

Dunagan gets continuance

■ A judge's ruling will allow the UNL freshman to take finals before he is sentenced on charges of manslaughter and the use of a weapon to commit a felony.

By JOSH FUNK
Senior staff writer

UNL freshman Matthew Dunagan will be able to complete his final exams before he is sentenced for the murder of his father thanks to a continuance granted last week.

In December, Dunagan, 19, did not contest charges of manslaughter and the use of a weapon to commit a felony for the Sept. 30, 1997, shooting of his father, John Dunagan.

A Lancaster County District Court Judge granted the defense's motion for a continuance Thursday, one day before Dunagan's scheduled sentencing.

John Stevens Berry, one of Dunagan's

lawyers, said this was a complicated matter and needed time for consideration, but he refused to comment further.

Deputy Lancaster County Attorney Jodi Nelson did not return several Daily Nebraskan phone calls Friday.

This is the second time the sentencing hearing has been moved back.

The hearing was continued from Feb. 18 to March 19 to allow the judge additional time to review the pre-sentence investigation.

Dunagan could face one to 20 years in prison for both the manslaughter and the weapons charge, but the judge also has discretion to suspend the sentence.

After the plea agreement was entered, Michael Hansen, Dunagan's other lawyer, said their goal was to keep Dunagan out of jail.

In January, County Attorney Gary Lacey said the case called for compassion.

Lacey said a psychiatric evaluation detailed a pattern of systematic abuse in Dunagan's life leading up to the Sept. 30, 1997, shooting.

Early that morning Kay Dunagan called 911 and reported: "My husband is an alcoholic; he was drunk, he was going to kill me, and my son

defended me."

When police arrived at the southwest Lincoln home, Matthew Dunagan admitted shooting his father, John.

Documents filed in Lancaster County Court detail the events of that night:

John and Kay Dunagan had been fighting, which was reportedly common when John Dunagan drank.

Matthew Dunagan went upstairs to his room and loaded a 12-gauge shotgun in case the argument got physical.

About two hours after the argument ended, John Dunagan became upset and threatened his wife in Matthew's presence.

So Dunagan went upstairs, got the shotgun, returned and shot his father three times as he lay on the couch.

Dunagan's mother, Kay, bailed him out of jail a few days later, and he finished his senior year at Lincoln Pius X through tutoring.

After graduating with a 4.0 grade point average, Dunagan came to the University of Nebraska-Lincoln on a Regents Scholarship.

Dunagan has been a full-time student all year, majoring in biochemistry.

NU regents vote down proposed alcohol ban

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was UNO hockey home games at the Omaha Civic Auditorium, where beer is sold.

Alcohol sales were incorporated into the 10-year contract to help defer the costs of the hockey program.

Wilson said he didn't want other sports to think this kind of arrangement was acceptable.

But detractors on the board said alcohol at sporting events was already covered by a state law banning its sale in state buildings and policies at each campus banning alcohol.

"The question is what is good policy," Regent Drew Miller of Papillion said. "Binge drinking is the biggest problem on campus, and this policy does not address that."

The regents voted 4-3 against Wilson's proposal with Miller abstaining.

The regents also approved the hiring of two new faculty members on Lincoln and Omaha campuses.

Marsha Torr was named the vice chancellor for research at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Torr most recently oversaw research and taught physics at the University of South Carolina in Columbia, where UNL Chancellor James Moeser worked before coming to Lincoln.

On April 15, Torr will replace Priscilla Grew, who retired after six years to return to teaching.

Torr will have a tenured professorship in the physics and astronomy department.

"This is both an honor and a wonderful opportunity for me," Torr said in a statement. "I have been impressed with the faculty, staff and administrators that I have met. ..."

At the University of Nebraska Medical Center, Kenneth Cowan, M.D., will lead the Eppley Cancer Research Institute.

Before coming to Omaha, Cowan did genetic and cancer research and clinical work with the National Cancer Institute.

The regents, who were in Kearney Friday to meet with UNK administrators for an annual check-up, approved the lease agreement for a new UNO residence hall and commons building.

One of the project architects, Tim Holland of the Holland Basham firm in Omaha, presented plans and a model of the 164-bed, suite-style facility.

"This building will be around for a long time, so students who graduate in 2004 can bring their grandchildren back to see it," Holland said.

UNO Student Regent Jon Schrader joked that there should be a student regent room in the new hall.

The \$15 million residence hall will be built and operated for 40 years by the Suzanne and Walter Scott Foundation.

After the 40-year period, the university will assume ownership of the hall and oversee its operations.

UNMC Chancellor Harold Maurer, M.D., said he had signed a letter of intent with Methodist Hospital and Nebraska Health System to form the new mental health partnership.

The two hospitals plan to form a jointly sponsored, nonprofit corporation to oversee the project.

The new mental health and substance abuse services and UNMC's psychiatry department will be housed in three existing buildings on the Methodist Richard Young campus.

"We're extremely pleased with the educational and research opportunities this partnership will provide," Maurer said. "We are committed to making UNMC a world-class institution, and we believe this is the next step to achieving excellence."

In other regents news:

■ The regents approved three deferred maintenance or renovation projects, including authorizing bids for Hamilton Hall renovations. The other projects are on the Kearney and Omaha campuses.

■ Association of Students of the University of Nebraska President Sara Russell was recognized for her year of service, and last year's board chairman, Regent Robert Allen, of Hastings, was recognized.

Town tries to recover from prairie fire

THEDFORD (AP) - Four semitrailer truckloads of hay were delivered Sunday to ranchers near this western Nebraska town to help them recover from last week's devastating prairie fire.

"Some ranchers lost all their hay, some lost summer pasture, some lost winter pasture," said Brent Pluge, University of Nebraska agriculture extension educator based in Thedford.

About 40 ranchers were hurt in one way or another by the fire, which destroyed thousands of acres of rangeland, Pluge said.

The hay from Dodge and Cuming counties arrived Sunday for ranchers in the burned area. A committee of ranchers was set up to help make distribution decisions, Pluge said.

Thedford, a town of 250 people, was evacuated when the state's largest fire nearly reached the community late Tuesday. The fire scorched nearly 130 square miles in the Sandhills before it was under control Wednesday.

The donated hay was being sent by the Dodge County Feeders Association, the Cuming County Feeders Association and the Cuming County Ag Awareness Group.

Later in the week a group also will be going out to the burned area to help repair fences, organizers of the aid effort said. The groups also were collecting cash donations to purchase additional fencing materials for Sandhills ranchers.

The Nebraska Department of Agriculture also set up a hotline for farmers and ranchers who would like to donate feed, supplies or pasture land. The number is (800) 422-6692.

Pluge said his extension office has received more than 200 calls from people offering hay, fencing materials and money.

Surveillance video helps police catch bank robber

By JOSH FUNK
Senior staff writer

One week after a Union Bank robbery, Lincoln police on Thursday arrested the man identified in a surveillance video.

Police said the investigation was aided by high-quality video tape from the bank and a new professional-quality VCR that Union Bank donated earlier this year.

Lincoln Police Chief Tom Casady said they received numerous Crime Stoppers calls, and two police officers identified the suspect after seeing the videotape.

The 43-year-old man arrested for the March 11 robbery is no stranger to police.

He served three years in prison for a 1991 Lincoln bank robbery, and he was in prison for a 1984 burglary.

Also, the man was a vocal critic of police last spring when he was working at the Greyhound bus station.

The man called police racist for their handling of an assault on a bus driver.

But the man's accusations of police misconduct were unfounded.

"He wasn't straightforward in his criticisms of police," Casady said.

Police had the man's house under surveillance last week in preparation for serving a search warrant.

So when the man left his house around 3 p.m. Thursday, police followed and made the arrest without incident, Casady said.

When police searched the man's house, they did not find money or the gun used in the robbery, but Casady said the investigation would continue.

The arrest came exactly a week, almost to the minute, after the 3:51 p.m. robbery of the Union Bank branch inside the 70th and Van Dorn streets Russ's Market.

"Armed robbery is one of the most dangerous crimes because of all the things that can go wrong (during the crime)."

TOM CASADY
Lincoln police chief

The man entered the bank, pointed a handgun and ordered one of the two tellers to empty a cash drawer.

A few weeks before the robbery, the Union Bank employees had gone through police training on how to handle a robbery.

Casady said he was very concerned about catching the man responsible for the robbery.

"Armed robbery is one of the most dangerous crimes because of all the things that can go wrong (during the crime)," Casady said.

But the man was caught quickly after surveillance video aired on local newscasts.

The tape was edited frame-by-frame with the Union Bank-donated VCR.

"This equipment comes in very handy in a case like this," Casady said.

Quality surveillance systems are a worthwhile investment for financial institutions, Casady said.

Better video helps police investigate crimes and involve citizens.

"In all criminal investigations, citizen input is critical," Casady said. "Nine times out of 10 a crime is solved because someone tells us what they know."

Accident kills UNL student, injures five

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Linnell, along with two other passengers, was sent to Gothenburg Memorial Hospital and later transferred to Kearney's Good Samaritan Hospital.

Linnell's father, Robert, said he was in London at the time of the accident when he got a 7 a.m. phone call with the news.

"I spent roughly 25 hours to come home to see my boy," he said.

Linnell's brother, Steve, a senior at Papillion-La Vista High School, said family and

friends have been supportive, but he still cannot believe his brother may not be able to walk.

"The real emotions have not struck - I haven't seen my brother for over a week," Steve Linnell said. "I, we, can only pray for the best of all those involved."

Linnell's parents said they would stay by their son's side until he is well.

"My heart really goes out to Jason's folks and the families of the other students," Robert Linnell said. "I don't know what I would be feeling if it had been Brian."

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