

'A needed shot in the arm'

27th Street plans coming to fruition

BY CASEY JOHNSON

Buildings have been razed, trees have been planted and new signs have been posted.

Now, residents of Lincoln are beginning to see the fruits of the labor gone into the North 27th Street revitalization plan.

Community officials say the plan has been successful so far because of the combination of private, governmental and grassroots efforts.

Wynn Hjermstad, community development manager for the Urban Development department of Lincoln, said one of the good things about the project is that business owners and residents of the area contribute to the overall ideas of the revitalization.

"Taxes generated in that area are paying for it, so it's a pretty neat process because the people that live there and work there and own property there are the ones who are making the decisions," Hjermstad said.

Some of the projects involved in the planning efforts for the street are a new strip mall located on the west side between S and T streets and a new Walgreens on the northwest corner of 27th and Vine streets.

A new bridge will span 27th Street and connect the MoPac bike trail from 33rd and X streets into the University of Nebraska-Lincoln City Campus. The trail will be called the Husker Link.

Deloris Lintel of the Clinton Neighborhood Association said the revitalization started in part because of concerns over the public's perception of the area.

"This area has a lot of strengths to it," Lintel said. "We wanted to show the general public that this area is still a great place to live

at and visit," she said.

Lintel, who also is a member of the New 27th Street Business and Civic Organization, said the community cannot succeed in the revitalization without the help of private development.

"I hope that private business continues to come into the area and breathe new life into our community," she said.

Some of the projects already completed are a new McDonalds near 27th and Vine streets, new lights and signs along 27th Street to provide visual unity along the corridor and a new \$1.5 million police station on 27th and Holdrege streets.

Perhaps one of the most important projects underway is a new community center being built next to the new police station. The Northbridge Center for Children and Youth will be built by Cedars Youth Services of Lincoln.

Part of the center will be paid for by federal funding secured by U.S. Sen. Bob Kerrey and a \$40,000 donation from the McDonald's Corporation.

Jim Blue, Director of Cedars in Lincoln, said it is important to have the youth center in the North 27th Street area because of the lack of resources in the area.

"If you look at the numbers in that census track, it has the highest number of single-parent households in the city of Lincoln and the second highest poverty rate in the city of Lincoln," Blue said.

Blue said that about 1,500 children live in the area, but there are no licensed child care centers, libraries, swimming pools or health care facilities. He said there is also a lack of entertainment.

Blue said one of the biggest priorities for

the center will be to establish professional child care services and work with other organizations to provide after-school programs, health care, counseling and spiritual programs.

"We like to refer to the project as a 'community center without walls,'" he said.

Construction on the 1,500 square-foot facility is scheduled to start in March. The center could open its doors before the end of 2001.

Maj. Robert Boone of the Salvation Army on 27th and Potter streets, which has been in the area for more than 50 years, said he liked the idea of having a community center, the police station and the Salvation Army all on the same block.

"We are thinking that this area is going to be kind of a campus of activity,"

The police station will provide protection, the community center will provide child care and the Salvation Army will provide for residents' physical and spiritual needs.

Mayor Don Wesley said the plan for the revitalization was started to make the area more attractive to businesses.

"That particular area was having some trouble some time ago, and we wanted to make a concerted effort to invest there as a city and then spark private investment," Wesley said.

Wesley also said the revitalization was critical for Lincoln because of the street's high profile.

He said the street is a north-south version of O Street because of its high-traffic volume. Wesley said the neighborhood "needed a shot in the arm."

The investment will help improve the neighborhood, which is one of the older ones in the city.

"The street gets better, the neighborhoods get better, and it all builds upward," Wesley said.

Six win back lives, honored by LAP

■ The Phoenix Award was given to those who jumped on the road to self-sufficiency.

BY SARAH FOX

Dennis Thorne returned from the Navy in 1967 and married six years later.

After a failed marriage, which lasted three years, Thorne ended up homeless.

He lived in Minneapolis, Nashville, Tenn., Miami, San Francisco, Sioux Falls, S.D., and Lincoln.

Twenty-four years later, Thorne has an apartment, a job and an award.

Thorne and five other people received the Phoenix Award on Nov. 8 from the Lincoln Action Program, a nonprofit human service agency that is funded by local and federal grants.

LAP gives the annual awards, named for a mythical bird that rose from its ashes, to people who've made progress in becoming economically self-sufficient.

An LAP board created the award in 1989, and they choose the winners each year.

"(The board) really saw people struggling to pull themselves out of poverty and not getting a lot of credit," said administrative liaison Deb Daily. She said LAP serves 2,500 to 3,000 people each year.

Many people decide to go for help when they "get sick and tired of being sick and tired," said Sheila Novotny, caseworker at Day Watch on 1911 R St. This was Thorne's case.

About a year ago, Thorne, 55, said he started thinking about getting a home.

"I stayed at a few people's houses, and I saw what they had, and I just decided that I'd had enough. I knew I was smart enough," he said.

Thorne said he liked being homeless because he could visit many parts of the United States and could always get help from rescue missions or people he met.

"You can get almost anything free," he said. "You can knock on someone's door, and they'll usually let you in if you're not drunk."

However, Thorne said being homeless is sometimes life threatening.

"There's a lot of crazy people out there, and some will kill you," he said. "There's a lot of alcoholics out there. Most of them are lonely people, and they want someone to drink with, but you can get hurt."

Thorne said he was never physically hurt while he was homeless because he learned to be careful. He said he learned to identify "crazy" people by the way they walked and looked at others.

He learned that homeless people should hide their possessions in a "camp" instead of carrying them on the street, and they should be alert when they return to their camp.

"Before you get there, you have to look around because someone might want your sleeping bag," he said.

Thorne said he learned about the Lincoln Action Program through Day Watch, a non-profit group that gives homeless people free breakfasts, showers and laundry facilities.

He got an apartment in January 2000 through LAP and works 20 hours a week at Day Watch answering the phone, putting out snacks for people and doing "whatever they ask me to do."

He's paying back child support on his 27-year-old daughter, Daelynn, whom he hasn't seen since the 1970s.

"(The board) really saw people struggling to pull themselves out of poverty and not getting a lot of credit."

Deb Daily
Lincoln Action Program

Thorne said he doesn't really regret not knowing his daughter and has made friends in Lincoln to replace his daughter and family in Sioux Falls. He said he chooses people he knows as his sons and daughters and was known as the king of the street people.

Thorne's caseworker, Novotny, nominated him for the award because she said he'd made a lot of progress for someone his age who'd been homeless for a long time.

"He probably was one in my caseloads that faced so many odds," she said. "It looked as if it would be real difficult for him to integrate into society at his age."

Thorne said he was happy with his new life and, especially, his apartment.

"The last time I slept under a bridge, I was slapping mosquitoes all night," he said. "I've got an apartment, a job and a remote control with 64 channels."

The other five winners of the Phoenix Award and the youth award are:

■ Toni Douglas, who asked that her story be kept confidential. She works for Store Kraft Manufacturing Co. in Beatrice making cabinets for stores in shopping malls. She and her family just moved into a Habitat for Humanity home. She's raising five children, ages 5 to 17.

■ Kathy Garland, who was able to leave a one-bedroom apartment and move into a larger one with her two young daughters for whom she does not receive child support. She is trying to finish her GED and works at the Nebraska State Historical Society.

■ Dawn Nolin, who is raising two teen-agers as a single parent. She has battled depression and was burned as a toddler, which left her with scars and a disability. She works full time with the Nebraska Game and Parks at Mahoney State Park.

■ Karen Straw has been free from drugs for one year and lives with her teen-age sons. She's been homeless and survived five years of domestic abuse from a boyfriend. She works at DaVinci's and volunteers at the Capital Humane Society every Thursday by walking dogs.

■ Carolyn Tankersley was homeless for two years in Los Angeles.

She came to Lincoln in September 1998 when her sister sent her a bus ticket to Nebraska.

She's participating in counseling and gets physical therapy for fibromyalgia, a muscle disease that won't allow her to walk for very long.

The youth award winners are Edwin Leon, 16 and Chris Leon, 15.

They volunteer with LAP's Youth Violence Alternatives Project painting over graffiti and doing home repair for crime victims.

The Leons' parents divorced when they were young, and the boys often didn't have much to eat and had sporadic contact with their father. Edwin Leon plans to join the National Guard, and Chris Leon wants to be a politician or a social studies teacher.

Union leaders edge closer to agreement

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

NICE, France — European Union leaders got caught in antagonistic negotiations Sunday in their quest for a treaty to guide the bloc as it pushes its boundaries eastward, beyond the old Iron Curtain.

"We have a huge treaty that we have to decide upon, page after page, and that will take tremendous time," Swedish Prime Minister Goeran Persson said on an unscheduled fourth day of talks.

But one official said the leaders edged closer to agreement as the talks dragged on into the night.

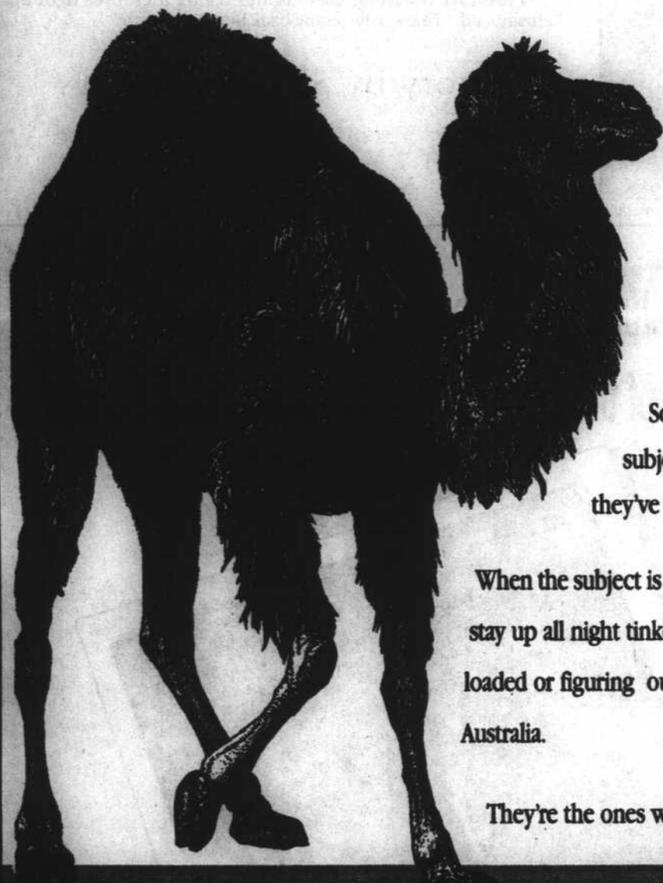
"The elements of an agreement are on the table," said Pierre Moscovici, France's minister for European affairs.

Moscovici, who has played a pivotal role in the talks, warned a possible accord was still hanging in the balance as leaders wrangled over how to share power in an expanded Union.

"The whole thing is like a house of cards, if you touch it here or there, it all comes tumbling down," he told reporters.

The 15-nation EU has agreed to accept up to a dozen central, eastern and southern European nations, with the first newcomers possibly being allowed in by 2004.

Ask Someone Who Knows



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