

The Nebraska women's basketball team has returned to the AP top 25. NU is ranked 23rd in the latest poll. PAGE 7

Thousands of party-goers converged on New Orleans for Mardi Gras, and DN reporter Matthew Waite was among them. PAGE 9

Cloudy with snow, high 30. Blustery tonight, low 15.

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MARDI GRAS MADNESS



THOUSANDS OF REVELERS at New Orleans' Mardi Gras parades scramble for trinkets tossed by masked characters on floats Friday night. Mardi Gras, or Fat Tuesday, is the day before Ash Wednesday, the start of Lent. Please see page 9 for weekend tales from the Big Easy.

MATTHEW WAITE/DN

Bills may stiffen state liquor laws

By BRIAN CARLSON
Staff Reporter

Legislature

The Legislature's General Affairs Committee brewed over several bills Monday regulating the sale of liquor in Nebraska.

Those testifying acknowledged statewide problems with alcohol-related violence and the failure of liquor-licensed establishments to comply with industry regulations, but disagreed over ways to deal with the issues.

Concerned by levels of alcohol use among minors, several advocacy groups testified on behalf of LB17.

The proposal, sponsored by Sen. David Landis of Lincoln, would allow the Nebraska Liquor Control Commission to enforce suspensions of liquor licenses after an establishment's second offense of selling alcohol to minors.

Currently, a business may either pay a fine or accept a suspension of its liquor license after a violation, regardless of its number of previous violations.

Landis said fines were inequitable for businesses of varying sizes and were unable to serve as economic deterrents to license violations.

"You have to have the punishment fit the crime," he said. "The virtue of suspensions is that they make the pun-

ishment fit the nature of what's going wrong."

Frosty Chapman, executive director of the Liquor Control Commission, said the most common violations addressed by his department were sales to minors and to intoxicated customers.

The buy-out option of only paying a fine currently available to violators prevented his department from effectively enforcing the law, Chapman said.

"We need a tool to get the attention of certain establishments where fines do not appear to be doing the job," he said.

Bill proponent Ed Virant, representing Omaha's Project Extra Mile, cited the results of a recent series of police sting operations in Omaha.

Of 105 liquor-licensed outlets investigated, 42 percent were caught selling alcohol to minors. Most did not check for identification, he said.

"If the people of Nebraska were really aware of the buy-out option, they would demand that a suspension be placed on a business on the first offense," Virant said. "How can the industry defend such a high percentage

Please see LIQUOR on 3

Unanimous vote by City Council denounces January cross burning

LORI ROBISON
Staff Reporter

After officially expressing its disappointment with Sigma Chi's cross-burning ceremony, the Lincoln City Council added its voice Monday to the firestorm of criticism leveled at the fraternity since the Jan. 23 incident.

But even though a resolution deploring the action was passed unanimously Monday, Dale Young, councilman for Lincoln's southwest district, defended Sigma Chi and its history. He said the fraternity was one of the first in UNL's greek system to include minorities in its membership.

"I've worked with and known many members of this fraternity," Young said. "I believe them when they deny a connection to the (Ku Klux Klan)."

Richard Rice, a UNL fraternity alumnus and professional adviser to Sigma Chi, spoke to the council Monday on behalf of the fraternity.

After apologizing for any pain caused by the cross burning, Rice outlined the ceremony's historic meaning of brotherhood and unity. He said he hoped the community understood that the fraternity's intent of performing the ritual was historic, not racial.

“
This is 1997, and we need to make sure that people understand by their actions what they are doing when they do something.”

COLEEN SENG
councilwoman

Addressing the legality of the ceremony, Rice told the council that the police were advised of when and where Sigma Chi's initiation ceremony would take place — on a privately owned field outside of Lincoln. He added that cross burnings would not be a part of future ceremonies.

Coleen Seng, councilwoman for the city's northeast district, expressed her disbelief that a cross burning occurred in Lincoln in the first place.

"I couldn't believe this happened in our community," she said. "This is 1997, and we need to make sure that people understand by their actions

City Council

what they are doing when they do something."

Cindy Johnson, councilwoman-at-large, said the incident was a valuable lesson for her children. She also thanked the fraternity for its courage in facing its responsibilities to the community and speaking before the City Council.

According to Rice, the fraternity expects several sanctions, which may include revocation of its charter, leveled against it in the near future from the international fraternity organization.

Nebraska Union face lift slows fast-food business

By KASEY KERBER
Staff Reporter

It's official among fast-food restaurants in the Nebraska Union: Business is down, and the union expansion project is partly to blame.

The expansion project has closed the north entrance of the union, which opened to Subway, Imperial Palace Express and Amigos.

The result, operators say, has been a loss of business to students who find it more convenient to walk to a fast-food business on Q Street.

Tim Church, associate manager of Amigos, said it was a matter of convenience.

"Students have to walk all the way around the building just to get in," Church said. "It's not too convenient."

The closing of the north entrance has also had an effect on attempts to attract new customers.

Amy Deubelbeiss, manager of Subway, said she had seen a drop-off in business from those new customers, who might not know the Subway is there.

"Basically, the customers we

have are ones we've seen before," Deubelbeiss said. "There aren't a lot of new faces."

Another factor contributing to a drop-off in fast-food business has been a lack of student seating.

Deubelbeiss said most customers want a quiet place to eat or talk with friends. The remaining seats are close to construction and sometimes loud, Deubelbeiss said.

Daryl Swanson, Nebraska Unions director, said workers were trying to improve the food court's appearance.

Swanson said because of asbestos removal, the food court seating has been limited, but the situation will get better.

"We're working every day to make things more comfortable for students," Swanson said.

Meanwhile, food court businesses are dealing with the loss, which Amigos and Subway say is not substantial.

"I'm waiting to see what will happen," Deubelbeiss said. "Our business always drops off a little in the winter, but if it doesn't pick up much in the spring, it would be a bad sign."