

Union contractors behind own schedule

By KASEY KERBER
Staff Reporter

The Nebraska Union expansion project is behind schedule, but not as much as organizations located in the union had feared.

Some student organizations had been told their area might not be renovated until weeks or months later than scheduled.

Larry Blake, union expansion project manager, said confusion arose over dates originally planned for the union and those now set by Builder's Inc., the construction company handling the expansion project.

Blake said a "strict schedule of dates" was originally set for the project, but the schedule was revised shortly before the union board began accepting bids.

"We were very concerned about getting a favorable bid for this project," Blake said. "We eased off the dates because contractors might see them as an added cost."

As a result, Builder's Inc. was given a list of "critical dates" after their bid was accepted.

Yet those dates were guidelines because no specific clauses were included in the contractor's contract requiring the company to complete each stage of construction by its assigned critical date, Blake said.

These clauses are often called "liquidative damages," he said.

Daryl Swanson, director of Nebraska Unions, said placing such clauses in the contracts offered no substantial advantages.

Blake agreed.

"With liquidative damages, you

"We eased off the dates because contractors might see them as an added cost."

LARRY BLAKE
expansion project manager

have to prove a specific financial loss," Blake said. "That's often a hard thing to do."

Instead, Blake said, it was important to keep an open mind with Builder's Inc., especially when it comes to delays. The company is currently behind its own schedule by a small margin, he said.

This could be attributed to asbestos removal in the union, a 2-week delay on constructing a west entrance and other construction "discoveries," Blake said.

One such discovery included 1 to 2 feet of sand under the union plaza's concrete slabs, he said.

"Students might have seen it and thought of a beach," Blake said. "It was just another unforeseen aspect of the construction."

But Blake said it was just a small example of the many difficulties that will be experienced later by Builder's Inc.

"It's kind of like a can of worms," Blake said. "You just encounter a lot of problems."

Act of Bravery



DANIEL LUEDERT/DN
ERIN MCCLAIN, left, defends herself against the attack of Heather Currie Tuesday in front of Love Library. McLaine and Currie are second-year graduate students practicing for their certification as actor combatants.

Tests on cats stir protests

PETA and Boys Town battle on ethical, legal issues of performing research on kittens.

By JIM GOODWIN
Staff Reporter

The recent controversy surrounding animal testing conducted by an Omaha research hospital won't end the federally funded practice, a hospital spokesman said Tuesday.

Randy Blauvelt, spokesman for Boys Town National Research Hospital, said the validity and necessity of the hospital's search for a deafness treatment outshined attempts by an animal rights group to quell the practice.

Eighteen members of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) protested in a Boys Town office March 14, calling attention to their efforts to end the use of kittens for research.

The disagreement between Boys Town and PETA revolves around the need to use kittens in nerve regrowth and regeneration research designed to find a correctional treatment for deafness.

The program, conducted by hospital researchers Edward Walsh and JoAnn McGee, is federally funded through a \$2 million grant from the National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders, a branch of the National Institute of Health.

Jason Baker, PETA campaign coordinator, said from the group's Norfolk, Va., headquarters that he thought computer modeling and other research avenues could effectively simulate the testing done on kittens by the hospital.

Baker also said that PETA has on file the professional opinions of practicing veterinarians. They say enough differences exist between deafness in cats and humans that comparisons between the two aren't useful.

"We're basically working to get Boys Town to stop these experiments," Baker said.

Blauvelt disputed both of Baker's points, saying the hospital had the support of veterinarians who believed the use of kittens in the research is scientifically founded and effective.

He added that researchers also used computer models and human trials in their studies, and the hospital would not use kittens if it were not necessary.

"Believe me, if we didn't believe that to be true, we wouldn't be doing this," Blauvelt said.

Behind closed doors

The controversy resulted from allegations PETA made in August that the kittens' treatment and living conditions were substandard.

Baker said that on Aug. 14 the organization presented photographic and videotaped evidence showing the hospital's "filthy cages, sloppy surgical work and animals languishing in pain for days and months without pain killers."

He said a former Boys Town employee notified PETA early last year of what the worker believed was unethical — if not illegal — violations committed by his employer against the kittens.

In response to the employee's allegations, PETA sent an undercover investigator to the hospital in 1996 to gather evidence supporting the claims, Baker said.

After obtaining its materials, PETA held a press conference, calling for an end to the testing, Baker said. He wouldn't disclose the employee's identity or former employment status.

Blauvelt said PETA's allegations were unfounded and pointed to an investigation by the U.S. Department of Agriculture that absolved Boys Town of all but a few record-keeping infractions.

Blauvelt said he was familiar with the allegations PETA made at its Au-

gust press conference, but wouldn't comment on them.

"The truth is we do use animals for research that does use surgical procedures," Blauvelt said. "The way they (PETA) pitch things is so overly dramatized and misleading that I won't go back to their records and say, 'This is accurate' or 'This isn't accurate.'"

PETA alleges Boys Town researchers "cut open the skulls of kittens and sever nerves at the base of their brains." Other allegations include a failure by scientists "to properly train and supervise staff experimenting on and caring for kittens and cats."

Blauvelt said as far as he knew, the former employee was a security guard who quit his job, only to return six months later to spy on PETA's behalf.

He added Boys Town hasn't decided whether or not to take legal action against the former employee.

In the clear?

USDA spokesman Jim Rogers said his department made its first of two unannounced inspections of the hospital on Aug. 20, almost one week after PETA's conference.

Rogers said the USDA cited the hospital for record-keeping violations, storing outdated medicine in the laboratory where the kittens were kept and not having a standard operating procedure for handling sick animals. He said inspectors found no actual "handling or care problems."


Return inspections on Sept. 30, 1996, and Feb. 7, 1997, found all violations had been corrected, Rogers said.

As for Boys Town, Blauvelt said testing on kittens for the purpose of alleviating deafness would continue.

Baker said PETA also would continue making mass mailings and telephone calls and staging demonstrations.

"I would just like to generate public interest in this issue," Baker said.


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