

OPINION

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EDITORIAL

It's only a game

Amusement law should read "game over"

Once again, fun and amusement are going to be put in a half-nelson by the laws of the state and city.

The Lincoln Star reported Tuesday that Lincoln's soon-to-be Champions Fun Center, under construction at 1615 Yolande St., hit a roadblock in its operations when general manager Gordon Whitten was told that he couldn't give away prizes or free game tickets to the winners of the games.

It is a violation of both city and state laws for a game of chance to give a prize to the winner.

These are the same laws which have kept the Lincoln Chuck E. Cheese restaurant from distributing prizes for winning their games.

Out of 264 company-owned restaurants in 44 states, Lincoln is the only place where a child can't take home a stuffed animal for getting a high score in skee-Ball.

What makes this situation even more frustrating is the fact that the city law and state law can't agree on what exactly is a game of chance.

According to the state, games of chance are considered gambling, but for some reason, keno, pickle cards and the lottery are not considered games of chance.

Very grey area, evidently.

If a game of chance is illegal, then half of the midway at the Nebraska State Fair would be shut down, and there would be roving police units sent out to shut down neighborhood carnivals and arrest anyone playing pinball, because a free game can be won at the end if the last two digits of the score match the two digits randomly selected by the machine.

This kind of enforcement sounds ridiculous, but if the law is to be equally enforced, that is what would need to be done.

Whether talking about the city or state law, the law in itself is not only ludicrous, but it is rarely enforced.

Many arcades in Omaha have game tickets given out for high scores in skee-ball, and all over Omaha and Lincoln are those crane games where the winner might get candy or a stuffed animal, and that's just the tip of the iceberg.

All games of chance have elements of skill involved, but where does the skill stop and the chance begin? More importantly, can laws be made to clear up this area?

No. The area is too vast and too grey. Better to abolish the law, and start over if necessary, rather than continue to selectively enforce the current law.

Hopefully Whitten and Paul Peter, attorney for Chuck E. Cheese's, will be successful in their efforts and get the city and state laws repealed.



Problems can't sink canoe trip

This past Saturday, I spent almost 12 straight hours in a canoe.

This was not a prison sentence or even community service. It was voluntary and it was fun — sort of.

Let me back up.

For the past two months my friend Josh has been planning a river adventure on the Platte (it could have been worse — we originally thought about heading down Salt Creek).

And last Friday, eight of us hopped into four canoes just south of North Bend and drifted over 45 miles.

I'm going to have to give you a description of the cast of characters in order for any of this to make sense.

First of all, there's me — whom you all know and adore so there's no need to beat that dead horse.

Then there's Josh. He was the man behind the curtain of this adventure. He got a really good deal on the canoes because of his military connections.

One thing about Josh — he doesn't do anything half-assed. It's gotta be all or nothing. This pretty much sums up our canoe trip.

Next, there is Brian. He's my cousin whom you may have read about before. Brian (like me) does everything half-assed. Since we were in the same canoe, this may explain why everyone else complained about how long it took us to get to the next rendezvous each time.

We've also got Kevin. Kevin spent most of the trip completely covered up because of the sun. He was along for the ride.

Kevin's canoe mate was James. James lost his glasses in the river and spent most of the trip squinting and drowning the biting sand flies. Their canoe was not much ahead of ours.

James' brother Steve came along. Steve is all right, but he's hyperactive and 17 years old. He almost got killed several times.

Holding down the back of Steve's canoe was my friend Gabe. Gabe is like a monstrous teddy bear. He's 6 feet tall and 230 pounds and wouldn't



Joel Strauch

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hurt a fly. But he came close to hurting Steve.

After they stopped screaming at each other and kind of figured out what canoeing was all about, they kept their boat off the shore and stayed near the front of the expedition.

The other half of Josh's canoe was filled by our friend Symeon. Symeon doesn't smoke, doesn't drink and works out for hours every day. Their canoe was usually up front.

Now with this motley assortment spending three days out on the river, camping on islands, you might think there'd be a few problems.

You'd be right.

The problems started with James' tent. He had borrowed this big ole four-man job from his dad. But he hadn't asked his old man how to set it up. He assumed that since all of us had set up plenty of tents before, we could figure this one out.

Unfortunately, this wasn't a tent. It

was a canvas nightmare.

We finally got it to lean up unsteadily and the four suckers, I mean sleepers, got in.

The tent was fine — as long as there wasn't any wind or rain. We had both that night.

By some miracle, the tent was still kind of standing in the morning and the people inside were relatively dry.

It looked like everything was going to work out. The rain had raised the river several inches, we had a good breakfast of 4 dozen scrambled eggs and 2 dozen sausages, and we had two cases of beer to keep us company canoeing.

I don't know how hot it got on Saturday (I think it was around 140 F), but I do know that when you drink and sit directly under the sun for twelve hours and you don't wear sunscreen, there's a problem.

I'm still having difficulty walking normally because my feet are so burned. And Brian spent most of the night ralphing because of the heat and the beer.

I wasn't really too annoyed at James when I found out that he had sunblock with him and hadn't told us the whole time he'd been cruising alongside our canoe. Mainly because he was pretty burned, too.

We were a bit slow on our last day on the river. The final stretch was only about ten miles, but it took Brian and I several hours to drift it (probably because we kept falling asleep).

A lot of things went wrong this weekend. I won't go into detail about Brian diving headfirst into three-foot deep water, or James stealing Brian's sleeping bag and passing out on top of the wet tent because he was too drunk to set it up, or Gabe and Steve capsizing their canoe 15 feet from the end of the trip.

It wasn't a perfect adventure, but it was a good time with some great friends.

Strauch is a graduate of UNL and the editor of the Daily Nebraskan.

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