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Fax number: (402) 472-1761
 World Wide Web: www.unl.edu/DailyNeb
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Trial might use DNA

■ The genetic evidence could help convict the man of two Nebraska rapes.

OMAHA (AP) — Prosecutors want to use DNA evidence from sexual assaults at other Midwest campuses against a traveling comedian charged with raping a teacher at the University of Nebraska at Omaha.

Vinson Champ, a former "Star Search" contestant, is a suspect in sexual assaults at six Midwest colleges, including the one in a UNO classroom in March. Champ, 35, is charged with raping a woman at St. Ambrose University in Davenport, Iowa. No charges have been filed in the other attacks.

Champ was in jail in Omaha on \$1 million bond while awaiting his trial, which might not start until next year.

At a pre-trial hearing Monday, Deputy Douglas County Attorney Leigh Ann Retelsdorf said she hoped

to use evidence from the other attacks against Champ in his Omaha trial.

Retelsdorf told Douglas County District Judge Lawrence Corrigan that she was still gathering the evidence. Another pre-trial hearing is scheduled Nov. 5 to see how much her case had progressed.

"I am turning over the DNA material as fast as I get it, which is not very fast," Retelsdorf told Corrigan.

Hearings on the admissibility of the evidence may not begin until December, Corrigan said.

Defense attorney James Martin Davis of Omaha said he would attempt to limit the DNA evidence, as it will be a central part of the prosecution's case.

"The case ... involves allegations not only of what happened here, but also what happened in the other jurisdictions," Davis said.

DNA also is being used to tie Champ to a Feb. 6 rape of a 27-year-old woman at Union College in Lincoln, according to an affidavit

filed in Lancaster County Court.

After the Union College rape, several similar attacks occurred at other colleges in Omaha, Iowa, Illinois and Wisconsin. Champ became a suspect in the attacks when he was arrested in Pasadena, Calif., for an attempted rape similar to the assaults in the Midwest.

The judge also will hear arguments Nov. 7 on whether Champ can afford to pay for his own experts to examine any DNA evidence the prosecution may introduce.

"You're not going to find any defendant capable of raising \$15,000 to \$20,000, especially when he's locked up and unable to work," Davis said. "He's going to be defenseless if he can't run his own tests."

Prosecutors in Iowa said they wanted Champ to face charges there first because Nebraska was taking too long to try the case, but Nebraska prosecutors insisted he stand trial here initially.

Warrant issued for curator

KEARNEY (AP) — The former curator of the Museum of Nebraska Art was accused Monday of embezzling more than \$100,000 in museum funds.

A warrant was issued for the arrest of John McKirahan, 52, of Kearney.

Buffalo County Attorney Richard Anderson said no arrangements had been made for McKirahan to surrender, and the investigating officers were actively trying late Monday afternoon to serve the warrant.

"I don't intend to make any deals," Anderson said.

McKirahan was not home, said a

woman who answered McKirahan's telephone and identified herself as his mother-in-law. He did not return a message seeking comment.

Anderson said McKirahan allegedly deferred funds in excess of \$100,000 from the museum between February 1992 and October 1997 into an account about which others did not know. He said a co-worker discovered the account and notified the museum board and auditors.

McKirahan left the museum director's post Oct. 2. At the time, he said he resigned for personal reasons that were unrelated to work. Anderson said Monday the museum board knew about the alleged embezzlement and had moved to dismiss McKirahan.

"That was the precipitating factor," Anderson said. "The board fired him, despite what he said."

McKirahan was replaced on an interim basis by Gary Zaruba, an art professor at the University of Nebraska at Kearney who was the museum's first director when it was created 11 years ago. Zaruba will serve as the interim director until a national search can be conducted to find a permanent replacement.

McKirahan had been director of the museum since January 1989. As museum director, he was an employee of the University of Nebraska at Kearney, which operates the museum with the Nebraska Art Collection Foundation.

The museum has a general collection of more than 800 works by 325 artists.

The Nebraska State Patrol continues to investigate the money involved in the alleged embezzlement, said Anderson, who said the amount diverted was more than \$100,000.

Anderson said the museum employee learned of the account after raising a question about a transaction involving the account.

"It wasn't a Swiss bank account," said Anderson, who would not be more specific about how the account was discovered. "It was a local Kearney account but it was an account no one knew about."

McKirahan was charged with one count of theft by unlawful-taking embezzlement. It is a Class III felony that carries a maximum penalty of 20 years in prison and \$10,000 in fines.

Court vote denies validity of abortion law

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court, in a rare near-unanimous vote on an abortion question, refused Monday to give judges more power over young girls' decisions to end pregnancies.

The court's 8-1 vote left in shreds a Louisiana parental-consent law found by lower courts to unduly interfere with some girls' abortion rights.

Only Justice Antonin Scalia, one of the court's most fervent opponents of any constitutional right to abortion, voted to review the state's appeal and consider reviving the law.

Louisiana Attorney General Richard Ieyoub had argued that the case "cuts to the core of this nation's ability to protect the welfare of children."

Janet Benshoof of the Center for Reproductive Law and Policy applauded the court's action. "Louisiana's passion over making a political statement on abortion far exceeds its ability to draft a law that will withstand constitutional scrutiny," she said. "But this is not the end of any story. It's the end of one episode."

The court's action was not a ruling and therefore set no national precedent. It continued, however, the court's five-year record of denying

full review to any case dealing directly with abortion rights.

The court in 1992 barred states from banning most abortions, voting 5-4 to uphold the core of its 1973 decision in Roe vs. Wade that said women have a constitutional right to end their pregnancies.

Since then, the justices only have granted full review to disputes involving protests outside abortion clinics.

Most states have laws requiring unmarried girls under 18 to get the permission of one parent before having an abortion, and the nation's highest court has upheld such laws.

But those past rulings have required a judicial bypass — letting judges act without parental consent to permit abortions for girls deemed mature enough to decide on their own or when telling a parent would not be in a girl's best interests.

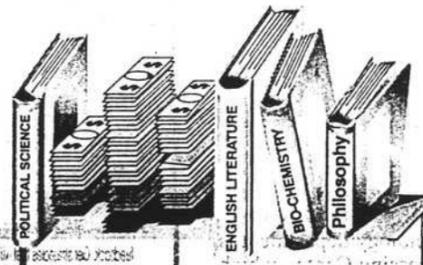
Before 1995, Louisiana's parental-consent law said judges "shall" authorize abortions without telling a parent in those cases in which a girl's maturity or best interests are argued and proved in her favor.

The 1995 law said judges "may" authorize abortions in such circumstances.

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