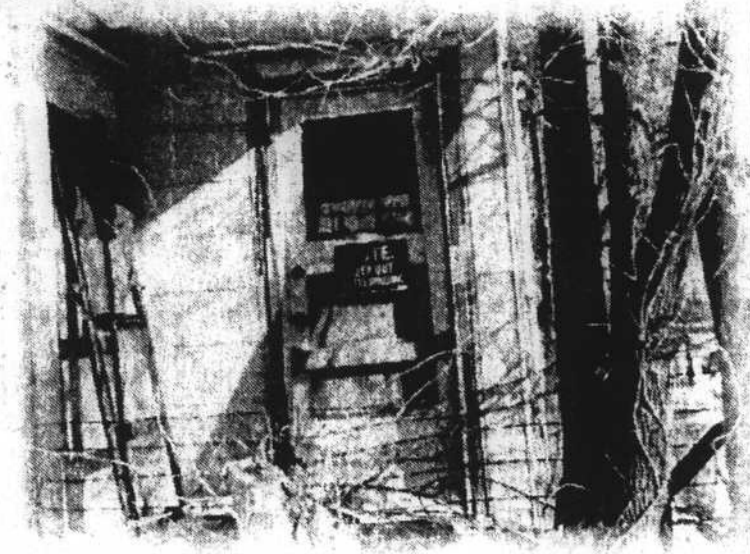


Home Sweet Home

According to Jerry McGinn, director of the Department of Building and Safety, landlords must provide a safe, habitable dwelling for their tenants and meet the Lincoln housing code, or they may face multiple fines.

Lincoln's housing code sets requirements for floor area, windows, lighting, ventilation, bathrooms, kitchens, sewage disposal and access to exits.



Aaron Steckelberg/DN

Living quarters

Tenants have right to livable dwelling

By Chad Lorenz
Senior Reporter

Students living on their own for the first time may settle for second-rate apartments or houses, but they can expect basic comfort in the place they call home.

By law, landlords must provide a safe, habitable dwelling for their tenants and meet the Lincoln housing code or they may face multiple fines, said Jerry McGinn, director of the Department of Building and Safety.

If tenants encounter a problem with their property, the landlord is responsible for making the repairs or solving the problem, McGinn said.

The tenant should call the department to complain if the landlord doesn't act in a reasonable amount of time.

An official from the department will inspect the problem and set a deadline for the landlord to repair it, he said.

If the problem endangers the tenant's health or safety, such as no heat in the winter or structural problems, the official will order tenants to vacate the building, he said. During that time, the tenant is not responsible for paying rent.

"Ninety-eight percent of the time, we get compliance right away from good owners," McGinn said. "If we can't get an owner to work with us, we'll turn it over to the law."

Assistant City Attorney Rick Peo said at that point, he would prosecute the owner for violating city ordinance.

The fines range from \$50 to \$300 and can be imposed each day the housing code is violated, he said.

In the case of death or injury, the county attorney would take legal action against the owner, Peo said.

Lancaster County Attorney Gary Lacey is now handling a case in which a 7-month-old girl died because the owner failed to meet the building code.

Sanjuana De Santiago died of hypothermia in a house owned by Richard Hedrick at 145 N. 18th St. A water pipe in the above-mentioned unheated apartment froze and broke, dumping frigid water onto the sleeping child.

The Department of Building and Safety had restricted the building to single-family occupancy, but Hedrick had split the house into two dwellings. The upstairs tenant had been gone for two and a half weeks.

"The tragedy just makes you sick," McGinn said.

McGinn said Hedrick, unlike most owners in Lincoln, had been difficult to work with. Building and safety officials made 51 inspections in three years at that address, he said.

"He causes this office a lot of grief," McGinn said.

McGinn said his office kept a close eye on Hedrick's properties because of previous complaints the office had received.

After the initial occupancy permit is issued for a building, it may not be inspected for years if tenants don't complain, he said.

The department of building and safety must issue an occupancy permit before an owner can rent out a building, McGinn said.

Six inspectors from the department will conduct a final inspection on the building, he said. Each inspector specializes in an area of building safety: electrical, mechanical, plumbing, construction, fire prevention and housing, he said.

Lincoln's housing code sets requirements in areas such as floor area, windows, lighting, ventilation, bathrooms, kitchens, sewage disposal and access to direct exits.

National building codes are changed based on nationwide disasters caused by a lack of regulations, McGinn said.

"It's sad that it takes a tragedy to bring a code up to date," McGinn said.

The most recent updates involve fire prevention through separation — the use of heavier materials between rooms of a house to keep a fire from spreading, McGinn said.

When a code is updated, only new buildings have to meet it, McGinn said. Old buildings that met the code when they were built do not violate the new code, he said.

It's through cooperation from owners and communication with tenants that building and safety officials can best enforce Lincoln's housing code, McGinn said.

"It's a constant battle to keep a building safe."

blers behave," Goodman said. "They typically will borrow a lot of money, and they will typically not pay off their debts."

Workshop urges unity

By Joy Ludwig
Staff Reporter

Students should become more aware of the power within themselves, the keynote speaker at the Racial Minority Leadership Conference said to more than 90 students at the Nebraska Union on Saturday.

"If you don't believe in yourself, then who will?" asked Joel Gajardo, director of the Hispanic Community Center.

John Harris, special assistant to the vice chancellor for student affairs at UNL and a workshop leader, said becoming a leader involved having self-confidence, following a mentor, being a mediator and having initiative and communicative skills.

"Leadership is a process," he said. "There are many things you have to do to get to this point."

Workshop topics included:
● "Taking the first step" for freshmen.
● "Keeping the fire alive" for up-

perclassmen.
● Time management to avoid burn-out.

● "Developing a unity council" for student ethnic government.

● "Involvement in other organizations" for branching out.

After the workshops, a large group session was led by Dolores Simpson-Kirkland, administrative assistant for the Department of Students for Lincoln Public Schools.

Five ethnic groups were formed to discuss racial history and issues affecting that group. The groups then came together to share their ideas.

"What's most important to remember is how we can all come together and connect with somebody," Simpson-Kirkland said.

Reggie Barnes, a freshman psychology major, agreed with Simpson-Kirkland.

"It's important for students to learn about themselves and other cultures," he said. "The quicker we learn this, then we can become a better community."



Matthew Waite/DN

Robert Goodman, author of "The Luck Business," told senators and media Friday afternoon that adding gambling to Nebraska would create problems. Goodman's book examines the effects of gambling across the United States.

Senator fights for same-sex marriages

By Julie Sobczyk
Senior Reporter

Although a bill to allow same-sex marriages in Hawaii was tabled in the state's legislature last week, Nebraska Sen. Ernie Chambers won't give up.

The Omaha senator is proposing LB1260, which would amend Nebraska's marriage laws to allow members of the same sex to legally marry.

Same-sex marriages are not legal in any state.

Nebraska, as well as other states, need to allow same-sex marriages, Chambers said, because it is a 21st-century issue.

"This is an issue related to civil rights and civil liberties that can't be dodged by political bodies," Chambers said. "They have an impact on so many people."

The bill would allow homosexuals to receive benefits such as insurance and pensions, just as heterosexual spouses receive, he said.

"If the same-sex marriage isn't recognized, those benefits won't be available to the same-sex partner," he said.

The Judiciary Committee hearing date on the bill has not been set, but Chambers said he hoped the measure would advance to the general file.

"Year after year, I'll be back," he said. "I will not be dissuaded because of criticism or opposition."

If the bill passes, other states would be required to recognize homosexual marriage in Nebraska because of the equal protection clause in the Constitution.

Chambers said other states might try to get around recognizing Nebraska's same-sex marriages but would have a hard time holding their claim in federal court.

"A state would have better luck in saying they will not recognize any marriages from a state that allows same-sex marriages," he said.

At least two other states last week considered legislation opposing same-sex marriage legislation.

On Wednesday, a South Dakota House committee killed a bill that would have banned same-sex marriages. Meanwhile, a California Assembly committee approved a bill that would ban recognition of same-sex marriages from other states.

Chambers, however, said he was expecting challenges to the bill.

People who supported ultra-traditional or religious values would show the most opposition, he said.

"There will be some who find it unbearable to consider the idea of a same-sex marriage and feel it shouldn't

be discussed at all," he said.

Although Chambers said he had received only one letter in opposition to his bill, he was still short on support for it.

Kristen Job, a senior English major at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, said she supported Chambers and the bill.

Job, vice president of UNL's Gay/Lesbian Student Association, said the bill could have a strong impact on her life.

She has been in a committed relationship with a woman for about two years, she said, but because of laws, they can't marry.

"This should not be a question about special rights for gays," Job said. "It should be a question about equal rights."

"A heterosexual couple has the option to decide if they want to get married, and homosexual couples don't," she said. "It just shouldn't be that way."

But Amy Rager, a sophomore in general studies, said she opposed the bill.

"I don't believe same-sex marriages should be approved or made legal," said Rager, who is chairwoman of UNL's College Republicans. "I believe in the values of the Bible, and I think it's wrong according to God's standards."

Goodman

Continued from Page 1

economy like Iowa's.

Nevada has seen major economic benefits from gambling because of its tourist base. Convenience-based gambling states have not seen the benefits.

Convenience gambling is geared toward a specific area — within 35 to 50 miles of the casino, Goodman said. He admitted that the casino did bring in huge amounts of revenue, while creating jobs in the casinos.

But, he said, it also shifts dollars out of the local economy — including restaurants, bars, sporting events, clothing stores and furniture stores.

Revenues, taxes and jobs are then lost in the local economy, Goodman said.

"This is a classic example of what economists call a zero-sum game," he said.

A theoretical zero-sum game has no losers, Goodman said.

"The difference is, people don't get addicted to buying hardware," he said.

There are demonstrated increases in problem gamblers after gambling is introduced, Goodman said.

If it were just counseling that gamblers would need, the effects would be insignificant, he said. Problem gamblers, however, don't just need counseling.

"The economic problem comes from the way in which problem gam-

blers behave," Goodman said. "They typically will borrow a lot of money, and they will typically not pay off their debts."

Problem gamblers then don't pay bills, then taxes, and some then become involved in crime, Goodman said.

The costs of problem gamblers — from bankruptcy to processing them in the criminal justice system — were estimated by Goodman to be up to \$73 million. Iowa encountered six times that cost.

Nebraska, which is a smaller state, would be looking at a minimum of \$50 million in cost increases, Goodman said.

With gambling across the Missouri River in Iowa and across the border in South Dakota, Nebraska will see an increase in problem gamblers, he said.

But if Nebraska simply adds gambling to fight gambling, that will only increase the number of problem gamblers, Goodman said.

Nebraska should not put its economy at risk by expanding gambling, Goodman said.

"You want to preserve what you already have," he said, "and you certainly don't want to put yourself in a position where you are going to make things worse than they are and then have to backpedal a few years from now, like other states are doing."