

# Power to the People

## Campus utility plants work around clock

### Dedicated workers required to keep UNL community cozy

By **DARREN IVY**  
Staff Reporter

Students may not notice the important role the campus utility plants have in their daily lives at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Even fewer may understand how all the machinery in the utility plants works.

But they do notice if they're too hot, too cold and if campus buildings are without water and electricity.

That's why employees at campus utility plants aim to keep the campus cool in the summer, warm in the winter and electrically powered throughout the year by working 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year.

"Our utility division works 24 hours a day because the campuses always need electricity, heating and cooling," said Gary Thalken, manager of utilities. "These are necessary services for a successful teaching and research environment."

The UNL utilities division acts like a regular district utility company. The utility plants transfer electricity, produce steam for heating and produce cool air for air conditioning, which is used by City Campus, East Campus and off-campus buildings.

"We buy it, distribute it and bill it each month," Thalken said.

Because the utility plants are a campus department, they collect money from university facilities in two different ways. Expenses from the residence halls, the Nebraska Union, the State Capitol, the Bob Devaney Sports Center

and the Pershing Armory are paid on a monthly basis according to the amount of energy each one uses during the month.

However, the energy costs for the academic buildings on campus are paid for with the money the Legislature allots the NU budget each year.

In 1996, the university paid \$10.5 million for energy from the utility plants. This money paid for the 146.5 million kilowatt hours of electricity, 650 million pounds of steam and 32.8 million tons of chilled water City Campus used.

It also included the 48.5 million kilowatt hours of electricity, 288 million pounds of steam and 10.4 million tons of cool air East Campus used.

#### Plants of the past

The university hasn't always had its own utility plants. When the university was founded, each of the buildings had self-contained heating units.

But after the number of buildings increased, the City and East campuses had to build their own utility plants. That first city plant was built where Richards Hall is now.

In 1926, a new plant was built and the steam part of that plant is still part of the current utility plant at 14th and Avery streets.

Since the City Campus plant was built, there have been many additions.

Last year, the plant's four original brick boilers were removed. Currently, one of the new steel boilers has been installed, but Thalken hopes to have the other boiler installed by

March 1998. Although the plant is only installing two new boilers, the total heating capacity will be greater.

"The new boilers will be more efficient and more reliable," Thalken said.

Located in the middle of East Campus, the East Campus power plant supplies energy to all of East Campus and to the Pershing Armory. Originally built in 1926, the East Campus plant also has had many additions.

With these additions, the plant now has three boilers, three chillers, three cooling towers, one electrical substation, one emergency generator and 100,000 gallons of stored oil.

#### Distribution, not generation

Before 1980, the two utility plants generated their own power because the costs were comparable with buying from an outside source.

But in the last 16 years, generating their own power has become impractical for many power plants.

"We can buy it cheaper than we can produce it," Thalken said.

The utility plants spend an average of \$30,000 a day on energy. Thalken estimated that this figure would be at least twice as much if the plants produced their own.

Another factor that makes generating energy impractical is the fact that the power plants don't have enough generation capacity to generate energy for the whole campus, he said. Thalken said the plants would have to buy other energy anyway.

#### Plans for power

Steam for the university is produced by the utility plant boilers. The boilers burn natural gas or oil, which in turn heats the water. The heated water then turns to steam and is distributed to buildings through pipes. Inside the campus buildings, the steam is used to heat air or water.

The cooling system is not as simple. The cooling systems consist of cooling towers, chillers, Freon and cooling rods. The water starts in the chiller where it is cooled by the Freon. The cool water is then piped to the campus buildings where it goes across cooling rods. As the water goes across the rods a fan blows the cool air through vents. This is the air conditioning.

After the water goes through the rods, it comes out warmer. This warm water is piped back to the plant where it starts the cycle over again. Like any air conditioning unit, the cooling towers blow the warm air or steam into the air. This steam is what many students might see coming out of the utility plants in the morning.

Electricity also is distributed to the campus through the substations at these utility plants.

#### Behind the scenes

However, all the university's massive machinery would be useless without the people who operate and take care of it.

Forty-three UNL utilities company employees work around the clock keeping the machinery operational.

Overseeing the operations of the entire utility company the past 11 years has been part of Thalken's managerial duties.

Additional upkeep of the plants has been done by Jim Lane and Bill Peters, the City Campus and East Campus plant superintendents. Although Lane and Peters are the superintendents, they couldn't do it without the help of their co-workers.

"The utility plants are an essential part of the campus and the people who run (the plant) are the cogs in the wheel," Peters said.

## Leader of England's Labor Party revamps creed

### Charismatic Blair could bring the movement to new political heights.

By **ROBERT BARR**  
The Associated Press

LONDON — The Labor Party was a mass movement born in the mines, mills and dockyards of Britain, but the Labor Party in its current form is largely associated with one man: Tony Blair.

In three years as party leader, Blair has changed the party's creed, branded it "new Labor," and put it in position to win a national election Thursday for the first time in 23 years.

Suppressing the ideological battles that preoccupied the party a decade ago, and embracing many of the policies of the governing Conservative party, the 43-year-old Blair has led Labor on a single-minded quest for power.

If he succeeds in this week's national elections, Blair will be Britain's youngest prime minister since Lord Liverpool, who was 42 when he assumed office in 1812.

"What Tony Blair has particularly done is to admire and, in a sense, imitate Margaret Thatcher's techniques at the height of her powers," said Roy Hattersley, deputy leader of the Labor Party in the last election.

#### Political chameleon

Critics inside and outside the party charge that there's little substance behind the catchy slogans and the high-wattage grin of the leader.

The common accusation is that charismatic Blair has traded principles for popularity.

"Isn't the real truth that you are a politically hungry chameleon?" a talk-show caller demanded of Blair on Tuesday.

Blair responded: "I refuse to believe that the Labor Party should either face a choice of being electable and unprincipled or principled but unelectable."

Blair said voters face two fundamental questions: Do the Conservatives deserve a fifth term? Is new Labor really different from the party that lost the last four elections?

Specific issues of government and policy take second place to those larger questions, but Blair wants to reassure his followers that the party still leans left.

"I want the left to realize that if we win this election, we will have done so without ceding any ground that cannot be recovered," Blair said.

"I am going to be a lot more radical in government than many people think," he said.

#### Oxford and rock music

Blair already is more radical than his background would suggest. He grew up in a comfortable middle-class home in Durham, and his father, a law professor, headed the Conservative Association there.

Blair went to Oxford University in the early 1970s where he was lead singer in a rock band called Ugly Rumors. Even then, the driven young man was apparent beneath the shoulder-length hair and skin-tight trousers.

At Oxford, Blair also became acquainted with Peter Thomson, an Anglican priest from Australia who led long and influential conver-

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**TONY BLAIR**  
Labor Party prime minister candidate

sations with students about theology and politics, and the idea of community.

Blair went into trade union and industrial law after graduating and marrying fellow barrister Cherie Booth in 1980. They have three children.

He started making a mark in the Labor Party in 1992 when he was appointed spokesman on crime and justice. He set out to take the law and order issue from the Conservatives, and make it Labor's.

"I think it's important that we are tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime too," Blair said in 1993.

#### Stepping up to stands

Labor annexed other Tory issues in a similar style. On taxes Labor has pledged no increase in the top rates, and no increase in spending overall.

"What I can promise is that there will be a

fresh start with different priorities, different values — and bit by bit we will rebuild the education system, the health service and the welfare state in this country," he says.

Blair completed the work of two predecessors in revamping the Labor Party after it polled just 28 percent of the vote in 1983. Blair won his seat in the House of Commons that year on a Labor platform advocating unilateral nuclear disarmament, higher government spending, more borrowing, and withdrawal from what is now called the European Union.

In its eagerness to woo Conservative voters, the Labor Party now embraces free-market capitalism, is enthusiastic overall about European Union, has said it will keep to current spending ceilings, and plans to retain Britain's nuclear power.

Or as political satirist Rory Bremner says in his Tony Blair light bulb joke: "Why change it if it's working?"