waiting, Wilke heard someone yelling that the subject did not speak English.

Two plain-clothed officers arrived to help.

Wilke rocked Renteria to the left and both fell, with Wilke falling on Renteria's feet.

Another officer brought Renteria's arm back and Wilke handcuffed it. Renteria was still struggling and moving around after the handcuffs were applied.

Wilke took a couple of steps back. "I wanted to catch my breath," Wilke said. Renteria was still kicking his legs and some-

one asked for Wilke's rope, he said.

"I tried to make the loop big enough to fit over his right foot," he said.

Wilke demonstrated use of the rope.

Both feet have the rope tied around them and then it has a metal clasp that connects to the handcuffs.

As Renteria was moved to the cruiser, Wilke filled Captain Rowe in on the situation, after Rowe arrived at the scene.

Medical assistance was called after Renteria vomited on the backseat of the cruiser.

"I've told the truth," Wilke said when asked if he had lied under oath.

Under cross-examination by Robert Bartle, Wilke admitted that Renteria did not fit the description of Chico Martinez.

Martinez was wearing a dark blue jacket and blue shirt. Renteria was wearing a white and black checkered shirt and no jacket.

People do not always fit the description that the dispatch gives officers, Wilke said.

Wilke also testified that no one hit Renteria in the neck or the head.

On June 19, both attorneys gave closing statements.

Bartle began by talking about the critical two and a half minute time frame that occurred from the time Wilke arrived at the scene until Renteria was in custody.

The whole time officers were trying to arrest Renteria, all he was doing was trying to walk away, Bartle said.

In his closing statements, Berry brought up the fact that the words "arrest," "police" and "stop" are similar in both English and Spanish.

After almost nine hours of deliberation, a seven-man, five-women jury found Wilke not guilty.

Wilke stood before about twenty co-workers and family. The Renteria family that had attended the trial from the beginning was not present when the verdict was read.

Wilke close his eyes and sighed as Majorie Hart read the verdict.

Bartle said he will accept the decision and move on to his next case.

"I think Lincoln will learn and grow from this," he said. "I hope that all members of the community and all constituencies will accept this verdict."

Lt. Kent Woodhead of the Lincoln Police Department said, "I don't think it'll affect the police department. We think the community has been behind us."

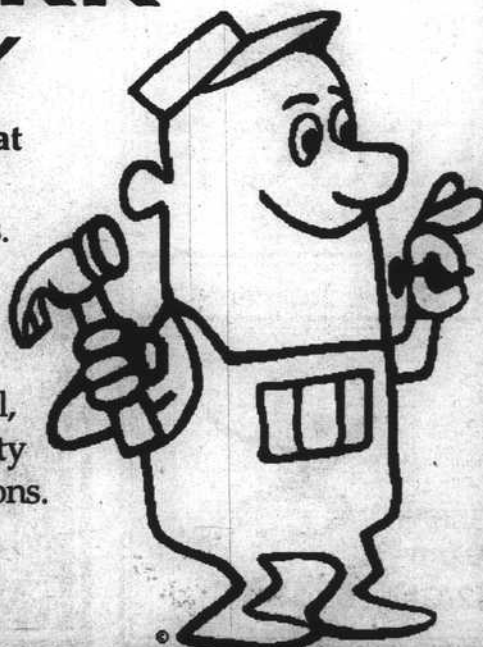
Officer Stephen Shellpeper has been charged with third-degree misdemeanor assault trial begins June 26. The grand jury for Danny Wright with the Lincoln Fire Department will reconvene this week.

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Tuition rates to be higher as regents approve increase

By Becky Keasling
Staff Reporter

The University of Nebraska Board of Regents recently approved a 6.2 percent tuition increase.

The increase will go into effect this fall and will bring in an extra \$390,000 of revenue to the university. This will cost most UNL students an additional \$119 each year.

James Griesen, Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs, said, "The money is needed for the engineering program in Omaha, salary increases, library improvement, and to hire additional temporary professors."

"We need to hire additional temporary help because the university may be facing a 400-500 increase in first-time undergraduate students." If this happens, the university will

need to offer additional basic classes such as English, history and math, Griesen said.

"Although it is difficult to adjust to the new lower division demand, we will get help," he said.

Also, half a percent of the \$390,000 has been set aside for a scholarship fund for students with financial need.

"It seems appropriate to give money to students through scholarships and grants," Griesen said. "It shows that UNL makes students a high priority."

Furthermore, there has also been a large increase in the number of students who requested on-campus housing.

Seven hundred more students than last year have reserved the housing.

Griesen said he is not concerned about this increase, and the university would not accept more contracts than it could handle.