

# Parole board considers early release of Kratzsch

By JESSICA FARGEN  
Staff writer

Two-and-a-half years ago, Maryanne Kratzsch gently covered her children's heads with pillows to muffle the sound, then shot her live-in boyfriend in the head after more than eight years of abuse.

She wrapped his wound in a drop cloth and buried his body under their doghouse in Omaha. Because of that, she has been in jail for the past year with no chance of parole.

But the Nebraska Board of Pardons decided Wednesday that when District Court Judge Lawrence Corrigan sentenced Kratzsch a year ago, he did it with the intention that she would be eligible for parole after one year.

Kratzsch, 33, is serving an eight-year sentence at the Nebraska Correctional Center for Women in

York for manslaughter and use of a weapon to commit a felony. In July 1996, Kratzsch killed her boyfriend, Gerald Heck, as he sat on their couch.

Corrigan sentenced her to consecutive sentences of one to five years for manslaughter, and one to three years for the weapon charge, translating it to a sentence of two to eight years.

Corrigan wrote in a letter that he thought Kratzsch would be eligible for parole this February after serving half of her minimum sentence.

But under state law, she received a flat sentence of eight years with no chance for parole, Attorney General Don Stenberg said.

Although Stenberg and Secretary of State Scott Moore said they thought eligibility for parole after one year was a light sentence for murder, their job was not to rehash the grisly details of the Kratzsch case, Moore said. Instead, he said, their job was to correct Corrigan's mistake, which he

acknowledged in a letter to the board.

"I'm still trying to understand why such a light sentence was handed out," Moore said. "The fact is that's what the judge (intended).

Kratzsch's attorney, James Martin Davis, said the letter was all the board needed to readjust the sentence of Kratzsch, now eligible for parole.

"We are not asking you to release her, just commute (the sentence) back to what she thought she was going to get," Davis said. "Are you going to say she's going to suffer because a judge made a mistake?"

The board, composed of Gov. Ben Nelson, Stenberg and Moore, decided to commute Kratzsch's sentence after two hours of testimony from Kratzsch's family, the attorney general's office and an Omaha police detective.

Kratzsch's sister, Patty, sat with a clenched hand full of tissues during most of the hearing. Paul

Kratzsch, her father, sat near his daughter at the hearing and got up with the help of a cane to speak.

Both reminded the board that Kratzsch had responsibilities outside of prison - namely three little girls whose mother is in prison because she killed their father, he said.

"We desperately need her to bring them up properly and guide them," Paul Kratzsch said. "I need her."

Kratzsch had previously said that fear for her life, after threats by Heck, led her to kill him. She said fear of losing her children drove her to hide Heck's body.

Kratzsch had little to say at the hearing. "In essence I am just asking for that chance that I was told I would have," she said. "I was a responsible, proud citizen, prior to (the murder).

"I would like a chance to return to that once again."

## First lady leaves mark

Friends of Diane Nelson laud her abilities, accomplishments

By TODD ANDERSON  
Senior staff writer

A leaky roof, worn carpet and broken furniture. Many know the troubles of keeping up an old house.

But for first lady Diane Nelson, leaving the 40-year-old Governor's Mansion in disrepair was not the way to ensure it's service to future first families.

Although renovation of the governor's residence at 15<sup>th</sup> and H streets is the most visible part of the legacy the first lady will leave behind, her work in promoting volunteering and a sense of community are her most lasting contributions to Nebraska, friends and project volunteers said.

Rod Bates, who worked with Nelson in a campaign to celebrate the state's 125<sup>th</sup> birthday in 1992, said she had a way of inspiring people to help out and a drive to achieve her goals.

"When (Nelson) makes up her mind that something's going to be done, it's going to get done whether you want to help or not," he said.

Whether it was forming and leading committees, renovating the governor's home or working on community health and education, Diane Nelson has been

known for getting the job done.

The first lady said refurbishing the mansion was the first goal she identified in 1991, but the project was pushed back to 1997 because of her busy schedule.

"There always was just another project coming along," she said.

After planning a birthday party for the state in 1992, Nelson in 1994 became chairwoman of Good Beginnings, a state-funded organi-

to encourage Nebraskans to become involved in volunteer programs.

In 1997, Nelson and former first man Bill Orr kicked off the mansion renovation project, which Nelson called "a smashing success."

She and Orr raised money to fund the renovation and set up a trust fund for proper upkeep and maintenance needs.

Orr said Diane Nelson's leadership was integral to the completion of that and other projects.

"She is a driving force in any kind of project she is involved with," he said. "When she sets her mind on a goal, it will be achieved."

Marilyn Hansen, a friend of Nelson and chairwoman of the mansion renovation project, said Nelson's strength is her ability to put together the pieces of a large picture to generate a desired outcome.

"She reads people very well, and she encourages people to use their talents to the best of their ability," Hansen said.

Bates also said Nelson knows how to accomplish goals by following through with her commitments, seeking involvement and acknowledging everyone who plays a part.

He said Nelson remains calm and patient even when a situation is awkward or sticky.

"I just think she is a very gracious first lady, and she has a lot of class," Bates said.

"She's able to set everything aside and say, 'Let's get busy.'"



DAWN DIETRICH/DN

**FIRST LADY Diane Nelson presents the newly renovated governor's mansion in August, a project that she led starting in 1991. The endeavor was just one highlight of her eight years of work as first lady.**

zation that oversees health care and education for children.

In addition, she helped develop the community service commission

## Students see benefits of Habitat

Volunteers enjoy working to build home, which is scheduled to be finished in April.

By KENDALL SWENSON  
Staff writer

Student volunteers are beginning to see the positive results of a growing campus organization.

The University of Nebraska-Lincoln chapter of Habitat for Humanity has started building its first house on the northwest corner of 29<sup>th</sup> and Potter streets.

"I really enjoy it," said Jason Dubs, president of the UNL chapter of Habitat for Humanity. "It gives me a good feeling by helping out."

Student workers have been working Tuesdays and Saturdays with professional volunteers to complete the house. So far, volunteers have worked on what will be the house's basement.

Although the house is scheduled

to be finished by April 1999, the date is somewhat tentative, Dubs said.

A mild winter could help the chapter complete the house on time, he said.

"It all depends on the weather," Dubs said. "We would really like to have it done before the school year is done because people won't be around to help out in the summer."

Members of UNL Habitat For Humanity see the project as a large reminder of the chapter's progress. Over the past few years, the chapter has seen a large increase in membership and involvement.

"We didn't do much a couple of years ago," said Chris Stone, a third-year member of the chapter. "Our chapter is really strong now."

Although the project has been getting several volunteers weekly, it is still looking for both labor and money, Dubs said.

The chapter is hoping student groups will volunteer to "Adopt-A-Job" and provide labor and funding for a small part of the house.

For example, student groups can pay for the paint for the inside of the

house and provide volunteers for that job.

"People will probably get into the project a little more next semester," Dubs said. "We are still looking for student groups that are looking for fund-raisers to help support the project."

The UNL chapter is working in partnership with the Lincoln-Lancaster County chapter of Habitat for Humanity to build the \$40,000 house.

Lincoln-Lancaster County Habitat helps coordinate purchasing property for the house and locating skilled labor for jobs such as electric work and plumbing, Dubs said.

"They help us out a lot," Dubs said. "The Lincoln-Lancaster chapter helps find professionals to donate their time."

Although the house will require a certain amount of skilled labor, construction experience is not required to help.

"Some people don't even know how to pound a nail," Stone said. "Experience is a great asset, but all people are welcome."

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