

Despite fears, new year enters quietly

By Michelle Starr

Staff writer

As thousands of Lincoln residents counted down the seconds to 2000, city, county and UNL campus officials stood by ready with supplies and alternate plans for the possible effects of the Y2K bug.

But midnight came and went without any major power problems and only two incidents were reported by Lincoln police.

If the Y2K bug were a firework, it would be nicknamed "the dud," said Gov. Mike Johanns at a press conference on New Year's Day.

The preparedness of businesses, utilities and the government is responsible for the lack of Y2K incidents, Johanns said.

Steve Masters, public utilities administrator at Lincoln's Public Works and Utilities, said there were no problems with city traffic lights, water or wastewater facilities.

"Things have gone surprisingly smoothly," Masters said.

Rick Haden, manager of street and traffic operations at Public Works and Utilities agreed and said the only calls made to the office were traffic barricade requests for the downtown Fire and Ice celebration.

Haden said it was the two-year preparation and testing of the city's electric system and traffic lights that made the difference in the smooth operation.

Public Works and Utilities city crews were prepared with temporary stop signs if power failure were to occur, Haden said.

Larry Pelter, spokesman for Y2K at the Lincoln Electric System, also said nothing went wrong.

"It appears that most electrical

power around the world survived the Y2K turnover," Pelter said.

Forty LES employees were ready for any problems, he said.

LES also monitored the electrical systems at 11 p.m., 12 a.m. and 1 a.m. on New Year's Day to make sure the switch was a success for the Eastern Standard Time and Mountain Time, Pelter said.

After expecting a busy evening, the Lincoln Police Department had relatively little to complain about on New Year's Eve.

One of the two incidents reported to Lincoln Police involved Nickolas D. Bera, an 18-year-old from Lincoln, who allegedly robbed a woman, fired shots into the car of another woman and threatened another group of motorists, all between 7:30 and 9:45 p.m., police said.

Bera, 3235 S. 14th St., was taken into custody at 11 p.m. and is charged with seven felonies. His preliminary hearing is set for Feb. 7.

The second incident involved Jason Morin, 20, and a 15-year-old, charged with theft and child abuse.

Police said the two suspects may have stolen a Chevrolet Cavalier that was left running in the driveway in front of an apartment at 611 S. 20th St. An 18-month-old toddler was in the back seat.

Police found the two suspects near 15th and F streets, and the infant was found later unharmed in his car safety seat in a nearby alley.

The Lincoln Police Department was prepared for the festivities of the evening with more than 100 officers on the street, about 20 more than a typical Friday night around midnight, said John Becker, assistant chief of

operations.

Becker said even though police were prepared, it was a quiet evening.

"It was great. I went home earlier than I thought," Becker said.

Despite the two incidents, Becker said, some Thursday nights or football Saturdays have had more problems than New Year's Eve.

Although the additional officers did not encounter many problems, Becker said, it was better to over-plan than be caught off guard and not prepared.

Lancaster County Sheriff Terry Wagner said that like the city of Lincoln, Lancaster County increased the number of officers on duty and had few problems.

Wagner said there were 26 officers on patrol compared with the average of about 10 officers for that time of night.

The evening cost about \$1,200 for the county sheriff's department, Wagner said.

The entire night cost the Lincoln Police Department about \$15,000.

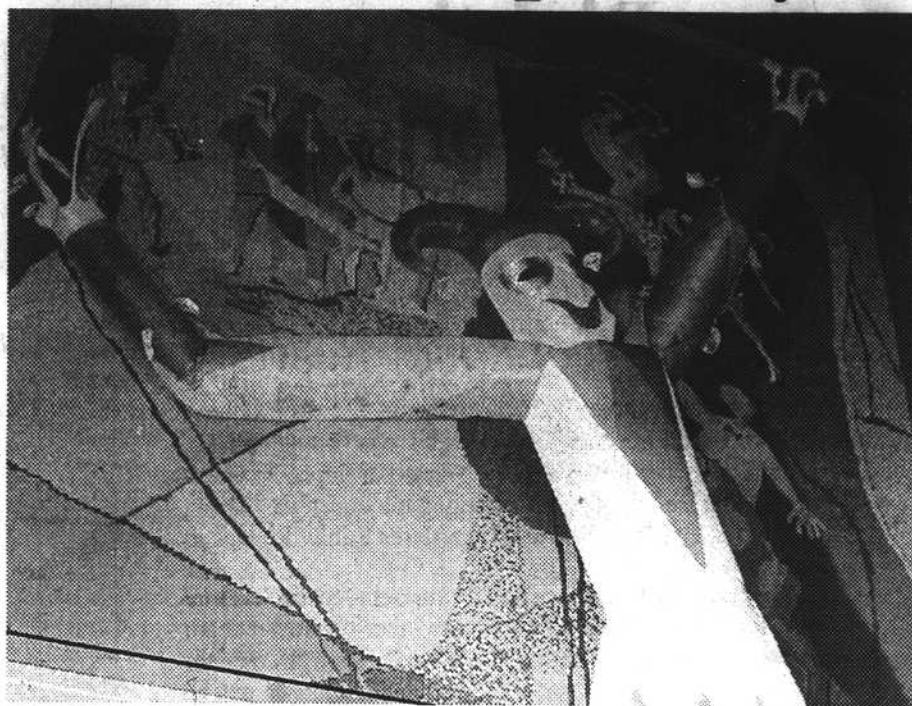
University Police officers also were put on emergency preparedness plan, which included training for possible problems, additional officers on duty and 12-hour shifts beginning at 7 a.m. on Dec. 31.

Eight extra police officers were commissioned for the university, said University Police Sgt. Mylo Bushing.

No reports of electrical failure were reported to the University police, Mylo said.

Because of the lack of problems, University Police discontinued the preparedness plan at 2 a.m. Jan. 1.

"It was as quiet of a New Year's Eve I've seen in a long time," Wagner said.



ABOVE: A 30-FOOT-TALL AIR puppet rings in the New Year in front of Pershing Municipal Auditorium, 226 Centennial Mall South. Thousands of Lincoln residents were downtown to witness the city-sponsored laser show and fireworks.



LEFT: In a scene reminiscent of Mardi Gras, Pam Nelson and her life-size puppet friend join the revelers on O Street. The Lincoln Police Department had extra officers on duty but saw few problems related to the large downtown celebration.

photos by Sharon Kolbet

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