

Cockson touched the lives of many

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family," Lessley said.

For some, Laura was more than just a friend.

"She was my conscience," Hicks said. "She'd always call me on stuff right away. She was such a rational thinker."

One of the things people remember most about Laura was her infectious laughter and a smile that could light up a room, Hicks said.

"If she smiled at you, it just made you feel good."

While Laura was growing up in Friend, the Cockson family always was close.

"They'd sit around and talk for hours," Hicks said. "Laura told her mom everything."

Laura was exceptionally close to her older brother, Steve, who was only 11 months older, but whenever the three sisters got together there was bound to be laughter, friends said.

One of the fondest memories Lessley has of Laura was a time when the three Cocksons at UNL - Steve, Laura and Sarah - were studying together in the Gamma Phi Beta basement.

"The three of them were studying, talking and laughing, and I remember thinking how lucky she was," Lessley said.

As the class valedictorian and star athlete in high school, Laura was an all-American girl, Hicks said.

She graduated in a small class of 16 people, which became so close it felt more like a family.

Last year Laura and Hicks had to deal with the loss of one of their high school classmates.

"I thought about what it would be

like to lose Laura then, and I couldn't imagine it - but now it's happened," Hicks said.

At the university, Laura's dedication to academic success was evident with her 4.0 grade point average in her occupational therapy classes. She wanted to continue at Creighton University next year.

"Last weekend we were talking about our futures, and now it is like we jinxed it," Hicks said.

As freshmen, Hicks convinced Laura to study abroad with her in the Czech Republic.

"Originally she didn't want to go, but in the end we had great memories," Hicks said.

Instead of ordering food in restaurants with the Czech language, Laura would use English, repeating herself louder if the locals didn't understand, Hicks said.

One of Laura's favorite pastimes was shopping.

"Every time I went to the mall I'd look for her and she was probably there," Theis said.

She was at the Express so often that when they were looking for help the owner told Laura to apply, Theis said.

In the aftermath of Laura's death, her friends and sorority sisters are trying to focus on the positive influence Laura had in their lives.

Her sorority sisters now wear purple ribbons as a promise and a reminder not to drink and drive, Grigsby said. Purple was one of Laura's favorite colors.

Meanwhile, her family and friends must learn to accept a future without Laura, Ideus said.

"I am a safer person now that she is watching over me."

Faculty votes to keep instructor; McLaughlin named top educator

BY BRAD DAVIS
Senior Reporter

Last week he was nearly ready to pack his bags and head back to teach high school in Missouri.

Tuesday he was named UNL's best instructor.

In the days in between, adjunct chemistry instructor Bill McLaughlin has watched students and faculty members join forces in support of keeping the 1997-98 Outstanding Educator Award winner in Lincoln - at least for a little while longer.

McLaughlin was told of the award Tuesday afternoon, the same afternoon chemistry faculty members voted "nearly unanimous" in support of hiring the chemistry instructor full time.

He could not be reached for comment Tuesday night.

University of Nebraska-Lincoln administrators had pledged to find

the money to hire McLaughlin if the chemistry department voted to add him to the faculty.

A petition including signatures of more than 1,000 students in support of keeping him on staff was presented to administrators earlier this week.

McLaughlin, a visiting instructor from St. Joseph, Mo., was originally told money wasn't there to employ him beyond his one-year term.

But with Tuesday's vote, Chemistry Professor Paul Kelter said McLaughlin would enter into negotiations with Brian Foster, dean of the arts and sciences college.

Kelter said chemistry faculty members knew McLaughlin was an outstanding professor.

"That's why we pushed so hard," he said. "This is a guy who teaches magnificently by interacting with the students in a rigorous, fun exploration of chemistry."

Senators advance DUI bill

BY TODD ANDERSON
Assignment Reporter

Legislature

Keeping drunken drivers off the road would save the lives of innocent drivers like UNL student Laura Cockson, Lincoln Sen. LaVon Crosby said Tuesday.

After three amendments were added to LB309, a bill that would increase the penalties for drunken driving sponsored by Crosby, senators advanced the bill to the final round of legislation.

"Anything we can do to get drivers off the road because they've had too much to drink, we should do," Crosby said.

Debate on the bill may have become more poignant following the weekend death of Cockson in an alcohol-related car accident that also seriously injured her two younger sisters.

"Why should we protect someone like him," Crosby said, referring to Jeffery E. Ireland, the driver responsible for the accident. "He has absolutely devastated a family."

Though there was widespread support for the bill - senators advanced it with a unanimous voice vote - they spent almost four hours debating proposed amendments.

The current version of the bill included amendments added by the Transportation Committee, that set the minimum fine for first-time DUI offenders at \$500, an increase of \$300.

A second offense would result in a minimum of two days in jail or house arrest and a minimum \$500 fine.

People caught driving under the influence four times would face jail time, a \$1,000 fine and a possible 15-year license revocation.

Under current statutes, repeat offenses committed within the last eight years count against the drunken driver.

Speaker Doug Kristensen of Minden said one of the most important parts of the bill would extend that time frame to 12 years.

"In eight years, it's impossible to rack up that many offenses," Kristensen said.

The bill would allow a person whose license was revoked to appeal to the Department of Motor Vehicles after a period of seven years, provided there were no further charges during that time.

The Legislature added an amendment proposed by Sen. Eric Will of Omaha that would set the guidelines for the DMV in recommending a pardon from the State Pardons Board.

Driving with a revoked license after a third and fourth offense would be a class III and class IV felony, respectively.

Also, for any felony committed while driving under suspension, the

driver's vehicle could be impounded.

The bill also makes DUI for minors a primary offense, in accordance with a mandate from Congress. Failure to conform to federal law would result in a flat, \$15 million penalty for the state.

Minors can be convicted of DUI if their blood alcohol content is more than 0.02 percent.

An amendment proposed by Sen. Ernie Chambers of Omaha, which was added to the bill, would require police officers to have reasonable cause for stopping a driver and demanding an alcohol test. Refusal to take the test, such as a Breathalyzer test, would be cause for imprisonment.

The DUI violation would remain on a minor's record for 90 days; a refusal violation would remain for 120 days.

Despite heightened national and local discussion of a proposal to lower the legal blood alcohol level to 0.08 - the current legal level in Nebraska is 0.10 - an amendment was not proposed to change the limit.

Nebraska is one of 10 states that hasn't converted to the lower legal blood alcohol level.

Crosby said she supported changing the limit, but would wait until next year to propose an amendment. She said the LB309 would lose support if such a provision were added this year.

"If I proposed an amendment now (to change the legal blood alcohol level)," Crosby said, "you'd see the rotunda full of lobbyists."

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