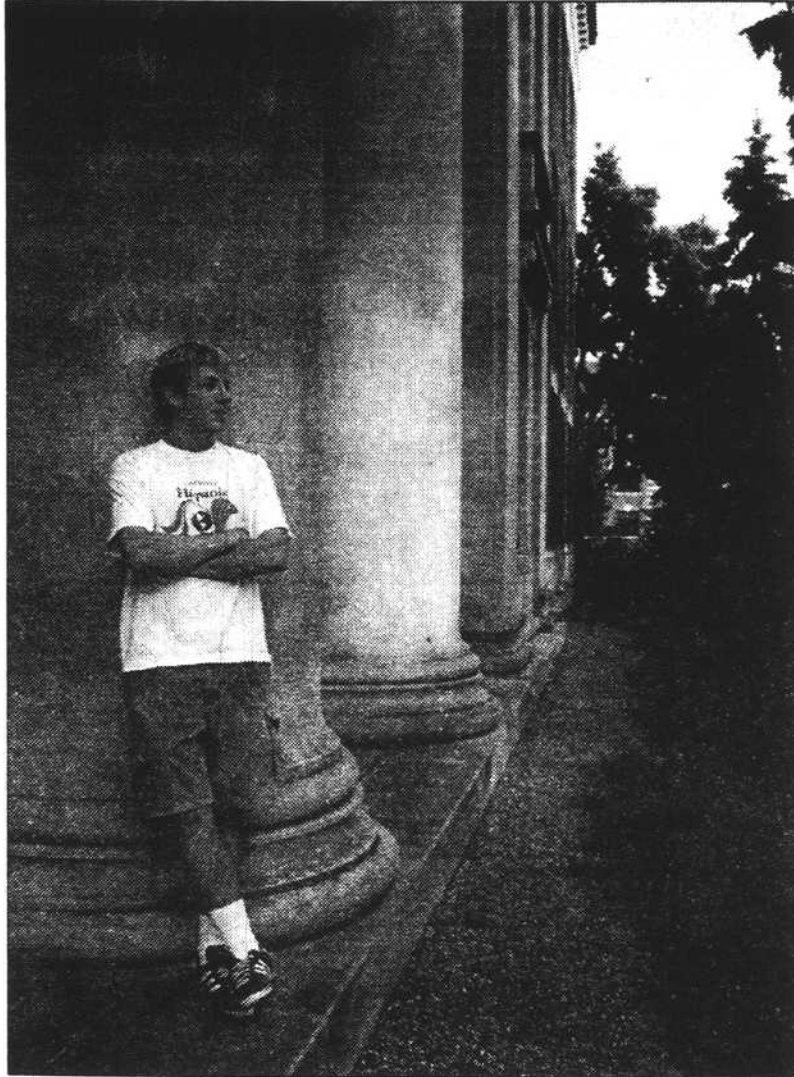


Rainbow award recipient fights hatred



MIKE WARREN/DN

Jonathon Judge, an academic senator at Nebraska Wesleyan University, faced death threats after advocating for a gay student group, Plains Pride. He was given the Rainbow award for his work on behalf of the group.

By TIM KARSTENS
Staff Reporter

While many of his collegiate peers were worrying about midterm exams and distant summer plans, Jonathon Judge was preoccupied with death threats and physical and verbal harassment.

Judge, a 21-year-old academic senator from Nebraska Wesleyan University in Lincoln, presented a bill to his fellow senators requesting recognition of a student group called Plains Pride.

What followed were assaults and anonymous threats aimed at Judge, his family and even an ex-girlfriend of Judge's. In the midst of the attacks and threats emerged a ground swell of support. Family, faculty, staff and students held rallies supporting Judge and Plains Pride.

Although it was a difficult time, Judge's family weathered the worst of the backlash and stayed behind him.

"It's been a tough time," said Mary Jo Judge, Jonathan's mother. "But we are very proud of him."

For his efforts on behalf of Plains Pride, Judge received the first Rainbow Award from the Lincoln Pride Network during PrideFest on June 20. The award, which recognizes individuals or organizations that have supported Lincoln's gay and lesbian community, was created to honor those who show strong, public support for Lincoln's gay and lesbian community.

The award was inspired by Judge's exceptional efforts on behalf

of the gay student group, and the great personal sacrifices he made assisting them, said Pat Fosket of the Lincoln Pride Network.

"The Rainbow Award came about primarily because we had heard what Jonathan had done," Fosket said.

Last spring semester, Judge was approached by some Wesleyan students who formed Plains Pride and wanted recognition from the university. By gaining recognition, Plains Pride would be able to petition the university for funds and become a more visible student group, Judge said. As a student body representative, he accepted their request and lobbied his fellow senators on behalf of Plains Pride.

Judge, who counted some friends in Plains Pride, said he petitioned the student senate because the group was like any other student organization and had the right to exist at Wesleyan.

"It wasn't even an issue," Judge said of Plains Pride's bid for recognition. "It was about free-speech and basic human rights."

It was after the bid was made and the decision to recognize Plains Pride was forthcoming that the death threats and assaults began. Judge said the incident came at a sensitive time for the Methodist Church — which is affiliated with Wesleyan University — as it was dealing with the controversy surrounding the Reverend Jimmy Creech. Creech, the former Methodist minister from Omaha, had previously angered church officials by performing a commitment ceremony for two lesbians.

As the tension began to build, his

"It was about free speech and basic human rights."

JONATHAN JUDGE
Rainbow award winner

family, university faculty, staff and fellow students began to rally behind Judge and Plains Pride. He said the backing came at a critical time and was essential in bolstering his morale.

"The support was phenomenal," Judge said. "Many students and faculty on campus were very supportive."

Even though he received significant support, Judge said there were times he wondered about what he had done. However, his personal convictions and a sense of right and wrong carried him through the controversy. To this day, Judge doesn't have any regrets.

"I would do it again," Judge said of the episode and any similar situation.

It is these qualities that make Judge unique and special — especially for such a young person, Fosket said. These are attributes society should see more of.

"Without the Jonathan Judges of the world, we couldn't do it," Fosket said. "We need more of it."

Heartland Big Brothers Big Sisters gets assistance from UNL student

By TOM FOSTER
Staff Reporter

Alyssa Hansen, 10, lines up a shot on the tricky 16th hole of the miniature golf course at Champions Fun Center, 1555 Yolande.

Smiling, she makes the shot, runs in a circle, and gives her friend a high five.

Her friend is Brenda Pick, a University of Nebraska-Lincoln elementary education major and volunteer at Heartland Big Brothers Big Sisters. Pick has been Hansen's big sister for a month, she said, and things are going great.

Heartland Big Brothers Big Sisters is an independent, non-profit organization that matches adult volunteers with children from single-parent or limited-income families. In Lincoln, 120 volunteers give their time to little brothers and sisters, said Program Director Lisa Borchardt.

But that still leaves at least 100 children waiting to be matched with someone, she said.

"We can always use volunteers," she said, "and right now, we can espe-

cially use males to give a boy the opportunity to have a big brother."

Borchardt said only 30 percent of the present volunteers were men, and 70 percent were women. Eighty percent of the waiting list is boys, she said.

Volunteers for Big Brothers Big Sisters are asked to make a long-term commitment to the program, Borchardt said. That way, relationships with the children have time to develop. She said the longest-running pair has been together for eight years.

Volunteers set aside two or three hours a week for the program, she said.

Pick and Hansen have made good use of that time. In the last month, they celebrated Hansen's birthday, visited Henry Doorly Zoo in Omaha, painted their nails at Pick's house, went shopping and played miniature golf. An Omaha Royals baseball game is next, and Hansen's dad plans to come along.

Hansen said it was originally her dad's idea to join the program.

Borchardt said many children come to the program via their par-

ents, but the majority come from school referrals.

As for the volunteers, many are students from UNL and Nebraska Wesleyan University, she said. Others come from all over.

"It's great," Borchardt said. "One of my volunteers is a retired gentleman over the age of 70."

Pick said she volunteered simply because she likes children.

"I always wanted to make a difference in a child's life," she said.

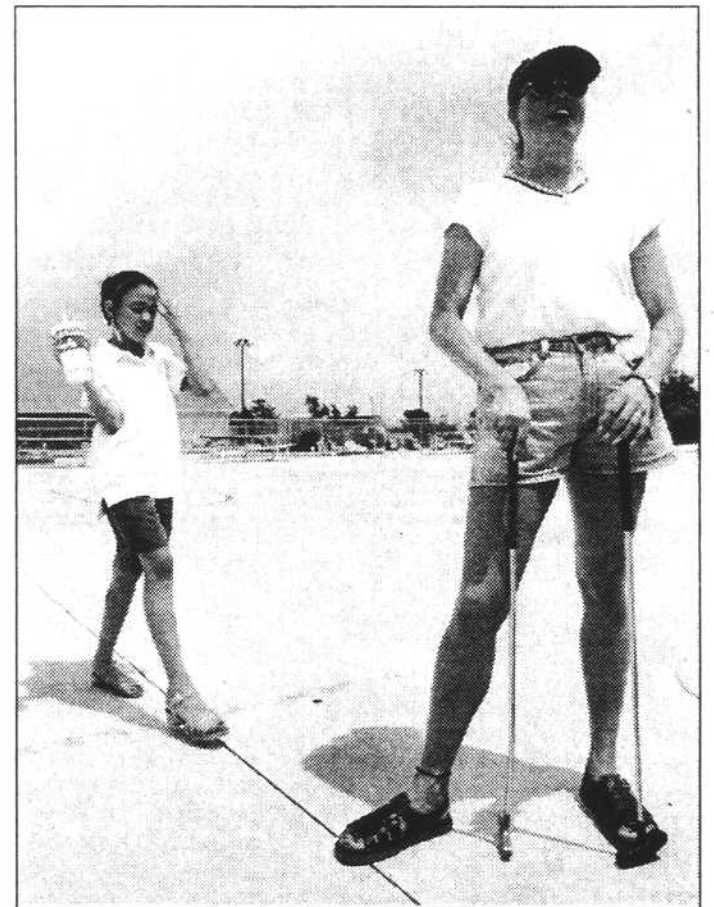
Becoming a big sister was not easy, though. Pick said the process involved an application, personal references and a lengthy interview.

"It was really a big honor to be accepted," Pick said.

Indeed, Borchardt said volunteers were carefully screened to find good matches for the children.

"We try to match the strengths of a volunteer with the needs of child," she said. "We want to make sure it's easy for them to stay together."

Finishing their round of golf, Pick said she expected the relationship with Hansen to last. Hansen smiles, and the two head off in search of an ice cream shop.



ALAN YOSHIMOTO/DN

BRENDA PICK, a volunteer with Heartland Big Brothers, Big Sisters, waits for little sister, Alyssa Hansen, who brings a cool drink after a game of putt-putt golf Saturday at Champions Fun Center, 1555 Yolande.