

Kube roots

After adjusting to a new position this season, NU sophomore point guard Nicole Kubik is stepping it up both on and off the court. PAGE 7

Floating on airwaves

Local supergroup Floating Opera will make its television debut Friday night on the PBS program "33rd Street Sessions." PAGE 9

LET IT SNOW, LET IT SNOW, LET IT SNOW
Snowy, high 25. Flurries tonight, low 13.

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Burning down the house



LANE HICKENBOTTOM/DN

FIREFIGHTERS EXTINGUISH a fire that started in the rubble of the former Firestone service station at 11th and M streets. Workers were removing the demolished building Tuesday morning when a torch ignited some wood while cutting through metal pipes. Firefighters had to use a backhoe to move the rubbish and get to the fire.

Faculty member arrested, fired

BY BRAD DAVIS
Senior Reporter

A UNL chemistry administrative assistant was arrested then fired Tuesday for allegedly misusing more than \$60,000 in department funds.

Diane Stevens, who has worked at the university for more than 20 years, was arrested by University of Nebraska-Lincoln Police Tuesday for "processing false employment paperwork," which paid someone for work not done.

Phyllis Larsen, UNL director of public relations, said it was unknown if the money went to Stevens or someone else.

Charges have not yet been filed in the case, but UNL Police Chief Ken Cauble said the Lancaster County Attorney's office will probably file charges today.

Stevens was released from Lancaster County jail Tuesday after she posted bond.

Larsen said Stevens may have had help if she was stealing money, but Cauble said he did not think Stevens would have had a co-conspirator.

A university statement said Stevens allegedly created a temporary "research associate" position.

Stevens' duties, the release said, included completing the forms that add employees to the university payroll.

Larsen said another employee discovered the alleged criminal activity, but she would not name the employee or the manner in which he or she discovered the possible theft.

Larsen said the Lancaster County Attorney's office instructed UNL officials to remain quiet about the case while it is under investigation.

Although administrators believe the missing money is an isolated case, Larsen said an investigation is being conducted to make sure there are not other irregularities.

"... there were enough university policy violations to cause her termination."

PHYLLIS LARSEN
UNL director of public relations

"The university folks who had done their investigations felt there were enough university policy violations to cause her termination," she said.

Vice Chancellor for Business and Finance Melvin Jones said the alleged theft occurred in a specialized sector of UNL's workforce.

The university will investigate all the jobs similar to Stevens' to make sure the same thing is not happening in other departments, Jones said.

Larsen said the case was under investigation by the UNL Police, the UNL Department of Operations Analysis and the Lancaster County Attorney's office.

Director of UNL Operations Analysis Linda Enck said her office's involvement with the case didn't require anything out of the ordinary.

She said the Operations Analysis office continually audits all university departments to ensure checks and balances within departments are functioning properly and funds are not misused.

Enck said her department was now auditing the chemistry department, which would have happened eventually anyway.

"This is what we do each and every day," Enck said. "To say we're going to start auditing just because of something like this would be incorrect."

Crime rates down from 1996

BY JOSH FUNK
Senior Reporter

Lincoln was safer last year than it was the year before.

That's the case if you ask number crunchers at the Lincoln Police Department.

According to a police report released Tuesday by Mayor Mike Johanns, crime was down in Lincoln for the second year in a row.

Crime statistics from 1997 show a 7 percent decrease in violent crimes and a 1 percent decrease in the overall crime rate.

Johanns attributed the decrease to the enlarged police force and the community's vigilant intolerance of crime.

"Our commitment to the police along with more officers helps them investigate crime," Johanns said.

Also, community organizations such as Neighborhood Watch and MADD Dads help reduce crime, he said.

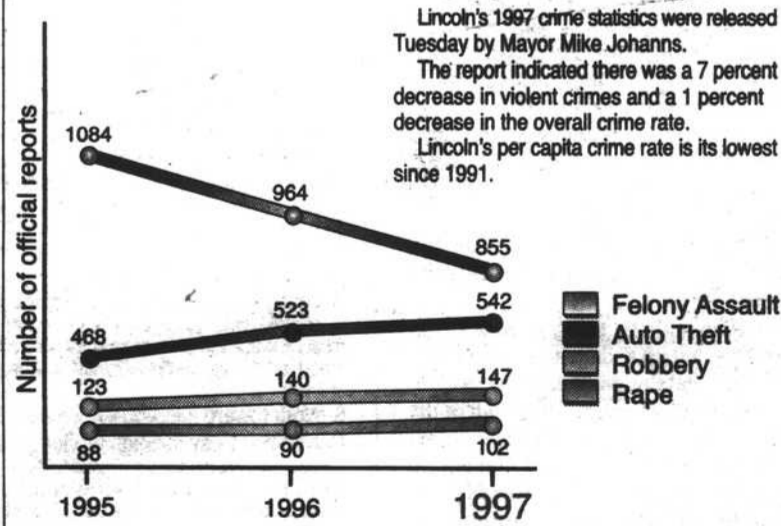
"When people show a lower tolerance for crime, their actions deter criminals," Johanns said.

Police Chief Tom Casady said he believed imprisoning more habitual criminals also reduced crime.

But Casady said the police department is only a small part of the community, and it can't prevent crime alone.

"There are 800 miles of streets in Lincoln," Casady said. "The officers

Holy fewer crimes, Batman



JON FRANK/DN

can't be everywhere."

The decrease in crime coupled with the continual increase in population makes Lincoln even safer to call home, Casady said.

This per capita crime rate is the lowest since 1991.

The bad news is that robbery, rape and automobile theft were up, Casady said, but the good news is that felony assault and violent crimes were down last year.

Although the crime rate is down from 1996, it has been steadily

increasing over the last decade.

Violent crimes are up 58 percent since 1987, and crime involving property is up 10 percent.

The long-term increase in crime can be partially attributed to a record number of drug cases, Casady said, especially marijuana- and methamphetamine-related crimes.

Also gang-related crimes in the capital city seem to have leveled off, Casady said.

"Our gang files have been stable for almost a year."

Legislative bill focuses on teaching phonics in schools

BY JOY LUDWIG
Staff Reporter

Legislature

Eleven-year-old Philip Weinmaster of Omaha couldn't read or write the alphabet during the first grade until his mother transferred him to a school that had a phonics program.

In three months, he said, he was able to read and write the alphabet legibly, not just "chicken scratch" — all because he learned that letters stand for sounds, he said.

Tuesday afternoon Weinmaster, with his mother Linda, spoke at the Legislative Education Committee hearing in favor of LB977, a bill that would require school districts to use

"systematic phonics instruction" as part of the reading curriculum for kindergarten through second grade.

Sen. Kate Witek of Omaha, who introduced the bill, joined teachers, a concerned parent and a member of the Lincoln Public School board in testifying on the bill.

"Why this is not already being done in classrooms is beyond me," she said. "We have educational professionals and they have let us down, and I want to know why."

As an example, she said one of

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