

Summer trip to Israel opens Hurtgen's eyes

By Doug Peters
Senior Editor

When ASUN President Shawntell Hurtgen was selected to go to Israel for a student leadership seminar this summer, she didn't know quite what to think.

Neither did her mother. "My mom was terrified," Hurtgen said. "It was to the point that we could barely talk about the trip, she was so nervous."

Hurtgen was one of 10 student-body presidents from the western half of the United States to participate in the eight-day seminar in mid-August.

Going to an area traditionally known as a hotbed of unrest also made Hurtgen nervous. The realities of the Middle East took some getting used to, Hurtgen said, but she felt safer there than she had expected.

That isn't to say there weren't some worrisome moments.

One of those moments began even before Hurtgen left the United States. In New York, she said, she was interrogated for nearly 30 minutes as part of a security check. Terrorist threats have led to increased security for flights to the Middle East.

Security also was a major issue once she arrived in Israel, Hurtgen said. Hurtgen said it was hard to get used to armed soldiers in the streets and the talk of land mines and terrorism.

Soldiers in Israel carry weapons with them at all times, Hurtgen said, even when they're off-duty.

"It's funny to be dancing in a club and bump into a gun ... That really

made me uneasy," she said.

But that wasn't the only source of apprehension for Hurtgen and the other students.

On their hike along the Jordan River, she said, students had to avoid certain paths because their guide warned of possible land mines.

Despite the potential risks involved, Hurtgen said, the trip provided some eye-opening insights and a new appreciation for cultures rich in tradition.

Bank, embassies, universities, the West Wall and even a military base in Golan Heights, she said.

They met with political leaders, journalists and students. They visited a Holocaust museum and met with Holocaust survivors and relatives of survivors.

Hurtgen said they left with a new appreciation of the issues that have shaped the conflict-torn Middle East.

They also planted trees to commemorate their visit.

Hurtgen said that before she left for Israel, she couldn't understand why no compromises could be made between Israeli Jews and Palestinians. During her stay, she learned about the millennia-old traditions that provide the framework for day-to-day life in the Middle East.

Traditions in the Middle East are so old and so strongly held that compromise has become nearly impossible, Hurtgen said.

"It's not as black and white as I thought," she said of the conflict between Israeli Jews and Palestinians. "There's just really a situation with very few winners."



Jay Calderon/DN

Shawntell Hurtgen, president of the Association of Students of the University of Nebraska, attended a student leadership seminar in Israel this summer.

But the visit provided more than a lesson on Middle East politics, she said. It gave Hurtgen an opportunity to see firsthand what most Americans only read about or see on television. It allowed her, she said, to see beyond misconceptions and enjoy the country

for what it was.

"It's a beautiful country," Hurtgen said. "It's just too bad that more of the beauty of the country and the people isn't heard about here."

Hurtgen said that the visit had made a definite impact on her and that she

regretted not being able to see more.

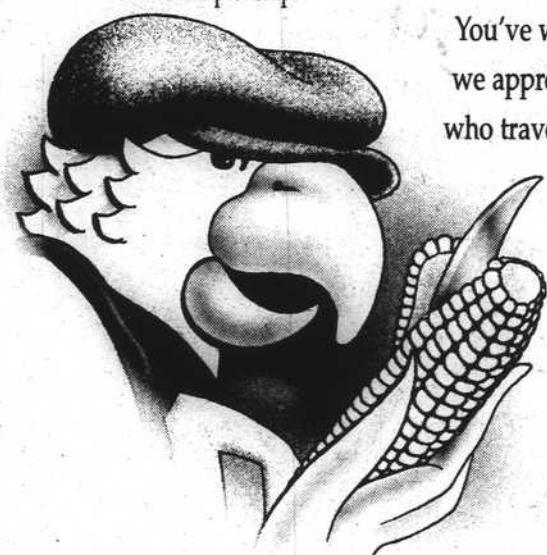
"I'd love to go back," she said.

And as for her mother?

"I'm just excited to show her my pictures and show her how different things are compared to the stereotypes."

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McMenamin

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being shoved aside.

"Obviously it's not the only case, but it's certainly the biggest and commanding the most time of any investigation," Casady said. "There's a considerable amount of work being done."

Casady would not say if the investigation had led police outside Nebraska, but he said police had explored any relationship the McMenamin case had to other homicides in the country.

Shortly after the slaying, police said they were seeking a man seen running from the Amberwood Apartment Complex in shorts and work boots. Casady said Monday that police had interviewed several men who were in the area, but they were uncertain if the man witnesses saw had been contacted.

Even though 37 days have passed since McMenamin's death, Casady said police efforts had not subsided.

"It's our most important
priority."

TOM CASADY
Lincoln police chief

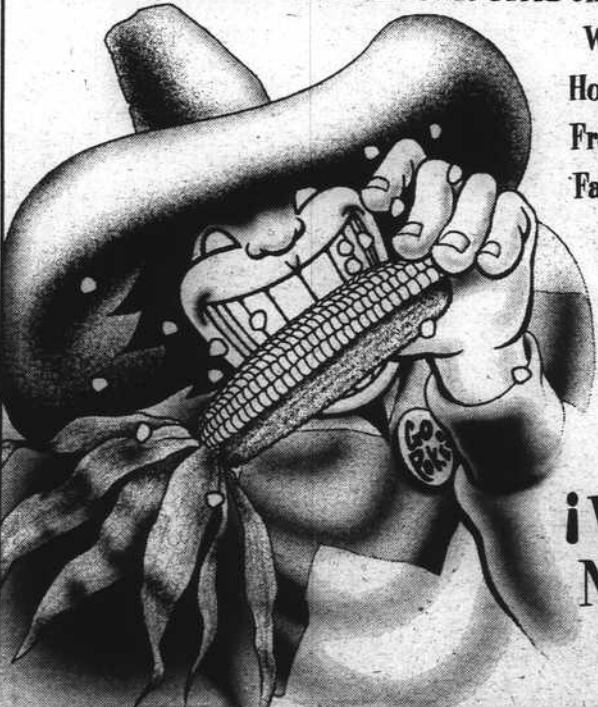
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