

Cindy Johnson dreams big, works hard

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the lights and the music, and everybody was always happy.

"To me, that was the perfect world."

The amusement park continued to be the perfect world for Johnson, after her father's career shifted gears and the family ended up in Southern California.

"(Disneyland) is where we would go on dates in high school," she said. "It was a totally different place when you were in high school than when you were a young elementary student."

But her weekend Disneyland dates eventually came to a halt, after her father returned home from the Vietnam War and was stationed in Bellevue.

Though she has been back to Disneyland several times with her husband and three sons, David, Phillip and Luke, the park's magic has disappeared, she said.

"When I took my children, I didn't think Disneyland was near as neat ... all the animation ... it wasn't so magical anymore.

"And I think it was kind of a lesson — that your perspective of the world is at the time that you are there, and that moment.

"The world stays the same, Disneyland's the same. It's me that's changed. And I think that takes a lot in our life — that we change."

The changes began for Johnson when her family moved to a new home in Nebraska. She adapted to her new high school in Plattsmouth.

And she didn't associate so much with Disneyland fairy tales any more.

"I didn't belong to too many clubs or organizations (in high school) because I started working as soon as I got to the age that I could hold down a job," she said.

"I bought my own clothes, bought everything like that. So, I started working. And if it wasn't working and marching in the band and studying for school, I didn't have any more time."

After high school, Johnson's life took another turn when, while studying at Bellevue College, she met her husband, Dave.

Unlike her vomiting episode before the Disneyland excursion, Johnson's pre-wedding excitement did not result in a queasy stomach.

"I didn't vomit when I got married," she said. "So that should tell you a little of my perspective (about Disneyland)."

One of the changes she cherished most, she said, was her move to Arizona, because of a past family vacation touring the state.

"I just found the Native American

culture fascinating," Johnson said.

"That's what we would do is go up to reservations and learn about different things. It was more of an educational type of vacation that my dad did for all us kids — and we loved it."

But even her appreciation of Arizona's culture and its Grand Canyon, she said, could never compare to the advantages of living in Nebraska.

One of her favorite things about the state is its winning football team. She said it is one of the things that has kept her here for so long.

Berringer, the late Brook Berringer, a former NU quarterback who died in a 1995 plane crash, as one of the most inspiring to her.

"Berringer was a real important player to me," Johnson said. "His character and the type of individual he was, was very impressive to me."

Johnson and her sons often squabble over who gets the families' limited supply of Husker football tickets.

"Well, we only have two tickets, and there's five of us," she said.

Fighting with her sons — David, 22, Luke, 20, and Phillip, 19 — can sometimes be a challenge.

Despite family quarrels over football tickets, Johnson said she's fortunate to have had boys.

"As a little girl, I always wanted to be a mother of boys. And every time I was pregnant I would pray it would be a little boy ... If I would have had three girls, I would have kept having children until I had a boy."

Thanks to her husband, Johnson said, she's had a much easier task raising her children and taking care of household chores.

"David cooks, he cleans, he does laundry when he sees that laundry needs to be done," she said. "Our time has always been limited so when we work together as a pair, it gives us more time to have fun."

Johnson has supportive friends and colleagues in both the political and personal realms — all of whom recognize her strong views on issues Lincoln faces in its future and the fun she has while taking time to relax.

Gov. Mike Johanns, who resigned as mayor after he won the 1998 election, endorsed Johnson in front of a crowd of about 100 people Tuesday, during a press conference held inside the state Capitol building.

"There isn't a person better prepared than Cindy Johnson to be the next mayor of Lincoln," Johanns said.

Her philosophies on taxes — Johnson is against raising taxes — were a prime example of why Johnson should

be voted mayor, he said.

Her ability to interact with citizens and her involvement in community organizations were other strong qualifications for the mayor's seat, he said.

Johnson was president of Mothers Against Drunk Driving in Lincoln for six years.

Her time spent in the organization, she said, taught her how to be successful in communicating with city officials.

"The way to be successful is not to be adversarial," she said. "You need to work as a team and educate your officials and work together with them."

Johnson also seeks to work on the

tax issue.

"When you start tacking on taxes, sometimes it takes them beyond what they can afford and they can't get their own home — which owning your home is an American dream."

In some ways, Johnson still fulfills the fairy tale existence because of her close-knit community of family and friends.

Deb Badeer, who met Johnson at a Lincoln church in the late 1980s, said Johnson's outgoing personality immediately helped the two become good friends. Badeer has shared a number of memorable times with Johnson and her husband.

One summer, Badeer and her husband had a summer olympics event in their backyard geared for the adults.

Many times, the Badeers and Johnsons would visit with each other, playing dominoes for hours on end, she said.

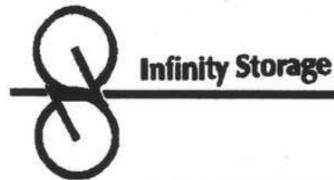
"She and Dave are just a lot of fun," Badeer said, who also said she admires her close friend for her faith in God.

"(Johnson's) faith means a lot to her," Badeer said. "We can talk about the Bible ... talk about those issues together."

"She's a neat combination of tough and tender."

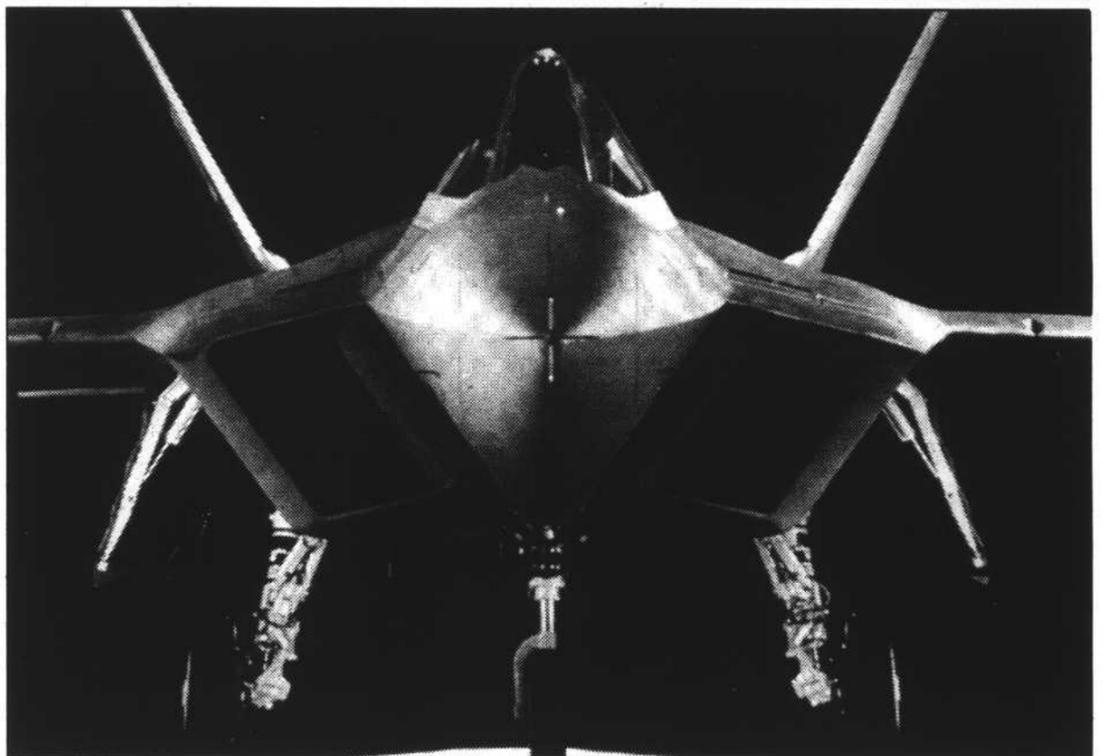
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Torr's goal: increase research, rankings

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Along with going to Washington, D.C., to secure federal funding, she will go to the private sector to find out what kind of projects are realistic for UNL to take on.

Torr said she hopes to put in place five to seven research initiatives that mesh the physical sciences with the social sciences.

Research projects addressing the issues of food supply, climate change and quality of water are examples of initiatives a land grant, agriculturally based college such as UNL would be most successful at, Torr said.

While Moeser said that UNL has the "intellectual fire power" to increase the amount and caliber of research done at UNL, he said Torr will be looking into hiring more research-only faculty members.

The increased emphasis on research doesn't mean every faculty member has to engage in extensive research, Torr said.

"Some people are fantastic teachers and should be recognized for that," Torr said. "Some people may not be so good in the classroom, but they may bring in a research initiative that is vital to Nebraska's interest. They should be

recognized for that."

Torr said she hopes to increase the research being done by the current faculty members by giving them more opportunities.

"I think there are many faculty who have wanted to be involved with the research at the university, but may not have had the opportunities," Torr said.

Timothy Mahoney, an associate professor for history, said Torr's attitude toward creating a supportive environment for research would encourage those professors who are actively pursuing research projects to go after them more aggressively.

"She's encouraging the faculty to go after more and more funds," Mahoney said. "It will encourage these faculty who have active research programs to keep doing what they are doing."

Torr said the increase of research at the university would ultimately improve the quality of life for students and faculty members. Increasing the research funds that come into the university would increase the caliber of the library, fund more building improvements and bring more facilities like the Beadle Center to campus, Torr said.

"I think it just starts to float up the whole ship."