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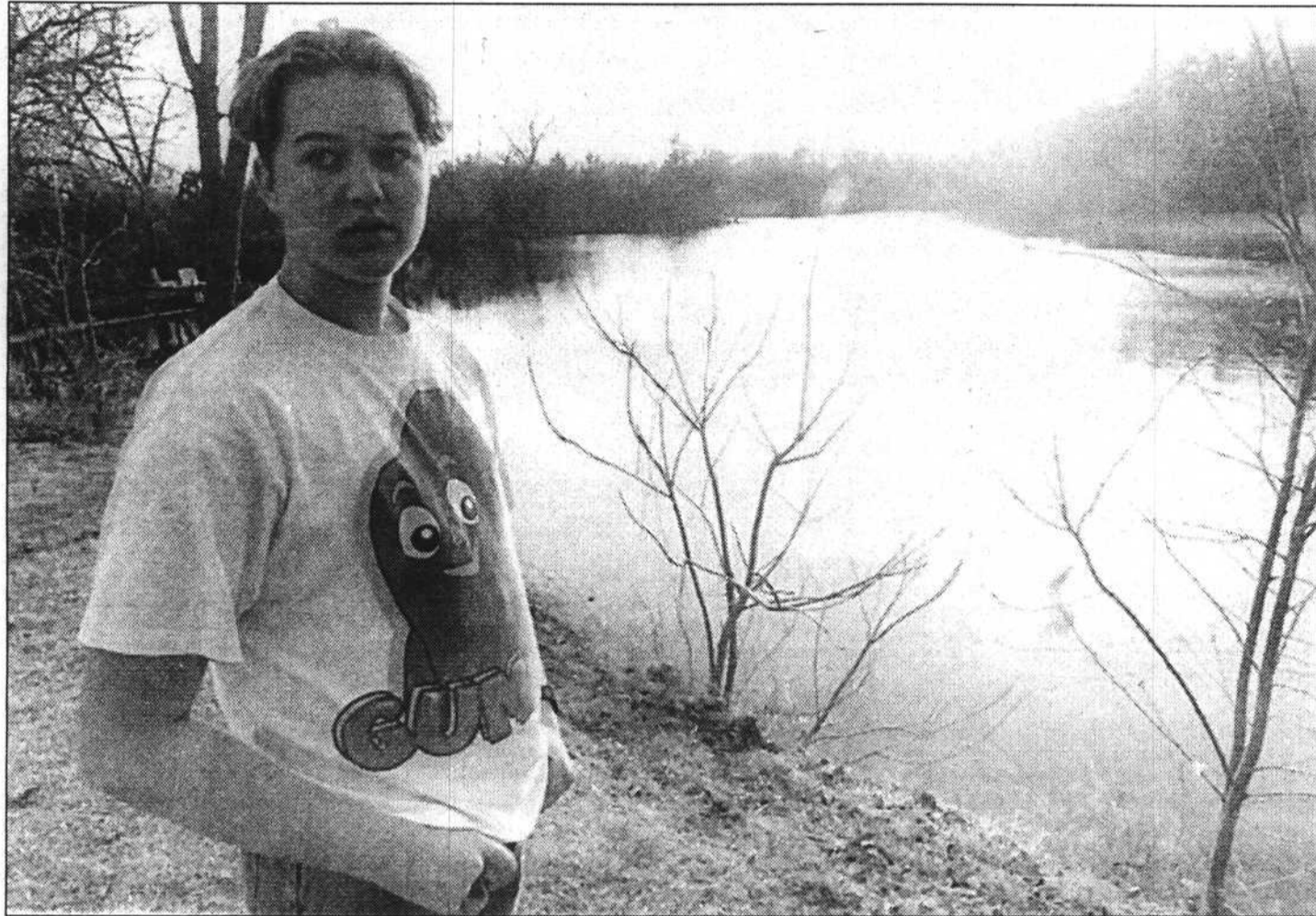
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WEATHER:

Today - Quite windy and cold. Northwest wind 25 to 40 mph.

Tonight - Clearing and cold, low 5 to 10 above.

March 25, 1996



Matthew Waite/DN

Ben Behlen stands next to Wagner Lakes, where his brother Jacob, a UNL freshman, drowned in an accident last week. Three other Columbus teen-agers, one of whom was also a UNL freshman, died in the accident.

Columbus teens killed in accident *Two UNL freshmen among victims; funerals today*

By Matthew Waite
Senior Editor

COLUMBUS—With the help of friends and family, the family of Jacob Behlen is coping with his death, his brother Ben Behlen said Saturday.

Standing near the spot where his brother drowned just days earlier, Behlen said neighbors and friends have been stopping by the house with food and condolences.

The kind words the family needs. The food already has filled four refrigerators.

Jacob Behlen died last week in an accident that killed three other teen-agers from Columbus.

Behlen, Eric Kudron, Ryan Gragert and Christina Dyer were all 19. Behlen and Dyer were both University of Nebraska-Lincoln freshmen.

The four had been missing since Monday, March 18. They were found in a submerged car in Wagner Lakes on Wednesday night.

According to a preliminary autopsy report released Friday, each of the four teen-agers was legally drunk, with blood-alcohol levels above .10. Exact figures were not released by the Platte County Attorney's

office Friday.

Another report released Friday said mechanical tests done on the car confirmed the brakes did not fail — an early theory by investigators and family members.

Ben Behlen, 16, said investigators were looking into a possible blowout on the car that could have caused it to be thrown out of control. Police found a scar on a concrete median at an intersection near the site and also found a bent rim on the car.

Jacob Behlen was reported to have been driving the car.

Many questions remain, and few answers have been found. For Ben Behlen, now is a time for family and healing.

Funerals for the four are today in Columbus.

Jacob Behlen, a business major, and Dyer, a psychology major, were home on spring break from UNL. Both lived in Abel Residence Hall.

"I guess he was liking the vacation — being with the family," Ben Behlen said. "He came home a lot."

Behlen said his brother made no enemies.

"Not a person that met him didn't like him," he said. "He made friends really quick."

A steady stream of mourners passed by the crash site Saturday afternoon. Many shed tears, some left flowers, despite a sign posted by the Columbus police department asking them not to. The land is private property.

A lone rose lay near a fence post, a fence the car crashed through before going into the lake. A card that read "I love you Jacob" lay nearby.

Mark Shannon, a Columbus resident who lives a few blocks from the crash site, said people in the central Nebraska town of 20,000 people are reacting typically to the tragedy.

"We're all shocked, outraged," he said, looking at the lake. "I am really appalled that four kids had to die so senselessly."

Shannon was on the scene of the crash when police pulled the vehicle out of the water. He said as he walked away, several teen-agers asked what happened, and if the four were alive.

"Those young people were hoping for the best. We all were," he said. "It's a terrible waste of human life."

Regents OK Union plans for expansion

By Julie Sobczyk
Senior Reporter

Plans for the Nebraska Union expansion went one step further Saturday.

At its monthly meeting, the NU Board of Regents approved the project's schematic plans and budget of \$12.6 million.

James Griesen, UNL vice chancellor for student affairs, told the board the estimated construction cost of the project would increase by \$300,000.

That amount would cover additional fire and safety systems that will need to be added to the existing union building, Griesen said.

The additional \$300,000 will be funded by UNL's general repair and improvement budget, he said, so the project's budget would not need to increase.

The expansion project is set to begin next semester.

The board unanimously approved an increase of \$77,757 in the budget for repairs and upgrades for the three elevators in Oldfather Hall.

The regents also unanimously approved Clark Enersen Partners to design the multi-level parking structure west of Memorial Stadium.

The firm was chosen from seven architectural and engineering companies that showed interest in designing the structure, which will contain 600 parking spaces, offices for Parking Services, the Athletic Department ticket office and the UNL Police Department.

The firm's approved budget is \$409,531. In other business, the board unanimously

See REGENTS on 6

Moeser wants better programs for undergrads

By Julie Sobczyk
Senior Reporter

Gaining high quality students, improving the campus environment, providing nationally recognized programs and keeping up with technology will all be a part of UNL's future, the university's top administrator said Saturday.

Chancellor James Moeser outlined the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's goals for 1996 to 2001 at the NU Board of Regents' monthly meeting.

The strategic plan for UNL focuses on the areas of instruction, research, outreach, student access and the campus community and environment, he said. Administrators have worked for two years to define the goals for the next five years.

At the top of the list, Moeser said, is improving UNL's undergraduate programs.

"This is my No. 1 priority," he said. "This is a major issue for me, and it must be for this university."

UNL got off to a good start this year, Moeser said, as the average ACT score of incoming freshmen increased from 22.7 to 23.1.

The increase could be attributed to recruiting done by the Office of Admissions, he said.

"If we don't recruit the students, they won't stay in Nebraska," Moeser said.

The new admissions standards, which will go into effect in the fall of 1997, make sure freshmen are prepared to succeed academically

See MOESER on 6

Senators to review property tax plans

By Ted Taylor
Senior Reporter

State senators today move into their second week of work on several property tax relief plans advanced by the Legislature's Revenue Committee.

Last Tuesday lawmakers quickly advanced LB1085, the first step in the committee's package, by a 38-1 vote.

Gov. Ben Nelson has said he supports the package.

The package includes LR292CA, a constitutional amendment that

would allow local governments to consolidate or merge if voters approve.

Other points include:

- requiring political subdivisions to pass a resolution to receive more from property tax than from the previous year,
- giving county boards direct oversight of the operations of certain services,
- setting procedures for the merging and consolidation of local governments,
- giving the property tax administrator full responsibility for assessment of property.

Property taxes are levied, collected and spent by local governments under conditions set by the Legislature.

Sen. Ernie Chambers of Omaha said LB1085 could make things worse.

"If we let counties do what's in their best interest even if it is non-beneficial to other counties, might this worsen the situation?" he asked.

But other senators said they thought the plan would help increase participation within the counties.

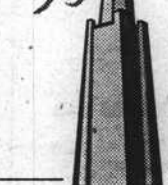
Sen. Chris Beutler of Lincoln said the bill was designed "to make counties really think about" the idea of consolidation.

Other property tax relief proposals on the table include LB1114, which would limit the property tax rates local governments can levy, and LB299, which would put two-year spending limits on local governments.

Debate is scheduled to resume on the property tax relief plans today.

Legislature

196



LR292CA, a constitutional amendment that