

# Routine stops risky for police

OMAHA (AP)—Traffic stops for improperly registered license plates are too common to routinely call for backup, police in Nebraska's largest city said.

Omaha Police Officer James Wilson Jr. was killed Aug. 20 when he pulled over a van with license plates registered to a different vehicle. Wilson did not even have a chance to leave his cruiser before he was shot in the head. Seven people have been charged in Wilson's killing.

Training officers in Minneapolis, Denver and Portland, Ore., say license plates registered to a different vehicle are a danger sign that makes it

advisable to have two or more officers present before stopping a vehicle, the Omaha World-Herald reported.

But Nebraska authorities say the high cost of registering vehicles here coupled with a low fine for improper registration make such stops a daily occurrence for Omaha officers.

Wilson was alone in his cruiser. A 1992 consultant's report on the Omaha Police Department says research has shown that two-officer cars tend to increase officer injuries and citizen complaints of overly aggressive police conduct.

The report recommended that the

department develop written policies on what kind of situations required more than one patrol car.

Omaha police officials have said written policies exist. On Friday, they declined to disclose the policies or discuss training in detail.

"We have people out there trying to kill us," said Lt. Mark Sundermeier, head of the training unit. "Our officers are safer if the criminals know less about what we do."

Vehicle stops are considered particularly dangerous because officers often have little idea of whom or what they will be facing.

# McMenamin reward increases

By The Associated Press

A reward for information that would help solve the killing of an Omaha woman has grown to \$12,550.

Martina S. McMenamin, 18, was found dead in her southeast Lincoln apartment July 25. She had finished her freshman year at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln last year.

Police reports indicated that McMenamin had been repeatedly stabbed. Investigators have not identified any suspects.

The latest contributors to the County rejects tribe's attempt to build homes

By The Associated Press

The Ponca Tribe of Nebraska, stripped of its land by Congress decades ago, has been turned down in its attempt to build five homes for needy families in Lancaster County.

The tribe has \$4 million in a grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to build the homes, and it has the land picked out in west Lincoln.

But the tribe's attempt to obtain tax-exempt status for the property it wants to build on was rejected last week by the county's Board of Equalization.

"It was the county's opinion that the exemptions did not qualify under the law providing exemptions," said Kerry Eagan, chief county administrative officer. The law allows tax exemptions for religious, charitable or educational organizations with property.

"The statutes are very specific about who gets exemptions and who doesn't," Eagan said. "There's nothing about providing exemptions to an Indian housing authority."

Mark Peniska, the tribe's housing commissioner for Lancaster County, said he believed the board acted unfairly.

"What's really so frustrating is our program mirrors the public housing program in Lincoln here," he said. "We get federal funds to build housing just like the city housing authority. It's exactly the same thing."

The Ponca have worked to find housing for some of their needy families in Nebraska since the federal government restored its tribal status in 1990. The status came without land.

The tribe was split in 1878 between Nebraska and Indian Territory, which later became Oklahoma. In 1962, Congress terminated the northern Ponca tribe and dissolved tribal lands and holdings.

The Ponca have tried to build housing in five counties where tribal members live: Lancaster, Douglas, Madison, Knox and Boyd. In all, there are plans to build 40 homes, including some in Charles Mix County in South Dakota.

Officials in Douglas County and the city of Omaha gave the tribe approval to build 13 homes in Omaha. Peniska said officials there agreed that the tribe met the letter of the law when they formed the Northern Ponca Charitable Housing Corp.

Knox County also approved the construction of seven houses in Niobrara, the northeast Nebraska town where the tribe has its headquarters.

Madison County commissioners rejected the tribe's request for tax-exempt status earlier this month.

CrimeStoppers reward were the employees and owners of Lazlo's and Jabrisco restaurants in the Haymarket and the state CrimeStopper's organization, Lt. Lee Wagner said.

Restaurant employees raised \$275, and restaurant owners matched that amount. Lazlo's senior manager John Wade said management of the two restaurants frequently did charity work, but never before had contributed to a CrimeStoppers reward.

"We were just kind of concerned," Wade said. "We hadn't seen a lot in the news lately, and we were afraid it

was kind of being shoved aside and was being forgotten about. Hopefully, somebody might come forward."

The state CrimeStopper's board contributed \$1,000. Wagner said the state board decided to donate because young people from all over the state attended UNL.

The Lincoln-Lancaster County CrimeStoppers Board originally approved its maximum \$1,000 reward. Family and friends of McMenamin's added \$9,000 to the fund, and Godfather's donated \$1,000. McMenamin worked at Godfather's.

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