

# Small businesses look at Y2K issues

State business leaders offer to help local companies with technological concerns

By Ieva Augstums  
Senior staff writer

With 267 days left until the new millennium, the fate of some Nebraska small businesses and their willingness to discuss Year 2000 problems is being questioned by a group of state business leaders who would like to help.

Many are concerned about business' disinterest in Y2K compliance plans, and are anticipating a potential economic downfall.

"This could definitely be a problem for some, and not for others," said Gisele Olney, a consultant for the Nebraska Manufacturing Extension Partnership, a program affiliated with the Nebraska Department of Economic Development. "But regardless, everyone needs to look at the issue."

Dave Wright, operations manager with the Nebraska Manufacturing Extension Partnership, agreed.

"Despite widespread publicity,

many small- and medium-sized manufacturers are still unaware of how this problem may affect their business," Wright said. "The potential crisis looming for companies' computer systems, manufacturing equipment and facility infrastructures are real."

To help combat potential Y2K problems and to ensure businesses aren't forced to shut down, a Y2K self-help program, developed by the National Institute of Standards and Technology, is available to all small manufacturers and other small businesses that would like free help with Y2K compliance.

Olney said the main Y2K problem was a flaw in the way dates traditionally have been entered into computer systems. For example, on Jan. 1, 2000, computers using two digits to track dates will recognize the double zeros as 1900, she said.

"The self-help kit will help businesses assess their concerns," Olney said. "It asks people to think through their business, step-by-step, and tackle one component at a time."

Olney said the program asks business owners to identify areas of concern in the internal elements of a business's information system, then consider the possible outcomes if that specific area were threatened or terminated. It then prioritizes areas of critical concern and provides resources and help for improvement, she said.

The program also examines external concerns.

"It's a program approach in which issues get addressed," Olney said. "Each situation is different. You just have to look at it, decide and figure your priorities."

Dave Wellsfry, a member of the National Bank of Commerce's Project Year 2000 Team, has done just that.

Wellsfry said the company was dealing with Y2K concerns, assessing them and coming up with solutions.

"We are simulating Year 2000 critical dates in our testing lab," Wellsfry said. "Once areas are identi-

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Nebraska Manufacturing Extension Partnership consultant

fied, we actually use real people who use real applications, seeing if we have solved our problem."

Glenn Harris, Nebraska Small Business Administration district information resource manager, commended those businesses that have begun assessing their Y2K concerns. But he said he had witnessed a strong disinterest in Y2K compliance issues among small business owners, and more needed to be done.

In October 1998, the National Federation of Independent Businesses said 82 percent of small businesses nationwide are potentially at risk for Y2K problems. Of those businesses, about 50 percent have

begun or finished assessing their concerns for 2000.

Harris, who travels across the state providing Y2K informational presentations, said the study also applies to Nebraska.

He said he was concerned about the future of small businesses but said he could not provide a solution to stimulate interest in Y2K issues.

"There is no simple answer for the reasons why people are not responding to our help. Some believe Y2K won't affect them," Harris said. "Sure, that's a possibility, but small businesses are the backbone of the American economy. If they fail, we all will be in trouble."

## Project helps abuse victims

By DANE STICKNEY  
Staff writer

A UNL residence hall was decorated with colorful shirts to raise awareness for violence against women on Tuesday and Wednesday.

The shirts were part of a visual display in the Harper-Schramm-Smith study room that bears witness to violence against women. The display is known as the Clothesline Project.

Each of the 27 shirts on the clothesline tells the story of a Nebraska woman who was abused. For example, a red shirt symbolized a woman who had been raped, and a white shirt symbolized a woman who had died from some sort of abuse.

Many of the white shirts bore pictures of the women who had died, while other shirts carried slogans such as "Abuse survivors will go to heaven because we've already been to hell."

The Clothesline Project originated nearly 10 years ago in

Massachusetts as a way to expose violence against women. Since then, other communities have started similar projects.

The visual display was accompanied by an audio tape, which symbolized abuse that is currently taking place, such as the following: Every 12 seconds a woman is battered; nearly every minute a woman is raped; every hour a woman dies from being abused.

Matt Hedin, a junior biology major and Harper Hall student assistant, was instrumental in bringing the Clothesline Project to campus. He saw it as a way to make males more aware of the injustices against women that occur on a daily basis.

"I first saw the display at a conference in Iowa," Hedin said. "It really had quite the impact on me. The fact that each shirt has its own story is totally overwhelming."

"I thought it was a great way to get the men on campus to open their eyes to the problem and do something about it."

Hedin took his idea to the

University Women's Center. He and Women's Center Project Coordinator Tolandra Coleman then worked together to make the project happen.

"After hearing Matt's idea, (the Women's Center) was very excited to help with such a great cause," Coleman said.

"Together we brainstormed on ways to make the project known around campus. We set up booths at the (Nebraska) Union and printed up fliers that Matt designed."

Hedin and the Women's Center also teamed up with the Lincoln Rape/Spouse Abuse Crisis Center to play host to a program on sexual violence Wednesday evening in the Harper-Schramm-Smith study room.

The program presented information on date- and acquaintance-rape and other common sexual abuse problems on college campuses.

Those interested in finding out more about violence against women or sexual abuse should contact the Rape/Spouse Abuse Crisis Center at (402) 475-7273 or the Women's Center at (402) 472-2597.

## Study: Teen smoking increases cancer risk

Those smokers who start as teen-agers display increased DNA alterations.

WASHINGTON (AP) — Permanent genetic changes that forever increase the risk of lung cancer occurs in teen-agers who smoke, even if they quit later in life. And the younger the smoking starts, the more damage is done.

That's the conclusion of a study published Wednesday in the Journal of the National Cancer Institute.

The research, coming at a time when more than one-third of teens are taking up the smoking habit, shows "there is something uniquely bad about starting young," said John K. Wiencke, a genetics expert at the University of California, San Francisco, School of Medicine, and primary author of the study.

He said the research gives powerful laboratory evidence of why starting smoking before the age of 18 can be particularly harmful to long-term health. Wiencke said such youthful smoking on a daily basis causes lung damage that the body cannot repair. He said the damage is less likely among smokers who start in their 20s or later, although smoking at any age is not healthy.

"It looks like it is the age when smoking starts that is important," Wiencke said. "It didn't matter if they were heavy or light smokers — what mattered is that they started young."

Earlier studies have indicated that young smoking stunts the lungs' full development and increases the risk of breathing problems later in life. Studies have also shown that smoking in the teen years is more addictive and that smokers who begin young are less likely to break the habit.

But Wiencke's study for the first time shows dramatic and enduring DNA damage caused by youthful smoking.

"This reinforces the idea that we need to stop young people from smoking, not only from the addiction standpoint, but also from the cancer risk standpoint," Wiencke said.

Surveys by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention indicate that 34.8 percent of high school students were regular smokers in 1995. That number rose to 36.4 percent in 1997.

A CDC survey of smokers aged 30 to 39 showed that 62 percent had tried smoking by the age of 16, and

24.9 percent had taken up the habit permanently by that age.

About 3 million teen-agers now smoke, the government estimates. And about a third of all smokers will die of smoking-related illnesses, including lung and other types of cancers, heart disease, stroke, emphysema and chronic pulmonary obstruction.

In their study, Wiencke and his colleagues tested for DNA alterations in the nontumor lung tissue of patients being treated for lung cancer. The group included 57 people who were current smokers, 79 who were former smokers and seven who had never smoked.

The healthy lung tissue was tested for the number of DNA alterations per 10 billion cells. Some alterations occur with age, but the number of gene changes was much higher among smokers — and highest of all among those who started smoking at a young age, Wiencke said.

For nonsmokers, there were 32 DNA alterations per 10 billion cells. For current smokers, the alterations were about eight times higher. The findings were adjusted statistically for the number of years smoked and for the amount smoked.

The startling discovery was that for former smokers, the most important factor affecting DNA damage was when they started smoking, not how long or how much, Wiencke said.

Former smokers who started at or before their 15th birthdays had an average of 164 genetic alterations. Ex-smokers who started between age 15 and 17 had an average of 115 alterations.

Among ex-smokers who didn't start smoking until after they were 20, however, the DNA alterations averaged 81, fewer than half that of people who started smoking earliest.

Such alterations occur when chemicals in tobacco smoke fuse with genes in the DNA of lung cells. These chemical complexes, called adducts, cause mutations and significantly increase cancer risk, Wiencke said.

The study shows that "genetic alterations from tobacco carcinogen exposure may persist in former smokers," said an editorial in the journal by three cancer researchers at the University of Texas M.D. Anderson Cancer Center in Houston. The editorial said the finding "fits one more piece into the lung cancer risk assessment puzzle."

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