

Law & Order

A look at crime on campus and in the community

NARCOTICS

Police seized drugs and weapons in a bust at a north Lincoln residence Tuesday night.

The Lincoln police narcotic unit delivered a search warrant to a house on the 2800 block of U Street where police suspected marijuana was being sold, Sgt. Terry Sherrill said.

Officers found 15 ounces of marijuana, a .38-caliber handgun and a .22-caliber revolver with the serial number scratched off, Sherrill said. Officers also found more than \$500 in cash.

Police arrested Angela Morey, the 28-year-old woman who lives at the house; and Terrence Brunt, a 23-year-old man from Omaha.

COUNTERFEIT

A Lincoln bank employee discovered a fake \$20 bill Tuesday, one

of hundreds that have been circulating around the city this month.

A teller at the Government Employee Credit Union, North 52nd Street, was paying out cash for a check when she felt a different texture to one of the bills, Sherrill said.

The bill matched a counterfeit sample that had been sent out to area banks, he said. The credit union thinks it received the bill from another bank.

AUTO THEFT

A 16-year-old boy was arrested in Crete Tuesday for stealing a car from Lincoln.

Dewey Isbel left the keys inside his 1987 gray Oldsmobile while he went inside the White C Store, 7001 O St., Sherrill said.

The youth, who was just leaving the store, got in the car and drove away, Sherrill said.

A Nebraska State Patrol trooper later stopped and arrested the boy.

Assisted suicide law tested

Bellevue man charged in suicide case calls Nebraska law unconstitutional.

OMAHA (AP) — A Bellevue man charged with helping a neighbor kill himself is challenging the constitutionality of Nebraska's ban on assisted suicide.

The attorney for James Hall, 21, argues in a brief filed in Sarpy County District Court that the statute is vague and infringes on people's 14th Amendment right to be free of government intrusion.

Hall is accused of providing Juan Carlos Nunez with a shotgun

that Nunez used to kill himself June 23. The case appears to be the first test of Nebraska's assisted suicide law.

Hall has pleaded innocent. No trial date has been set.

Bellevue police and Sarpy County Attorney Mike Munch said Hall knew Nunez intended to use the shotgun to kill himself.

According to court documents, Hall told investigators that on June 23 an intoxicated Nunez invited him to his apartment and asked him to bring the shotgun the two men had discussed earlier.

The affidavit said Hall told police that when he got to the apartment, Nunez threatened to shoot him and then kill himself.

Nunez told Hall to leave, saying he would shoot himself within 10 minutes, Hall told police. Hall said he left the apartment and did not call authorities to alert them.

Minutes later, Nunez shot himself in his bathroom. Hall told police he did not hear the gun discharge.

Gregory Riffle of Bellevue told police that several days later Hall said he knew Nunez had wanted the shotgun to commit suicide.

The Nebraska law states that: "A person commits assisted suicide when, with intent to assist another person in committing suicide, he aids and abets him in committing or attempting to commit suicide."

School board seeks reading skill standard

OMAHA (AP) — The city's school district is looking for a yardstick to measure what its students should be able to read by the end of third grade.

The challenge of putting a narrow definition on such a general standard has placed the school district in the middle of a national academic debate, a University of Nebraska-Lincoln professor said.

"This is a matter of opposing philosophies of what reading is," said Jann Ching, an assistant professor of literacy studies at UNL. "What (the school board) is talking about is that all children should be at a certain level by a set age. The difficulty in that is not all children come from the same literate background."

The Omaha school board set up a committee to determine the reading skills a child needs to succeed at increasingly complex studies.

The school district measures reading levels with its own exams and na-

tional standardized tests. But those tests gauge achievement in general terms, classifying a broad range of abilities as performing "at grade level," the committee concluded.

The board wants a definition of third-grade reading that is so specific it "can draw a line in the sand," said Joe Gaughan, a committee member and the district's assistant superintendent of instruction. Students who fall short of the line would receive additional help. Those performing above the line would advance to the next level.

Ching said teachers generally prefer to evaluate their students' reading skills based on their individual backgrounds and abilities, not on their age or grade level.

Every child arrives at school with different degrees of exposure to books and reading. That dictates how fast or slowly a child will advance, she said.

Members of the ad hoc committee have raised concerns that the assess-

ment techniques now used by teachers are too inconsistent and vague. Instead, they want to do a study that would give educators the definition they need to assess children objectively so none of them leave the third grade lagging behind classmates.

The Buros Institute for Assessment Consultation and Outreach, a division of the Oscar and Luella Buros Center for Testing at UNL, is expected to conduct the study. A \$46,500 contract with Buros could be signed as early as next week if the board approves it Monday.

The study will include input from district employees and community members in devising a definition that states exactly what a child should be capable of doing. National reading experts would visit the district to review the standards and provide suggestions.

The study also will include developing a way to assess students, then testing it in the district.

Ink pads limit check fraud, catch forgers

PRINTS from page 1

tracking him down. At Fast Bucks, another check-cashing service, the suspected phony check holders refused to leave the thumbprint, Hruza said.

"The criminals know we have this ability," she said. "Are they going to take the risk? Heck no, they're going to walk away."

Fourteen other states, mainly on the East and West Coasts, use the system, Hruza said. That leaves Nebraska a vulnerable target.

"You're going to see fraud shift from places that do have the system to places that don't," she said.

The Texas Bankers Association has been driving fraud out of its state since last November when it started using fingerprint signatures, said Lenelle Freeman, the association's senior vice president.

From November 1995 to September 1996, check fraud in Texas went down by 70 percent.

In Austin, Texas, fingerprints on checks have led to two forgery convictions this year, Freeman said.

That kind of success is getting more banks and businesses interested, Freeman said.

Out of Texas's 800 banks, 168 now use the system, she said. Even liquor stores, grocery stores and a video store

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TERRY HRUZA
Lincoln police investigator

use the fingerprint signature for check transactions.

Banks in Lubbock, Texas — where police devote three officers to investigating check fraud — want to try the system, she said.

"Any bank that's experiencing a large fraud problem is using it," Freeman said.

Investigator Hruza said the system would probably catch on quicker if it did not face opposition from some companies that have resisted the print system because they are afraid of offending their customers.

But those businesses need to understand they'll save more money in fraud losses than they'll lose by irking customers, Hruza said. In 1995, check fraud cost U.S. financial institutions \$615 million, according to the Federal Reserve Board.

To be fair to customers, banks and

businesses need to take prints consistently and not just when the customer looks suspicious, she said.

Most customers don't object because they realize the advantage of the service, said Jill Helgenberger, an owner of Fast Bucks.


"They seem to be pretty positive about it because they know it helps them too," Helgenberger said.

The fingerprint pads themselves are inexpensive. Nebraska Bankers Association sells the silver dollar-sized pads for less than \$5 each.

Steve Gordan, vice president of Signature Security Inc. of Omaha, said the no-mess concept is simple.

The ink rubs off skin because it's not carbon-based like most inks, he said. The ink penetrates the paper fibers, but not skin tissue, Gordan said.

"The fingerprint itself is as good as any you can get."



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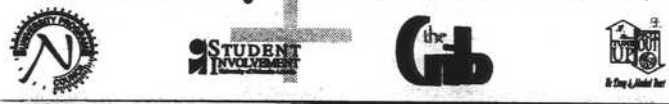
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