

Professor takes rights movement worldwide

HITCHCOCK from page 1

But the coordinator of African Studies won't have to worry about stuttering through a speech. He has enough tales to fill volumes.

"He's known to be an effective speaker," said Stephen Hilliard, the series' program committee chairman.

Hilliard said Hitchcock was the best choice to speak about human rights in Africa, a topic the committee wanted to bring into the series.

Hitchcock's experiences extend beyond his office and go into the homes of indigenous populations in eastern, central and southern Africa.

He also has focused his efforts on the plight of the American Indians.

Lately, Hitchcock manages to pursue his passion for human rights overseas at least once a year, most often in southern Africa.

An early impact

Growing up in Saudi Arabia, Hitchcock saw hands chopped off for crimes such as stealing.

It was a strict regime. Poverty was prevalent, and the effects of corporate

expansion fell mainly on the shoulders of indigenous populations.

He was born in the town of Abquaia. He lived there for 15 years until he moved back to California. While living in Saudi Arabia, he saw what negative effects modernization could have on less developed countries' populations.

"You could see such amazing impacts on their lifestyles," he said.

If you build it

At first, Hitchcock was blind to what he could do about human rights violations he sees clearly now.

In his first years working in Botswana, in southern Africa, Hitchcock was doing research in a rural area where a group of indigenous people called San lived.

The San approached him needing a bridge at Nata River. A young San girl had drowned crossing it.

Hitchcock then realized what he should be doing and helped the San get a bridge. But it wasn't easy.

The government said the San had no land rights. Hitchcock helped the indigenous people work with the gov-

ernment and build a bridge.

Since that awakening to the urgency of native populations' needs, Hitchcock has been overseeing development projects and helping indigenous populations adjust to modernization.

Without help, those people could easily have remained silent until they faded away, Hitchcock said.

It's hard to deal with such issues, he said, but things are improving.

Now, groups such as the San run their own developmental programs and do their own fund raising.

Pure opposition

In the two decades he has lived and worked in Africa, Hitchcock has experienced his share of adversity.

In 1985, a Somali friend and his family were killed in Botswana in a blast in the friend's home. In 1986, Hitchcock's hut was blown up in a raid in Swaziland. He wasn't home.

South Africans who blew up the hut were raiding and targeting anti-apartheid areas. Hitchcock wasn't personally targeted; the Africans blew up the wrong house.

In the early 1990s, Hitchcock spoke to service organizations in Nebraska about the harsh climate indigenous populations endured during the Gulf War.

He didn't receive a positive response. Most people were in favor of the war and didn't want to hear about its negative impact, he said.

'A bloody situation'

Remembering the good ol' days, a smile emerges on Hitchcock's face when he talks about his college years, when he slipped out of his conservative background into extensive protesting of

the Vietnam War.

Hitchcock was one of 2,000 students who, on Feb. 19, 1970, burned down the Bank of America near the University of California at Santa Barbara, where he attended school.

The bank was chosen as a symbol because it was one of the "biggest capitalistic things around," Hitchcock said. The bank supported the war, he said.

"It was a historic moment in college history," Hitchcock said as he pointed to a photograph showing the flames engulfing the building.

During protests, Hitchcock was involved with three major riots in which five people were killed.

"It was a really bloody situation for a number of months," Hitchcock said.

The police shut down the entire city of Santa Barbara. Nearly everybody involved was arrested, including Hitchcock. "It was a greater case of suppression of rights than I've ever seen," he said. "A lot of people got hurt."

The firing of a University of California at Santa Barbara anthropology professor sparked the protests. The professor was fired because of his political beliefs, Hitchcock said.

The professor said the U.S. government was providing harmful chemicals to Peru and Brazil. The chemicals were used to clear areas in the Amazon for oil exploration.

Hitchcock was one of 7,776 students who signed a petition protesting the university's decision to fire the professor.

In the line of fire

Hitchcock has faced controversy of his own recently because of issues surrounding the repatriation of about 1,700 American Indian bones at UNL.

"It's an interesting position to be in," Hitchcock said.

The anthropology department's handling of remains has been questioned because some remains were

found last fall in Bessey Hall, causing the department to be suspected of unethical research.

In addition to answering questions from American Indian groups, Hitchcock said he answers nearly a dozen calls and e-mail messages a day.

Hitchcock is striving to work especially closely with American Indian groups, hoping to right what was done wrong, he said.

Regina Thunder Hawk, a senior anthropology major, said Hitchcock has kept a strong viewpoint.

"I think he took the honorable stance with the issues that came up," Thunder Hawk, an American Indian, said. He did so, even though much of the university has resisted some of his beliefs, she said.

Hitchcock has met resistance in his effort to institute a university policy that would require researchers to get permission to work on human remains.

He said university officials argue that such a policy infringes on academic freedom.

"Why is it that it's OK to do work on dead people and not OK to do work on live people, or you have to get permission to do work on live people?" Hitchcock said.

Positive trend

Hitchcock will continue in his quest for human rights.

He will continue doing development work in Africa, but he also wants to focus on North and South America.

Hitchcock said he is happy with the changes in attitudes in human rights that have occurred internationally since the protests in California. "I'm heartened by listening to students at this university," he said.

Students are more interested in doing the right thing, granting indigenous populations the rights they deserve, he said.

"That wouldn't have been the case 20 or 30 years ago."

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City Council delays vote on P Street traffic flow

P STREET from page 1

said Tom Bassett, a one-way supporter. "They need to know the history of decisions made regarding P Street."

Two-way traffic was suggested as early as 1989 as part of a long-term plan for revitalizing the downtown area, council documents stated.

Some one-way proponents charged that the construction of the new Embassy Suites Hotel on P Street between 10th and 11th streets influenced the change to two-way traffic.

But Dallas McGee, assistant director of Lincoln Urban Development, said the city had already decided on two-way, and all of the hotel developers bidding on the project planned their buildings accordingly.

Embassy Suites developer John Q. Hammons said in a letter to the council that a two-way P Street was a key factor in his decision to build.

At Monday's public hearing, about 60 citizens sat in council chambers to show support for their side or address the council. Some who wanted to speak stood in lines and had to race to the microphone, sometimes running into each other, as speaking time was at a premium.

Two government agencies located in the Haymarket - the U.S. Postal Service and the Immigration and Naturalization Service - argued that the current two-way configuration is causing many headaches for their employees.

Both agencies use P Street regularly and have complained of traffic problems.

"They have shut off the postal service," said Leon Iatum, the president of the American Postal Workers Union. "To accommodate a few big businesses, the city has said 'to hell with the public.'"

In addition, the INS office has

expanded, bringing more employees and more traffic to the Haymarket district.

On the other side of the issue, supporters, who envision a pedestrian-friendly marketplace area, argued that through traffic should go around P Street.

Tim Francis, a 12-year downtown area resident, said drivers should use M or K streets as a throughway.

"I drive all over the city every day, and I can easily find the quickest way to get there," Francis said. "I didn't think that made me exceptionally bright, but apparently that disqualifies me for government service."

Two-way supporters stressed that Lincoln needs to give the new P Street a chance.

And Lincoln Mayor Mike Johanns agreed that drivers should be given time to adjust.

"I understand that at this point nothing has been good about it," Johanns said. "But it needs time."

Councilman Jerry Shoecraft, who proposed the bill to change P Street back to one-way traffic, was not swayed by the hours of testimony.

"I want the marketplace and downtown development (on P Street), but that will never happen with I-180 dumping thousands of cars in downtown a day," Shoecraft said.

After all the testimony, the council delayed a vote on the issue so it could further question the city's Public Works and Utilities department.

In other council news: The council discussed the procedure for appointing an interim mayor in place of Johanns, governor-elect. A vote will be held Monday, and Councilman Dale Young is expected to be appointed.

The council said it supports the state fire marshal's enforcement of occupancy limits in downtown bars.