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### One Big Family, One Big House: An In-Depth Look at Lincoln's Clinton Elementary School

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# Clinton School

## ONE BIG FAMILY

AN IN-DEPTH LOOK AT LINCOLN'S CLINTON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

## ONE BIG HOUSE





# One big family



## UNIVERSITY OF Nebraska CoJMC Lincoln

To order the magazine, send a \$10 check or money order – payable to UNL – to the College of Journalism and Mass Communications, 147 Andersen Hall, Lincoln, NE 68588-0443, attn: Clinton Elementary Depth Report (fee includes shipping, handling and sales tax.)

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Cover photo by David Story.

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# One big house

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Photo by Sean Hagewood.







**L**incoln's Clinton neighborhood is a nondescript one in many ways, not unlike hundreds of other neighborhoods around the nation. Mature trees line streets with decades-old houses in varying states of repair. And the neighborhood elementary school, a stately, 1920s-era brick building, is right out of Central Casting.

But within this very ordinariness is a story about a neighborhood where many families struggle with poverty, as they have for decades in this corner of Lincoln, and where the schoolhouse doors open to a refuge for some 400 children who collectively speak a dozen languages and rely on the teachers and staff for reading, writing and math—and sometimes coats, shoes and food.

Clinton Elementary School, as one child says in a poster on the first-floor hallway wall, is like one big family in one big house.

Six student reporters and two student photographers from a University of Nebraska-Lincoln College of Journalism and Mass Communications depth-reporting class explored Clinton's world in a six-month project that took them to graffiti-sprinkled alleys a stone's throw from Clinton School and into the controlled chaos of elementary classrooms where teachers routinely fall in love with the diverse parade of students—who love them in return.

This publication is a product of their work and that of the eight editing and design students, under the guidance of UNL faculty member Nancy Anderson, who created the magazine during a summer school magazine editing class.

But most important, it is the product of the patience and enthusiasm of the Clinton Elementary School staff, led by Principal Mona Manley, who welcomed us to the school, answered endless questions and showed by her example how dynamic leaders can make a difference. Student reporters

spent the day at Clinton on March 1 and returned numerous times through the end of the school year. We agreed at the outset to identify by first name only most of the children in these stories. In addition to getting to know the school, the UNL student reporters also explored the Clinton neighborhood with Lincoln Action Program neighborhood organizer Shawn Ryba, who took students on a neighborhood walking tour, and Clinton Neighborhood Association President Maurice Baker, who welcomed class members to an association meeting.

Readers will meet a wide variety of teachers, students, school administrators, parents, law enforcement officials and other community members, all of whom willingly shared their perspectives about the Clinton neighborhood and school. They opened our eyes to see beyond the ordinariness of a neighborhood and instead glimpse a world where families face financial strains and language barriers and many children don't have enough to eat. But they also showed us a world where a unique group of grown-ups tries to fix what's fixable and turn every day into a smile. It matters for the Clinton children. And for us all.

Mary Kay Quinlan, Lecturer  
College of Journalism  
and Mass Communications

The faces in Trisha Hoppmann's kindergarten class are representative of Clinton Elementary School. Photo by David Story.



*Despite hardships, school can still see*

# The **big** picture

by Jason Wiest

**T**he walls can talk in Lincoln's Clinton Elementary School, and the stories they tell are unlike any whispered in the hallways of the city's other elementary schools.

Sure, the crayon-crafted elephants and giraffes that adorn these hallways probably come as multi-colored and mutated at this 80-year-old school at 29th and Holdrege as they do at any elementary school in the nation. But more than the previous week's curriculum—lessons on Africa—are revealed on Clinton's walls.

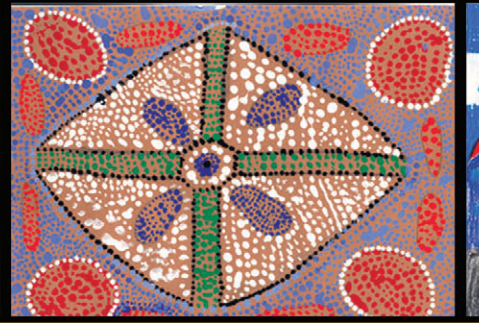
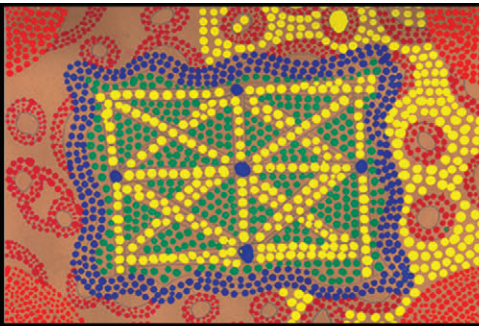
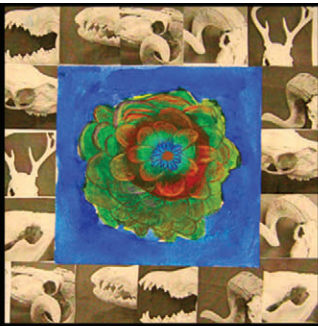
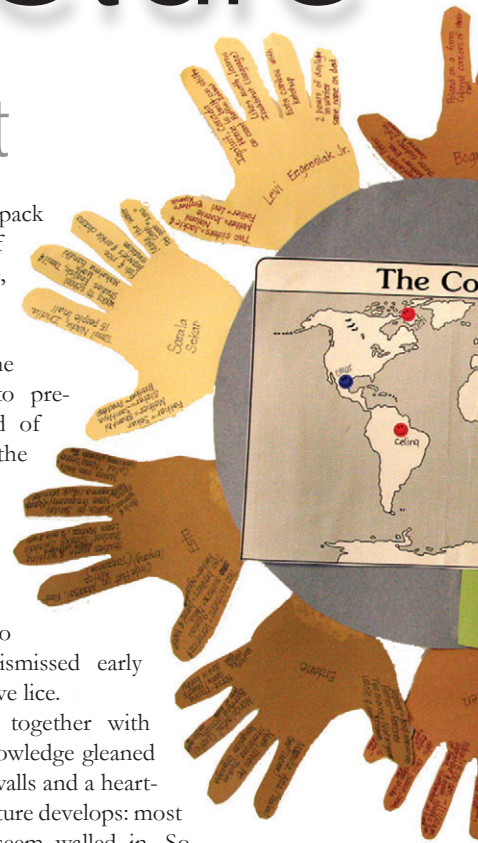
There, the children's ethnicities, social classes and family backgrounds are exposed alongside the students' dilemmas and dreams. The walls reflect Clinton's diverse student population through a fourth-grade class roster that includes the names Musaab, Cassie, Shaq and Maximino. Clinton's students speak a dozen languages, and as a construction paper world map on the wall outside Mrs. Walton's room shows, their homelands include every continent but Antarctica. Many students are refugees whose families can only afford to live in the Clinton neighborhood—one of the city's poorest.

Indeed, poverty is the biggest issue the school addresses, besides education, of course. Although there can be other causes, poverty is a major source of the problems Clinton deals with daily—like drug and alcohol abuse, domestic violence and healthcare—and it shows after taking just a few steps inside the school.

The halls are reminiscent of an early morning scene from a New York City sidewalk. A black Hefty garbage bag hangs from each student's coat hook outside each classroom. With a few exceptions, including a

dirty pink backpack that reeks of cigarette smoke, the students' coats and packs are all inside the garbage bags to prevent the spread of lice. Despite the precaution, lice remain a nagging problem at Clinton. Nearly every day, one or two students are dismissed early because they have lice.

Piece this together with all the other knowledge gleaned from Clinton's walls and a heartbreaking big picture develops: most of these kids seem walled in. So many have both a saddening past and present that it's hard for outsiders from more-privileged backgrounds to envision promising futures for these children. But while their troubles might be big, so are their dreams, and although they face adversity, they don't face it alone. And that's what's unique about Clinton. It's not the problems this school faces, but the way they are addressed that makes it special. Clinton Elementary makes a difference in its students' lives with the help of a com-







munity that's greater than the impoverished neighborhood that surrounds the school.

Without aid from this community—one that includes volunteers from fraternities and wealthier parts of the city, donors, corporate partners and organizations like the Salvation Army—Clinton wouldn't be able to provide for its students in the ways it does.

"The most important thing about Clinton," as one fifth-grader named Fredrica put it on one of the school's many pieces of displayed artwork, "is (that it's) like one big family living in one big house." And the faculty and staff do their best to make that house seem like a home.

Clinton is where many students eat when their parents, or parent, can't afford to feed them—92.1 percent of Clinton's students qualify for free or reduced-price lunches. Additionally, every morning, about 300 students show up for free breakfast, and after school every Friday, 50 students are sent home with backpacks full of enough food for their whole families. Special education students from Lincoln

North Star High School volunteer to fill the backpacks with donated food from the Food Bank of Lincoln, and various community volunteers help distribute them.

When clothes aren't in the family budget and a coatless third-grader is shivering on a November playground, teachers grab a coat from a donated stockpile in "the tower," an out-of-use classroom filled with clothing and other items.

And through the little things within the school's

walls, like morning hugs from Angela Gebhardt, the school's family care coordinator, Clinton provides a loving family environment that many students don't have at home. In the week after the winter break, for example, Clinton referred eight cases of suspected child abuse to Child Protective Services.

Domestic abuse is one of society's taboo topics, but still, there are hints of it on Clinton's walls. One art project had students describe why they liked their school. Inside balloons of different colors, one student wrote, "I like my school because I feel safe here..."

It could mean many things, but when other students' artwork refers to taking care of their younger siblings, a cat that leaves feces in the house and their parents being separated, it's easy to get a feeling from the walls that some of these kids are neglected, abused and hurting.

But that's not the only feeling that fills Clinton's halls. There's also a sense of the extraordinary lengths every adult in this school—from administrators to cafeteria staff—goes to to combat these issues.

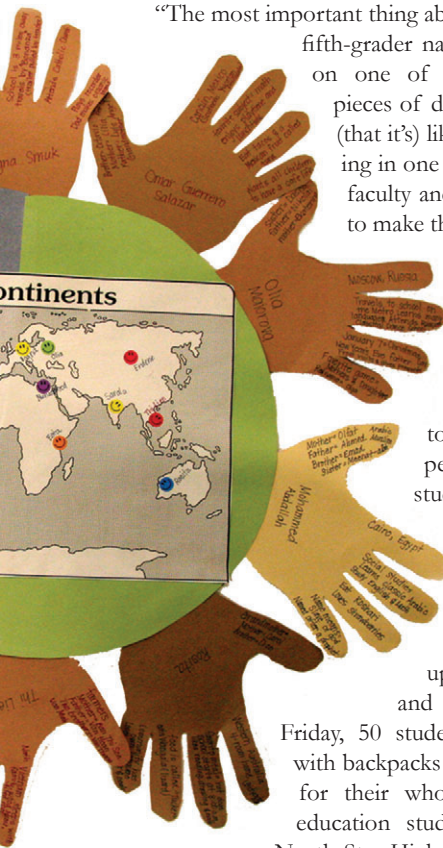
Once the effects of the social problems—like hunger, cleanliness and behavioral disorders—have been addressed, Clinton does a first-rate job educating its students. They repeatedly perform above average on standardized tests. They've got three \$3,000 SMART Board interactive whiteboards that help motivate them to learn.

And they've got teachers who genuinely love their jobs and their students, even though they often have to deal with heartache. Their job description places them in the classroom, but their own devotion and caring puts them in after-school programs, community events and students' homes. These teachers are definitely the stars that their nametags outside their classrooms suggest they are.

From their commitment to the students and the community's involvement in the school, even first-time visitors gain an understanding of the bigger picture at Clinton: despite the students' monumental problems, it's obvious this school gives them their best chance to succeed.

The writing's on the wall.

Student artwork lines the halls at Clinton Elementary. A map, center, shows the origins of students in one classroom.





# 429

Students enrolled at Clinton Elementary in 2005-06 school year

# 131

Number of English Language Learners students at Clinton

# 12

Number of languages spoken by Clinton students

- Arabic
- Chinese
- Dinka
- English
- Farsi
- French
- German
- Kurdish
- Nuer
- Spanish
- Ukrainian
- Vietnamese

# 14

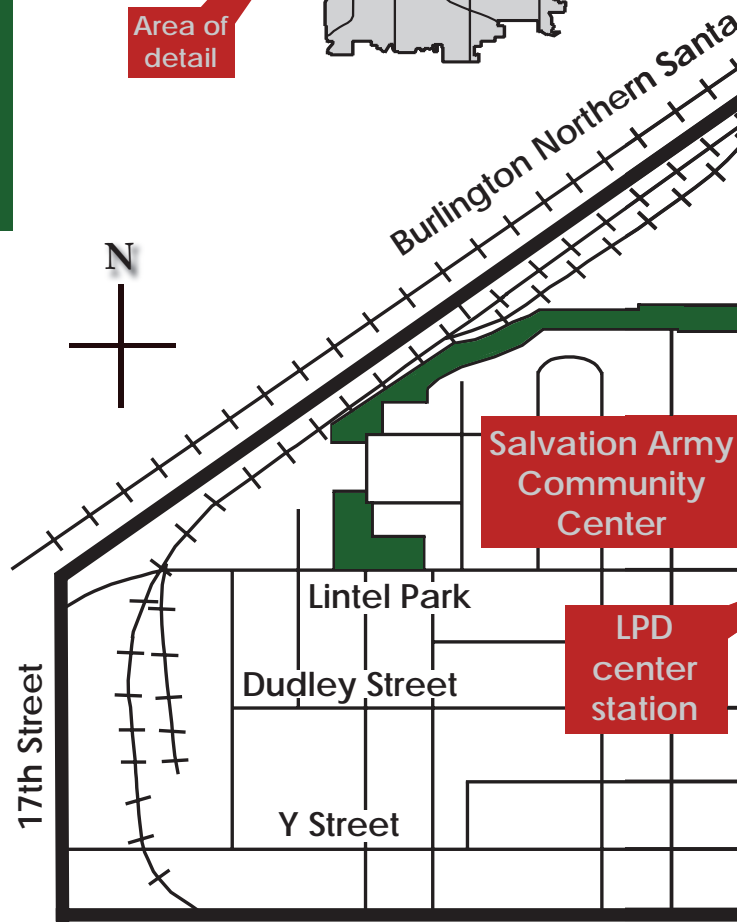
Number of students identified as gifted at Clinton

# 96

Number of special education students at Clinton

All figures are from the 2005-06 LPS Statistical Handbook, based on K-5 enrollment on Sept. 30, 2005.

# By the numbers





# 36

Clinton's "mobility rate"—the percentage of students who move in or out of the school each year

# 93.5

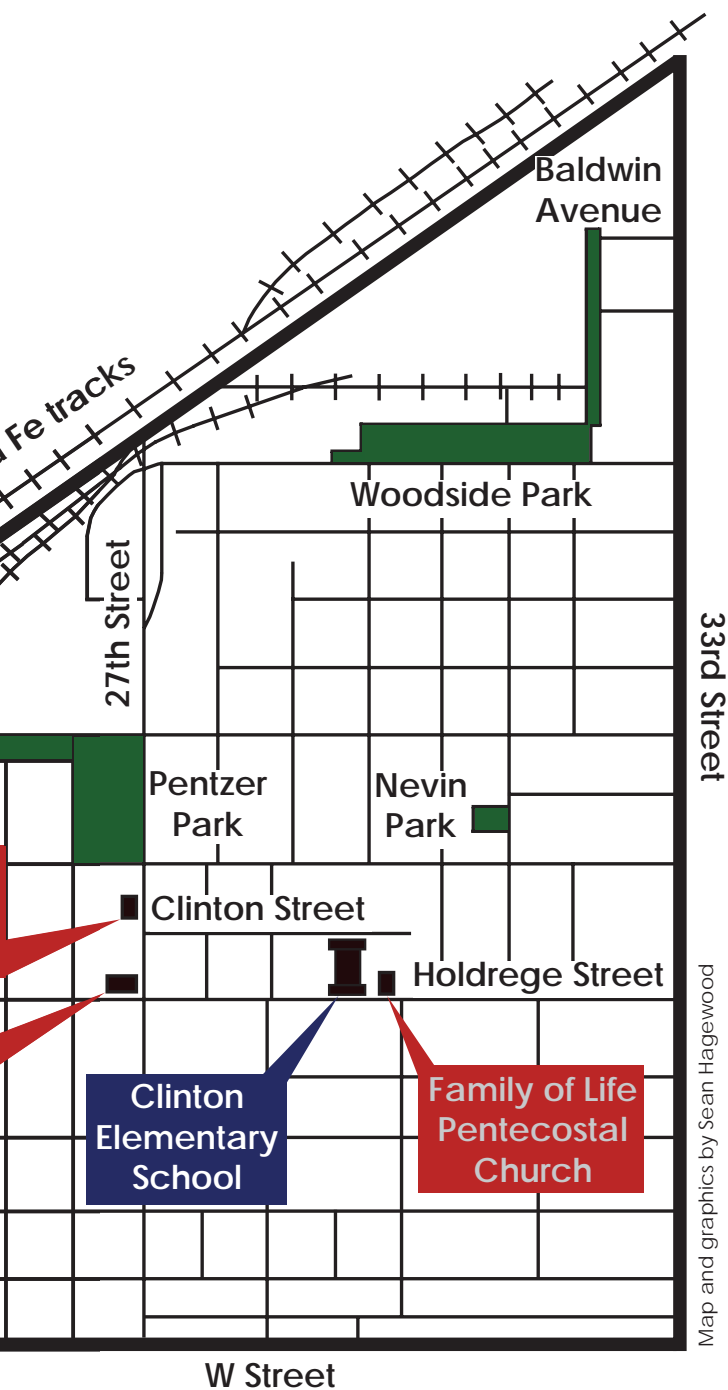
Percentage of Clinton students who attend school daily, on average

# 17.2

Percentage of Clinton students who attend on permits from other neighborhoods

# 92.1

Percentage of Clinton students eligible for free or reduced-price meals

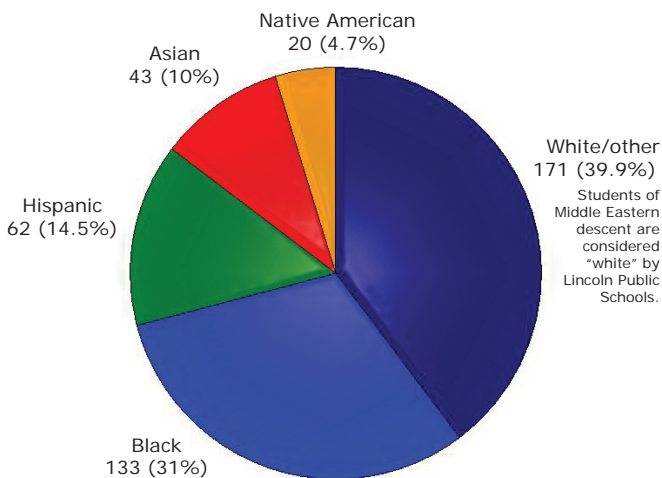


33rd Street

Map and graphics by Sean Hagewood

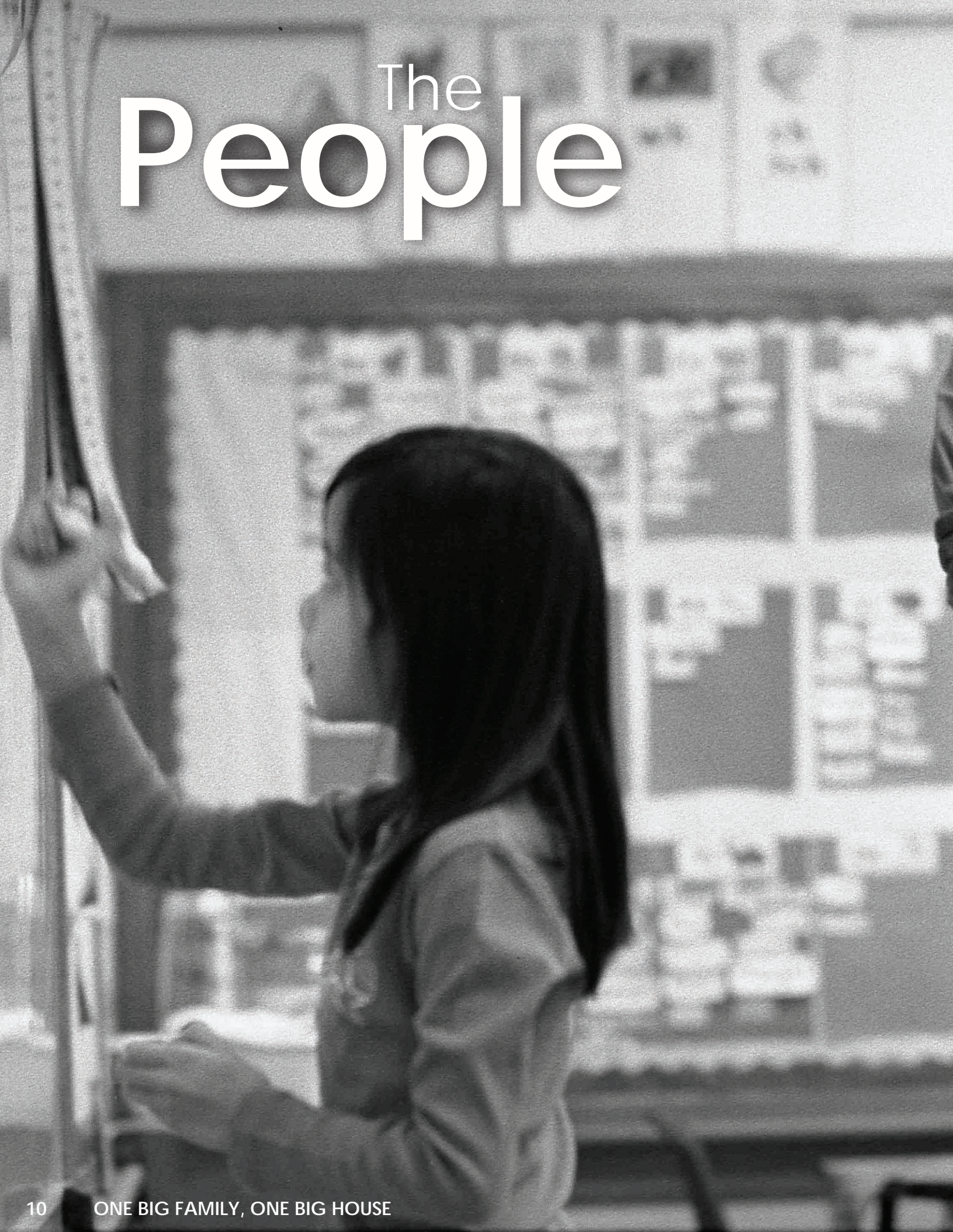
W Street

Students by race





# The People







Willie Banks teaches second grade. He's also a role model, a father figure and an all-around superhero. Photo by Steve Hermann.

# A wealth of knowledge

*Teachers focus on more than just the basics*

by Jason Wiest

If there's one thing Clinton Elementary can't teach its students, it's the art of learning to let go.

Second grade teacher Willie Banks doesn't even have it mastered, and he's been at Clinton for a quarter century. Like most of Clinton's 46 teachers, he's been there long enough to know that students come and go often. And with each departure comes a painful goodbye.

The farewells are similar. One moment, a student is working at a tiny desk, and the next that student is leaving ... for good. Maybe the child's parents are moving or the student is going to live with someone else.

"They start to cry, and they tell me, 'Mr. Banks, I don't want to go,'" he said. "They enjoy what they're doing here. They've got a safety net."

It tugs at the 6-foot-2 man's heartstrings. He doesn't want them to go either.

Clinton employs vertical teaming, an organizational approach that puts one teacher from each grade level on a team, creating a family-like structure within the school. Students start out with a team and work their way up. Sib-





Second grade teacher Leslie Brown calls on Chase Howard in class. Photo by Steve Hermann.

lings are assigned to the same team. This structure allows teachers to know many of their students before they even begin school, because the teachers already know the kids' families.

One advantage of the format, Mr. Banks said, is that it helps students and teachers form a tight bond. A disadvantage is it makes it that much harder to say goodbye. But even when somebody leaves his class, he's got to move on. So he stands in front of a rug full of 8-year-

olds sitting cross-legged at his feet, emotions stirring inside of him, and continues teaching. Because there are other lessons 8-year-olds need to learn.

Not just about math and science. There's also respect, tolerance and love.

Just as not being fed at home makes it hard for a student to learn, not being loved at home has the same effect. Dealing with such issues can present challenging obstacles to educating

the kids, but Clinton teachers love their jobs, and that's why many stay for their entire careers, even through the hard times.

Like the time fourth grade teacher Traci Boothe got a call from the office saying a parent was waiting downstairs to pick up one of her students.

"They're not coming back," the voice on the other end of the line said, "but don't tell the child, because they're fleeing."

Probably from an abusive situation, Boothe said.

"That was hard because I was close to him and I couldn't say goodbye."

Goodbyes aren't the only tough things Clinton Elementary's teachers deal with.

One day in class, Mr. Banks noticed red, irritated skin behind one of his student's ears. He asked the student about it and discovered that the student's stepmother was abusing him by grabbing his ears and lifting him off the

**'I know you can't save everybody,  
but if you can touch the life of just  
one, that's worth it.'**

**WILLIE BANKS, second grade teacher**





# 46: number of Clinton teachers Average years of experience: 15

mission with their families. She can't do anything to improve a family's economic status. All she can do is be understanding, say, when a student doesn't turn in an assignment.

"When they're at home, their goal isn't homework, it's just survival," she said.

"That's hard because normal little lives aren't normal lives. What we think is heart-breaking is part of everyday life."

Although teachers can't change the world for their students, often they can make their lives a little better. Sometimes it's as simple as being a friend.

Once, Mrs. Boothe received a call out of the blue from a student who had moved away. At first she didn't know the purpose of the call.

Then he stated it plainly: his mom had died.

They talked for a while, Mrs. Boothe being a familiar voice and a friend at the other end of the line.

"He obviously called because he felt a connection," she said.

Even though befriending children with tragic lives is saddening, it can also be rewarding.

"I know you can't save everybody, but if you can touch the life of just one, that's worth it," Mr. Banks said.

While Clinton's teachers might not be able to save the students from some immediate troubles, they can hope to save them from future troubles by improving their lives through education.

Clinton's teachers have more than 15 years of experience on average, and nearly half of them have master's degrees. Many have taught there for so long they take the classroom challenges in stride. In fact, Clinton's teachers talk more about how tough it is watching their students go through life's struggles than about how hard it is to teach students in those situations.

But it was hard initially.

In their early years of teaching, the diversity in their classrooms was a challenge for some.

Different ethnic backgrounds mean different social norms, Mr. Banks said. For example, American Indians often don't look at the person talking to them as a sign of respect. In some cultures, it's disrespectful to question the teacher. In others, women don't talk to men in

public.

But after a few years at Clinton, teachers learn about these cultures and how to tailor their teaching to them.

Mr. Banks takes a loving, fatherly approach.

It doesn't always work at first. His gender and stature make the first day of second grade so intimidating for some students that nearly every year, a couple of students are scared to tears.

"I'm a big grizzly bear here, but I try to do that soft approach—make learning fun," he said.

Once students are accustomed to him, he quickly builds trust and rapport. After that, teaching and learning are easy. By the time the year is over, the students have more than a second-grade education—they have a new source of support, and in later years, they often drop by Mr. Banks' room just to give him a hug.

Mrs. Boothe has a friendly style and jokes with her students. She says if she's strict, they seem to shut down.

Being buddy-like creates a more fluid classroom. She treats the students as equals, even letting one sit at her desk. He seems to learn better there, she said, despite the clutter of papers shuffled around personal objects like a bottle of lotion and a can of Diet Coke with a lipstick-stained straw sticking out of it.

Despite the students' differences in learning abilities, skin color and socioeconomic background, at Clinton Elementary, the focus is on teaching the children that everyone is on equal footing. This is an essential lesson in such a diverse school, Mr. Banks said.

Respect and tolerance are two of the first lessons he teaches his students, he said. Although the kids may be different, when they come into his room, they're a family.

And he hopes they stay family even outside the classroom.

Whether students leave Clinton Elementary entirely or just move on to the next grade, he knows how he'll feel when they're gone.

It's that feeling and these words he wants his students to remember when they say goodbye:

"You might be leaving Mr. Banks' room, but you're always going to be a part of Mr. Banks." ■

ground.

Mr. Banks helped the student get out of the home and into a safe place. It hurts to see a child go through that, he said, but it's one of the reasons he stays at Clinton.

"I feel that I'm needed here in so many ways," he said.

Not just as a teacher or watchdog. As a black male second grade teacher in a diverse school, he's a positive role model. He also acts the father figure from time to time when students' dads are not in the picture.

But Mr. Banks can't always play the protector, the role model or the all-around superhero. Sometimes, all Clinton Elementary's teachers can be are spectators in the lives of their less-fortunate students.

"It's hard not always being able to fix things that go on outside of the school," said Mrs. Boothe, recalling students from poor backgrounds—refugees or those who live at the city



# Former principal helped overcome challenges

by David Bennett

Most people in Lincoln drive along 27th Street with no sense of the poverty and diversity that lie just a few blocks from the busy road. Margaret Walker, former principal of Clinton Elementary, who retired last year, said many city residents “literally have no idea sometimes.”

To combat poverty’s negative effects on learning and cement the school’s position as an icon of neighborhood pride, it takes the right people, like those Walker knew at Clinton.

Walker said despite the hardships in the disadvantaged neighborhood, staff turnover is minimal because of faculty dedication. One time a couple of Clinton teachers came to Walker, fresh from a meeting with teachers from elsewhere in the district. These other teachers, many working in wealthier areas, would say things like, “Why are you still there?”

The teachers were offended that their jobs at Clinton were viewed as something to be ashamed of. They told Walker, “This is where I want to be.”

An observer of how Clinton operates today can turn to the recent past for some perspective. When Walker arrived at the school in 1995, she faced some daunting challenges: test scores were in the dumps, the school district viewed behavior problems at the school as unacceptable and teachers were swamped trying to meet students’ basic needs, she said.

Clinton had experienced a fair amount of principal turnover, too, but Walker was there to stay.

Walker began her 29-year career at Lincoln Public Schools as a consultant, then as district supervisor, of the Behavioral Skills Program, a day school for students with severe behavior problems. Her first step in turning Clinton around was managing the students’ out-of-control behavior.

Walker and her staff gave teachers

greater power to take care of problems in the classroom. Instead of referring disruptive students to the office, which was common before Walker arrived, the teachers were now in control.

Giving teachers the authority to make disciplinary decisions curtailed classroom outbursts and let the children know what the limits were, she explained.

Marilyn Moore, Lincoln Public Schools’ assistant superintendent for instruction (that is, the boss of principals), agreed. She wrote in an e-mail that Walker “led the Clinton staff in making improved student achievement a priority.”

Another problem Walker tackled concerned English Language Learners being sent by the district to other elementaries. Many immigrant children lived in the Clinton neighborhood, but the district bused them across town because the school did not have enough space.

“We found out that the kids didn’t know each other,” Walker said. “You would hear kids making comments about ‘those ELL kids’—it led to a lot of racial strife in the neighborhood.”

Eventually, Clinton created room for them, and it made a difference.

“Because many ELL students are so academically oriented, it really introduced a culture of learning, a different tone,” she said.

As Walker described the ELL experience, her body language and voice changed—already enthusiastic when

talking about Clinton, she became even more impassioned. It was “an incredible learning experience for us ... We learned so much from them, so much from Clinton’s ELL kids and their families.

“We were taken aback at their hardships and how much they had risked getting to the U.S. It gave all of us a feeling of humbleness. We used to take so much for granted,” Walker said.

In 1997, a newspaper article reported

Clinton had “pretty abysmal” reading test scores, Walker said. Kindergarteners were one to one-and-a-half years behind their peers in language development.

Walker and the staff experimented with many approaches to increasing reading ability, including one successful move of teaching the students—who fared better at visual tasks—how to speak and write about art. Through ongoing and direct involvement with struggling readers, they also made sure those behind got caught up and prevented those falling behind from falling any further.

Walker “joined several other LPS principals of low-income schools in insisting, and demonstrating, that low income does not have to mean low academic achievement,” Moore said.

Once Clinton children’s reading skill levels increased, Walker turned to improving writing and math. But she realized something else was wrong: the poverty and crime of the neighborhood were taking a toll.

“Neighborhood kids’ needs are limitless, literally limitless,” Walker said.

The teachers couldn’t deal with all of the children’s needs and remain effective classroom educators.

“I have never worked with a more dedicated group of teachers,” Walker said, but those demands on their time meant something had to be done.

The principal created a student services committee and a family care coordinator position at Clinton to relieve the teachers’ burden. Also, because schools are required by law to report suspected neglect and abuse, teachers had to do a lot of time-consuming paperwork. Walker lobbied Nebraska Health and Human Services to assign someone to handle Clinton cases, so now a single contact at HHS does so.

Walker’s arrival at Clinton had a huge impact not only on the school, but on the whole neighborhood, supporters say.

“Margaret’s leadership at Clinton is what the school needed most—a leader who believed in children, who worked with teachers and all staff members to set high expectations ... who lived and loved and laughed with the students and staff every day,” Moore wrote.

Walker retired in July of 2005 and said she still misses working at Clinton.

“Clinton’s kids really steal your heart—you don’t want to leave,” Walker said. “Clinton’s a hard place to leave—I hated to leave. It takes a part of your heart.” ■



**‘We were taken aback at their hardships and how much they had risked getting to the U.S. It gave all of us a feeling of humbleness. We used to take so much for granted.’**

**Margaret Walker, former principal**





Clinton Principal Mona Manley frequently works with students like first-grader Lauryn Pruitt during the course of her 11-hour workdays. Photo by David Story.

# An open door mission

*Students rely on administrators  
for support, encouragement*

by David Bennett

If elementary teachers are frontline soldiers in a war against ignorance and poverty, administrators are the officers commanding them.

However, the administrators at Clinton Elementary are no rear-echelon paper pushers. They charge into the midst of the action with the rest of the school's staff.

Principal Mona Manley, for instance, said it's worth it to work from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m.

"You want to know every kid's name," she said.

Schoolwide Coordinator Diana Pasco helps with lunch duty every day, running 120 students through each 30-minute period—and loving it.

Special Education Coordinator Kelly Schilousky can be found many afternoons outside Clinton



working the crosswalk with two-way radio in hand, talking to parents and ensuring children get home safely.

Assistant Principal Jo Theis sees “visibility to students and staff as a priority.”

Each member of the administration comes to school with different strengths, but all said they chose their jobs for a central reason: to make an impact on children’s lives. They do it out of love for the children and the field. Their workdays illuminate how Clinton Elementary stays well-oiled, bright and cheerful, even under the constant specter of neighborhood poverty and dysfunction.

The administrators said they do not have a typical day.

“Each day is different, brings different gifts,” Manley said.

Manley has been principal at Clinton since the fall of 2005, after stints as principal at Cavett and Kahoa elementaries in Lincoln and as a teacher and principal in Fort Riley, Kan. Although new to Clinton, she’s already found her place.

Her office is spacious, well-lighted and

‘Trust must be established between school and home, and that trust is built one contact at a time.’

## JO THEIS, assistant principal

open, and connected to the front office and the assistant principal’s. The doors stay open most of the time. An oval conference table in the room is at once clean and polished—auspicious—but also holds a basket of toys.

There’s even a canister of Flarp, a bright green noise-making goop.

She brings in Kerry, whom the assistant principal next door had been counseling, and shows off his dimpled smile—“the best in the school,” she says.

Manley’s face lights up when she interacts with her students. Her smile instantly makes Kerry feel at ease, and the smiles and praise

that are elicited when “Mrs. Manley” is mentioned to several students show she is well-liked and respected.

Pasco’s duties range from setting up field trips and special events to creating and running writing groups. She said the most rewarding part of the job is getting a hug from a student, and the worst part is when “kids you know are not getting what they need at home.”

In her office adorned by two colorful, abstract prints from artists Mark Rothko and Wassily Kandinsky, Pasco explains, in between bites of pizza, that “we’re (administrators) the last line of defense for kids’ behavior problems.” Pasco has been at Clinton since 1993, so she knows much about the students. Because she’s taught their siblings in many cases, she gets to know many kids’ whole families.

All of Clinton’s administrators interact with students every school day. They focus on children who may be falling through the cracks —mainly those with attendance trouble, but Assistant Principal Theis said they also get referrals from teachers about students who lose their glasses or have holes in their shoes, or worse, those who are suspected of being neglected or abused at home.

The cracks may open wide sometimes, but like seasoned mountaineers, the administrators can throw a safety rope to those scrambling at the edge of the crevasse.

For example, every quarter Pasco picks several students to work closely with. If



Diana Pasco talks to second-grader Calvin Scott Jr. during lunch. As schoolwide coordinator, Pasco sets up different events and programs for students and also monitors the lunch shift every day. Photo by David Story.



a student is attempting to resolve attendance problems and goes for one quarter without an absence, Pasco treats him or her to a special lunch.

Every day Manley checks on children who need extra contact, and Theis wrote in an e-mail that “all individuals at Clinton must see me as a daily presence for stability and consistency and safety.”

Clinton’s students sometimes face instability at home, as evidenced by the roughly one-third who move in and out of the school each year.

Because of the high mobility rate, Manley said, “you want to build strong relationships,” not only with struggling students, but with all students and their families.

“Trust must be established between school and home, and that trust is built one contact at a time,” Theis said.

When Special Education Coordinator Schilousky speaks with parents in his office or at the crosswalk, or when Manley sends a representative from the school to every Clinton Neighborhood Association meeting, parents see just how much the school meshes with the community.

Not all is so serious at the school, though. The administrators make sure their charges’ recreational needs are met as well. As school-wide coordinator, Pasco gets “to do all the fun things.” She sets up museum and zoo trips, family nights and fundraisers.

Pasco said Clinton never asks for money from parents for special events, so the school holds fundraisers with the help of VIP partners such as Outback Steakhouse and BNSF Railway to raise money for events such as the fifth-graders’ end-of-year celebration.

The rewards for their hard work are often intangible—both Theis and Schilousky say that it’s watching individual children growing and succeeding—but the results are concrete.

More than 90 percent of Clinton’s students passed city and state writing standards. The school has higher than average reading scores, and math scores are improving.

The best thing about working at Clinton is “watching our children achieve at the same level (as at other schools),” Manley said.

Manley said the administrators’ duties keep them on their toes. “I don’t even need a to-do list because within minutes of walking in the door, it’s made for me,” she said. The staff at Clinton has to “instantly be with it ... there isn’t a down time for us.” ■

# Ada Robinson

## Retired teacher stays involved with students, school



Even though she retired from teaching in 2003, Ada Robinson continues to substitute at Clinton Elementary.

Robinson, who taught at Clinton for 33 years, said she feels a special connection to the Clinton families and children, such as Rachel and Samantha Doyle, below, and John Eggers, left.

“I just knew what was important for Clinton,” Robinson said. “I think it was just the atmosphere of being here at Clinton and knowing I had something to offer the people, the children and the neighborhood.”

Robinson said she keeps in touch with many former students, and she gets five to 10 graduation invitations from them every year. Some students she had in her first years of teaching now have children of their own at Clinton. “Some of them call me Grandma, and that’s OK,” she said.



Photos by Steve Hermann.



# A labor of love

by Amy  
Thompson

It's difficult for Angela Gebhardt, the family care coordinator at Clinton Elementary, to articulate a schedule of her daily duties. A rough itinerary of her morning might read like this:

*7:30 a.m. — arrive at Clinton.*

*7:45 a.m.— greet children as they arrive.*

*8:15 a.m.— hand out tardy slips.*

*12:05 p.m.— lunch duty.*

Sounds simple, right?

Until she explains that she created the greeting duty herself to give her a chance to see the physical and emotional state of every child, each

day. She knows which children she may have to follow up with later. She may even pull a crying child into her arms and her office right then and there.

Handing out tardy slips is another opportunity to hear about new or old problems the children have: She'll wade through every excuse from the common ("My ride was late") to sadder reasons, such as being forgotten or even having to wake a parent for a ride.

It soon becomes clear that Gebhardt's official title fails to convey the extraordinary nature of her job. Clinton differs from many other elementary schools in Lincoln, and no other school has a family care coordinator like Gebhardt to marshal the array of services Clinton's children need.

Since more than 90 percent of the school's students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch (about 300 arrive early to receive

a free breakfast, too), Gebhardt knows she's working with a unique student population. These children are the embodiment of poverty in Lincoln.

Many grim statistics illustrate the plight of the students at Clinton. Gebhardt said more Clinton children experience abuse and neglect than in most other Lincoln elementary schools.

That's where she comes in. And though she said her job can be tiring, seeing the things she sees day after day, it never gets stale because she loves what she does.

"You can't work in a school like this if you don't have passion. It doesn't make sense," she said.

Gebhardt started working

in the schools through Nebraska Health and Human Services' Families First and Foremost program, a grant-based position that sent her to Clinton and Hartley elementaries.

Margaret Walker, Clinton's former principal, was so pleased with the job Gebhardt was doing that she started paying half of her salary so Clinton could have her full time. In 2003 when the grant was discontinued, Walker found the funds to keep Gebhardt on the Clinton staff.

Gebhardt does not have the master's degree LPS requires of its school social workers, so she was given the title of family care coordinator, a technician position in Lincoln Public

## INTERVENTION

Child Protective Services statistics at Clinton Elementary for the 2005-06 school year:

Intakes\*: 38

Interviews\*\*: 97

Families with CPS involvement: 15

State wards: 22

\* Student reports of abuse or neglect that the school passes along to CPS

\*\* Interviews between CPS officials and students that took place at the school

Source: Angela Gebhardt





Each day, as Angela Gebhardt greets late arrivals, like fifth-grader Bodie Lame, she tries to identify students who are chronically tardy and learn why they have trouble getting to school on time. Photo by David Story.





Schools.

Every day, she conducts one-on-one meetings with troubled kids that school administrators, parents and representatives from Child Protective Services often participate in.

Andria Lay a protection and safety worker with CPS, said Gebhardt's strength lies in her attitude. Lay usually visits Clinton once a week, but hears from Gebhardt every day with updates on the children with whom they both work. Every e-mail Gebhardt sends or receives about one of those children finds its way to Lay's computer as well. Phone conversations are also outlined in e-mails to Lay. This thorough exchange of information is above and beyond the call of duty, Lay said. It's something she doesn't experience with the 12 other schools with which she has active cases.

The thoroughness Gebhardt strives for is a message she hopes resonates with the children.

"They can know, 'I have a friend here,'" Gebhardt said.

This comfort level she's developed helps the kids speak freely when school officials come to interview them about very personal things, like domestic violence and physical or sexual abuse. Every day, Gebhardt is gathering information from concerned neighbors, relatives or the students themselves and passing it on to CPS for review. She arranges interviews with a child when necessary. Many of these interactions take place at the school because, not only do the children feel safer there, it's often difficult tracking them down away from school.

Gebhardt witnesses as many of the interviews between CPS and the Clinton students as she can manage. She can only sit and listen as the caseworkers question the children, but she hopes her presence will help put the kids at ease.

For every report she makes to CPS, she must create another report for LPS administration. It's a time-consuming and emotional process for Gebhardt, but she said it's the kids' successes that make it all worthwhile.

"They keep you going," she said. "They make the effort to stay in school, even when they're shuffled around." ■

Angela Gebhardt tries to greet as many students as possible as they arrive at school each morning. Often, she has a hug waiting. The greetings allow Gebhardt to check in with students and identify those she may need to follow up with later. Photo by David Story.





"The Tower" collects clothes for all seasons, but the most pressing need is for winter coats. Photo by Nicholas Berry.

## Tower's donations help Clinton families

A crucial part of Angela Gebhardt's job as family care coordinator is maintaining "The Tower."

It's about the size of a large apartment and smells a bit musty because the oversized windows don't open. The 20-foot-high walls, once white, have faded to a color resembling dry putty.

But from the floor comes a volcano of colorful cloth.

Once used for classes, the lone room that is Clinton's third floor doesn't meet the current fire code. Instead of collecting dust, however, it collects shoes.

And clothes.

And blankets.

And most importantly, winter coats. Gebhardt takes donations year-round of kid-sized items from individuals as well as corporations like Time Warner Cable and BNSF Railway.

When she or another teacher sees, or smells, shoes that have outlived their usefulness, Gebhardt treks up the long flight of stairs and wades through mountains of textiles to the south wall. Here, crammed shelves of used tennis shoes await dissemination to feet in need of shelter.

And every fall as the chill settles in, staff members look for students without adequate outerwear. During this mild winter, 57 children were given used coats.

Gebhardt also gets to shop for items that haven't been donated.

She forages clearance racks for clothes the tower may be running short of, using donated gift cards to pay for the goods.

Gebhardt said the charity of the Lincoln community doesn't end with clothes.

Each year, the Lincoln Journal Star lists a full page of needs in the area. Clinton always has a few listings for some of its families, and the school always gets more than it requests.

Like the time several families donated four chairs, a couch, a canopy bed, a breakfast table, three washers and dryers, drapes and a full set of pots and pans. Or the time other families gave two twin beds, a queen-sized bed, a sofa and loveseat, several

bookcases and carpet.

"We get a lot of calls," Gebhardt said. "They're reading a story and they know where (things) are going and that it's going to be used in a home."

As rewarding as this part of her job can be, she said she's exhausted by mid-December and ready for a few days off ... so she can return in January and forge ahead, her passion rejuvenated.

— Amy Thompson



Many donations are received, but Angela Gebhardt also shops for needed items. Photo by Nicholas Berry.



# The wheels on the bus

*Support staff keeps Clinton on track*

by Amy  
Thompson

**A** big yellow bus rumbles and bounces down Theresa Street.

Sheila Kahn, the driver, is just one virtually invisible thread in the quilt that makes Clinton Elementary beautiful. A support staff of custodians, cafeteria staff and a health technician are other threads that weave a stunning mosaic that begs to be displayed proudly.

This is a bus route that, at just two miles from the school, wouldn't be but for the pleadings of administrators and families at Clinton and Everett two years ago.

The trailer homes that line Theresa Street house some of the lowest-income families at Clinton. Because too few families had cars, car-pools sometimes consisted of 10 children in the uncovered bed of a pickup truck or crammed into a back seat without proper restraint.

The railroad viaduct over 27th Street was also unsafe for children walking to school.

To better ensure the children's safety, LPS resumed bus service to certain neighborhoods.

Raquel Zavala, a freelance interpreter and mother of four sons including two who go to Clinton, said sending her kids on the bus lets her get to work earlier each day. The Zavalas, who live in a mobile home park on the south side of Theresa Street, used to drive Jose, 9, and Eduardo, 6, to school, but changes to their work schedules no longer allow an extra tap on the snooze button. The bus takes 10 minutes



First-grader Eduardo Zavala, right, waits for the morning school bus alongside his father and younger brothers. Clinton administrators successfully lobbied the district to establish this bus route on Theresa Street two years ago. Families like the Zavalas depend on the bus to deliver their children to Clinton every day. Photo by David Story.





Chris Dennis, who knows the Clinton building inside and out, turned down an offer to work at a newer school. Photo by David Story.

to get to school, where about two dozen children hop off about 7:40 a.m. They join the wave of children streaming through the school's front doors: up one flight of steps, across the hall, down a flight of steps to breakfast.

The kids have a choice between a hot and cold breakfast. Today, they choose scrambled eggs or a mini box of cereal. They can drink white milk or chocolate.

About 200 kids are sitting in the cafeteria, supervised by various school staff. One paraprofessional who spends her early mornings here is Mary Cudaback. With Clinton for six years, she stays for the children.

"I love the kids," she says. "I plan to stay as long as I can."

And the kids love her, as evidenced by the gaggle of girls that floats toward her with open arms and missing-toothed grins. Dismissed in teams, the kids tussle and push and put an arm around a friend who looks upset. She's instant-

## 'I love the kids. I plan to stay as long as I can.'

**MARY CUDABACK, Clinton paraprofessional**

ly better.

"Are we ready?" Cudaback asks. "We need to line up here."

Suddenly 20 kids form a jagged, single-file line, led by Cudaback, and disappear through the double doors.

The room, nearly deserted but for a few stragglers dumping their trays and rushing to catch up with their team, leaves little but a lingering buttery smell and the din of disappearing tennis shoes.

Minutes later, building superintendent Chris Dennis, 48, has performed a magic trick. The room looks spotless. She pulls the last bag of trash from the room and can retreat to her office in the basement to catch up on paper-

work and get some well-deserved, albeit rare, rest.

Dennis manages a team of first responders when children get sick or have bathroom accidents. She controls most of the storage as well, including

the headache room—given its name because anyone taller than five feet must duck to avoid the thin steel supports that cross a room jam-packed with old desks, toys and wood planks.

She's thankful she doesn't have to visit this room often.

At Clinton for five years, she turned down an offer to work at a newer school because of her attachment to the building itself.

Dennis said it took a year to get everything back in place after a major renovation five years ago. She cleaned every nook and cranny and said she could look today and tell if there is a new scratch on the floor.

She doesn't get to interact much with the kids but said one thing she's noticed is the



Mariya Kovali, left, and the rest of the cafeteria staff prepare and serve breakfast and lunch for hundreds of students each day. More than 92 percent of Clinton's students qualify for free or reduced-price meals. Photo by David Story.



**The cafeteria staff** at Clinton Elementary provides the **400-some** school population with what may be their **only reliable source of food**.

Students turn to the five member team for breakfast, lunch and snacks: **necessities** they may not find when they depart for home.

amount of one-on-one time available to the students.

“That surprised me,” she said. “We didn’t have that when I was little.”

While Dennis takes care of messes left behind, Karina Mendez helps take care of the kids. She’s the health technician at Clinton and assists the school nurse by helping with basic first-aid, blood sugar testing, asthma, seizures and minor temper tantrums.

She’s worked hard to get to this point. Originally from El Salvador, she took an intensive English program at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln so she could then take the class that certified her as a health technician.

Eighty to 100 children pass through the nurse’s office each day, and Mendez does what





she can for each of them. Most request nothing more than a bandage to cover an unexpected boo-boo. More complex problems, such as a Spanish-speaking student with a seizure disorder, pop up less frequently.

She enjoys interpreting most of all and hopes eventually to land a position at LPS that would allow her to help ease the burden of all Spanish-speaking families.

“Otherwise, I will be here,” she said, standing to check on a girl complaining of a sore throat. Before she can sit again, another girl comes in needing her inhaler.

On the other side of the school, deep in the kitchen, the hands of the cafeteria staff are full. By mid-morning, the lunch preparation is well under way.

The work is constant, leaving hardly a

moment to stop and take a breath.

Stephanie Dunn began at Clinton in September. After years as a stay-at-home mom, she wanted a job that would allow her to be on the same schedule as her kids.

The staff of five rotates among jobs. This week it is Dunn’s turn to prepare the sides. From fruit cups to dressings, she fills enormous trays of white paper cups with that day’s offerings before she and the others sit down for their own lunch at about 10:30.

Linda Bartlett came to Clinton nine years ago from Kahoa Elementary. Along with cooking responsibilities, Bartlett also orders and tracks all food and supplies.

She directs the feeding of more than 400 children in two hours. Lunch is a well-organized, though loud, affair.

A never-ending wave of chatty girls and boys flows along the serving line selecting their meals before seating themselves at six-foot-round tables checkered across the multi-purpose room.

Teachers, paraprofessionals and custodians weave among them in a seemingly choreographed ballet. Pick up a dropped fork. Wipe up spilled milk. Bow down to look a child in the face while placing a hand on his back for a brief, private conversation.

Repeat the lunch process four times, and it’s 1 p.m.

The kindergarteners trail out the old wooden doors, and the tables are once again magically clear. ■





Lincoln Police Officer Sidney Yardley works to build a relationship with children that will give them a positive view of police. Photo by Steve Hermann.



# A friendly face

*Officer Yardley has become a source of support*

by Yangkyoung Lee

**T**he award letter for the 2006 Lincoln Police Department Officer of the Year describes Officer Sidney Yardley as one who “exemplifies great work, tackling difficult cases yet being considerate and helpful to citizens who sometimes find that just getting through the day is a difficult task.”

That explains a lot about who Yardley is as a police officer, but for many Clinton Elementary students, he is just a good friend.

Yardley is a part of the Police Department’s Center Team, which main-

ly covers the downtown business district, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and the Clinton neighborhood. He visits Clinton Elementary School almost every day and has definitely made a difference to Paul, who was in kindergarten when Yardley met him.

“When he got frustrated or mad he just left the school. I would come over and find him in the neighborhood and bring him back to the school,” Yardley said.

Yardley convinced the 5-year-old boy to come back to school. Shortly after he intervened, Paul quit running away.

“He used to throw things and trash the whole room,” Yardley said. “And I would come over to the school, and we would talk. We would clean the room together. Pretty soon, he wasn’t trashing rooms any more.”

Paul is now a second-grader who studies hard, and he has no problem staying at school, Yardley said.

“I just talked to him yesterday,” Yardley said like a proud father. “He’s just a cute kid. You would never imagine that he would have and could have caused the problems he can cause. He’s a wise young man now.”

But Yardley doesn’t want credit for the change in Paul.

“It’s not just me,” he said. “It’s the school that works with him. It’s the parents that work with him, too. So if I have a part in it, I may have a little part in it.”

Yardley, who is a full-time patrol officer, also visits Hartley Elementary at 730 N. 33rd St., as one of the Center Team’s 14 liaison officers. It is his job to give advice and help the

school administrators in various situations.

The liaison officers are distinguished from the school resource officers who visit only middle and high schools. Liaison officers visit elementary schools and community organizations, a service that was started in 1999 by Center Team Capt. Joy Citta to involve community members in their policing.

Yardley said at first he wasn’t sure he wanted to be a liaison officer, but that changed when Margaret Walker, then the principal at Clinton, convinced him he would be making a difference in the community.

“Dr. Walker told me we would be dealing with our future, and that changed my view,” Yardley said. “Where else can you be a part of your community where there are so many positive things?”

Yardley usually attends the Clinton weekly meetings led by Jo Theis, Clinton’s assistant principal. School staff members, including family care coordinator Angela Gebhardt, school nurses, counselors and sometimes mental health therapists who work with students with behavioral problems at Clinton, are also present to talk about issues regarding particular families and students.

‘Where else can you be a part of your community where there are so many positive things?’

**SIDNEY YARDLEY, Clinton Elementary police liaison officer**



‘Officer Yardley is a wonderful friend to Clinton. He is a strong advocate for children and can be counted on to do whatever he can to keep children safe and school a safe place for all.’

## MARGARET WALKER, former Clinton principal

He also helps the school when it needs police intervention with domestic violence and parental drug and alcohol problems.

Theis said Yardley’s role at the school means a lot to students.

“He provides a positive male role model,” she said, “and at the same time he plays an authoritative role...that shows the students that there are rules to follow, and there will be consequences if they don’t.”

Yardley is aware of his dual roles at Clinton and said he thinks of himself as both a police officer and a fatherly figure to the Clinton students.

“I know that in their eyes I am a policeman, and they learn at the school that policemen are all their friends. But there is a time when being a friend is not going to work. And I have to go back to being a policeman.”

This is what happened in March. A 10-year-old boy, whom Yardley had talked to several times before, was accused of stealing a wallet from a teacher.

Yardley said such a thing had never happened at Clinton before.

He took the boy to the police station and turned him over to the Police Department’s Family Crimes Unit, which investigates serious crimes against children and missing juveniles and runs a diversion program for juvenile offenders.

Yardley didn’t like what he had to do that day. “I know it is my job,” he said. “So I don’t have to like everything I do. I didn’t feel sad. But it disappointed me that we couldn’t reach him.”

But Yardley does enjoy his job, and he likes being surrounded by the students and

talking to them — especially those who need some guidance.

Clinton Elementary recognized his work formally by nominating him to be one of the two “Gold Stars” of Clinton last year, and he won the LPS award, honoring him as someone special to his school.

This year is also special to him because he’s been selected as the Police Department’s Officer of the Year. According to the award letter, Yardley, who joined the department as a cadet 31 years ago, has been recognized for his efforts to “get weapons out of the hands of potentially violent or dangerous people.”

Yardley said he wants to change the negative image of police that is engrained in the minds of some children, who either have seen their family members being arrested or have heard about such incidents from their families.

“The kids would think, ‘The police came and took my dad away,’” he said. “Children under those circumstances might be afraid of us. They would think, ‘I can’t go and talk to them because they would put me in a jail like they did to my dad or my mom.’”

Yardley, who has brothers and a daughter also in law enforcement, said he thinks working with Clinton students and developing a relationship with them may change the way families look at police officers in the future.

“If a family member gets arrested, they would come to me and say, ‘Why would they do that?’ and I would explain to them what happened,” Yardley said. “And then they know they can come in and ask questions.”

Kids at Clinton do ask Yardley a lot of questions. Among the most common are: Do

you carry a gun? (Yes, I do, because I am a patrol policeman.) Can I touch it? (No, it is my tool and dangerous.) Why do you carry a flashlight during the daytime? (Because I sometimes go to a place where there is no light, like a basement.)

When curious young minds ask him these questions, Yardley answers them nicely, and after years of interacting with elementary students, Yardley has a great concern for the kids.

“Kids throw things usually because they are upset about something or someone,” said Yardley, who wears an ever-present grandfatherly smile behind his thin-rimmed glasses and gray mustache.

When kids act out, Yardley approaches them gently. He distracts the kids from their anger by asking about something general, like the weather, and after they calm down, he talks to them about what happened and why it happened.

He tells them next time when something bothers and upsets them, they can talk with people around them — teachers, instructors and the rest of the Clinton staff — and tell them that they are upset.

“I tell the kids to express their feelings more verbally and say ‘I’m upset, and I need some time,’” Yardley explained.

Former Principal Walker said Yardley has meant a great deal to the school.

“Officer Yardley is a wonderful friend to Clinton,” Walker said. “He is a strong advocate for children and can be counted on to do whatever he can to keep children safe and school a safe place for all.” ■

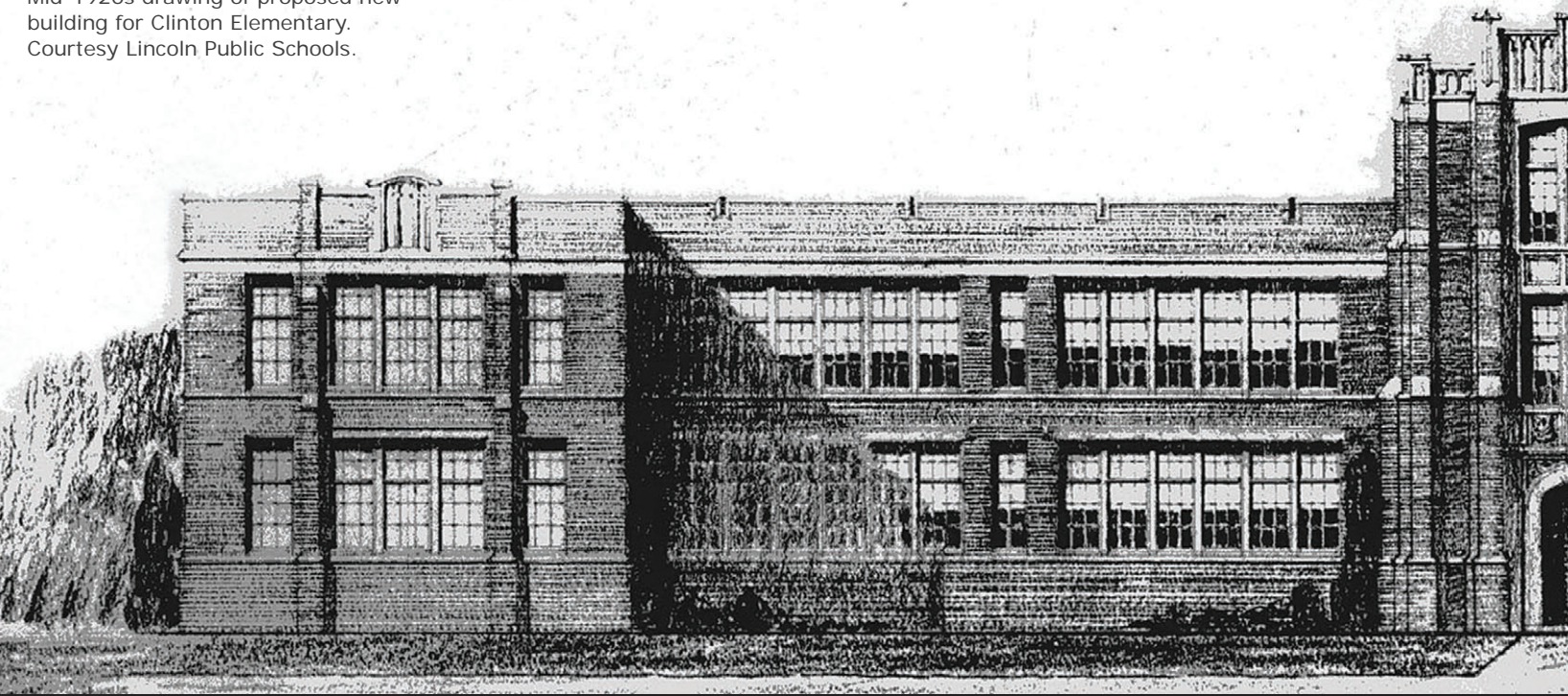




Officer Yardley says his favorite part of the job is interacting with the children, such as Malachi Norval, a kindergartener. Photo by Steve Hermann.



Mid-1920s drawing of proposed new building for Clinton Elementary.  
Courtesy Lincoln Public Schools.



# A solid foundation

*Historic Clinton  
changes with time*

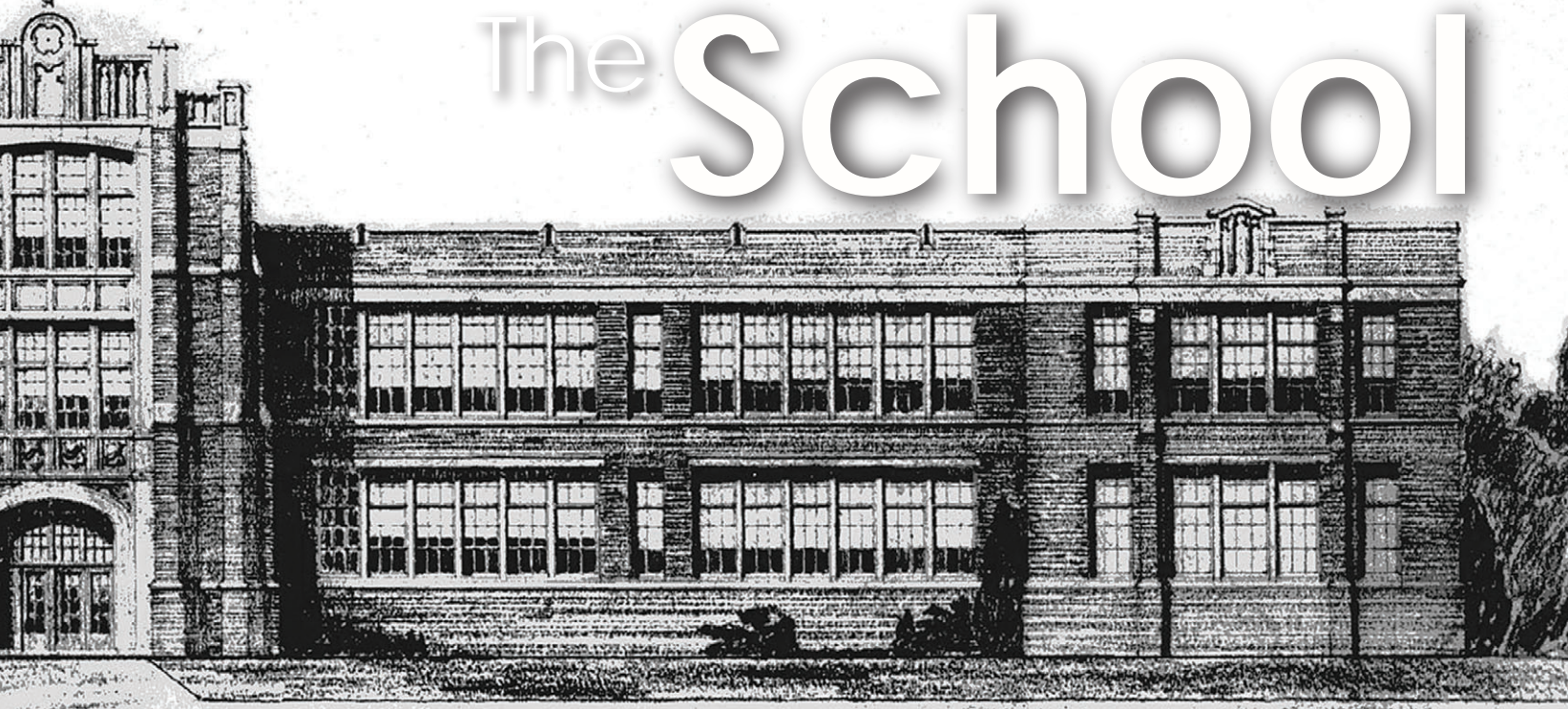
by Sean Hagewood

**F**or more than a century, schools have been an important part of the Clinton neighborhood, one of the poorest in Lincoln. Clinton School, then at 29th and Clinton streets, was built in 1891 and included kindergarten through eighth grade. DeWitt Clinton, a prominent





# The School



New York politician, was the namesake of the school and the street.

The old building was torn down and replaced by the larger Clinton Elementary School in 1926.

Construction on the two-story, 26-room school at 29th and Holdrege cost about \$365,000, and the school board spent between \$35,000 and \$45,000 for the two-block lot.

In a speech at the formal opening of Clinton Elementary in November 1926, Millard Lefler, then superintendent of Lincoln schools, stressed the importance of providing good schools for all neighborhoods in the city.

According to an article in the Lincoln Daily Star: “He told of the broad phase which education now envelopes. No longer is the poor man’s child under a handicap. No longer do the wealthy man’s children possess an advantage along educational lines.”

A kitchen was added to Clinton in 1960, an elevator was installed in 1995, and a wing with a new kitchen, multipurpose room and five classrooms was completed in 2002.

The school won’t see any changes as part of the \$250 million bond issue approved in February, but new windows were installed this summer through other funding.



Clinton Elementary, 2006. Photo by Nicholas Berry.



# Ready for anything

*Positive outlook helps  
nursing staff keep  
students healthy*

by Jeff Salem

**S**haron, dressed in a yellow shirt and yellow pants, walks into the health office. Her lip hurts. It's not quite 8 a.m. and the kindergarten is already seeking help.

Hollis Alexander-Ramsay, the school nurse at Clinton Elementary, comes to the rescue. Her remedy for Sharon consists of an ice pack wrapped in a brown paper towel.

The solved problem marks the beginning of what will undoubtedly be another busy day for Ramsay and her assistant, Karina Mendez.

The beginning of the school day is the busiest time for the health office. That's because more than 20 students are required to report to Ramsay each day—most before noon—and take their prescribed medication. Treatments for diabetes, attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder and asthma are regulated by Ramsay.

Just as Sharon is being sent back to class, Caleb strolls in.

"How are you, Caleb?" Ramsay asks.

"Sometimes good, sometimes bad," Caleb quickly responds.

Caleb is carrying a hot pink sticky note that he hands to Ramsay. The note is from a staff member in the cafeteria. It says Caleb ate all of his breakfast this morning.

Caleb has diabetes, and the note helps Ramsay track his carbohydrate intake.

Ramsay then administers a shot of insulin to Caleb.

It's clear Caleb has been through this before as he nonchalantly accepts the shot. He's

either trying to act tough, or he is simply used to living with diabetes.

It's probably the latter.

"I know everything there is to know about diabetes," Caleb declares.

Not every visit to Ramsay's office is so routine. Cora is having trouble breathing and although she has asthma, she only gets her inhaler when needed. But this time an inhaler may not do the trick.

Although Cora is calm, she clearly needs help. Ramsay, with her calm, motherly demeanor, sits Cora down and has her breathe through a tube connected to a machine that

is making a low humming noise. Meanwhile, as Mendez finishes giving Devon-tae, a whirlwind of a boy in a red turtle-neck, his ADHD medication, she calls Cora's mother just to let her know what is happening.

Ramsay and Mendez are in their third year together at Clinton, and it shows. Nothing that comes through their door seems unexpected or impossible to handle. They know what they're doing.

Ramsay runs the health office at Clinton on Mondays, Wednesdays and Thursdays. When she works at Riley Elementary on Tuesdays and Brownell Elementary on Fridays, Mendez heads the office at Clinton.

Their calm actions show that they know their job requires them to be ready for anything.

"Anything can walk through the door at any time," Ramsay said.

The office usually sees 80 to 100 kids a

'Anything can walk through the  
door at any time'

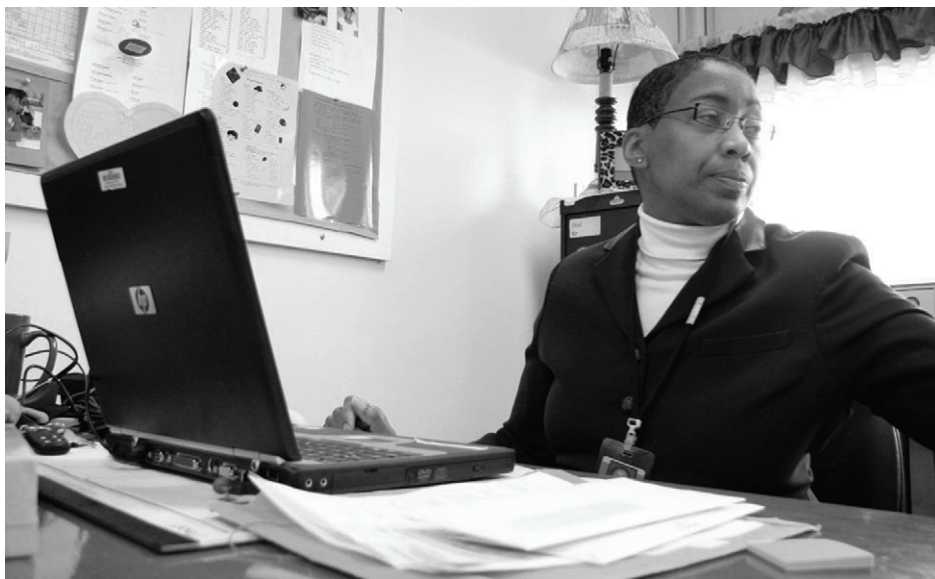
**HOLLIS ALEXANDER-RAMSAY, nurse**





Cora uses a nebulizer to help her breathe. The kindergartener has asthma, and the machine gets medicine straight to her lungs. Photo by Steve Hermann.





Nurse Hollis Alexander-Ramsay works at Clinton three days a week, giving out medication and treating students' injuries. Photo by David Story.

day, Mendez said. Sometimes they see the same faces more often than they should.

"We definitely have our share of frequent fliers that just want to get out of class for a while," Ramsay said.

A half-hour into the school day, Ramsay tells Cora that it's time to give class a try, but to come back if need be. As Cora slowly walks out of the nurse's office, Ramsay calls ahead to her class. There will be no outside activity for

Cora today—no recess or P.E.

A few minutes pass, and most of the kids have returned to class—about 15 in all—after receiving medication. It seems as though a slow day in the health office may be on the horizon when a paraeducator walks in. She tells Mendez that she was bitten on the wrist by a student.

She just wants the bite mark cleaned and doesn't want to take the time to fill out

a formal report, required for every trip to the nurse's office, but Mendez insists the paperwork must be filed.

The health office duties go beyond treating whoever walks through the door. The staff also makes regular lice checks and even arranges to check every student's teeth once a year in the fall.

LPS asks that every student in the district in grades 1-3 be checked for cavities, but Clinton staff had the entire school checked in the fall of 2005.

"There are high dental needs at Clinton, and we were just going above the call of duty," Ramsay said.

If problems are found with a student's teeth, a letter is sent home and follow-up calls are made by the school's health office to ensure that the family is aware.

Ramsay said students have been found to have tooth abscesses, and some have had up to 10 cavities in one check-up.

"A lot of these kids don't see a dentist regularly, and this is their only type of check-up all year," she said.

The families are told to contact the Peoples Health Clinic, 1021 N. 27th St., if they don't already have a dentist.

These check-ups, in addition to the daily health care of students, are important to the students of Clinton in receiving a good education, Principal Mona Manley said.

"It's critical to have a good nurse and a well-run health office like ours," Manley said. "It gets the students back in class quickly and helps them know they are in a safe, clean environment to learn in." ■

**80-100:** *students who visit the health office each day*

## A scratchy situation

Distractions to learning, like commotion in the hallway or a fire drill, can pop up at any elementary school, but, on March 1, the distraction of head lice affected Clinton more than usual.

On any given day, one or two students with lice are sent home for treatment, Clinton nurse Hollis Alexander-Ramsay said. By the end of this day, the number stood at six.

The first case was found at about 8:30 a.m. A mother stopped by the health office wanting a lice comb for her house. Her daughter, a student at Clinton, was found with head lice for the third time this year, and the mother was concerned it was coming from someone in her daughter's class.

Within 10 minutes of the mother's inquiry, the whole class was sent to the health office for screening. Ramsay and health assistant Karina Mendez check the students for lice by pushing hair aside with a tongue

depressor to expose the scalp. Girls are more likely to be carriers because they usually have longer hair, Mendez said.

After the class was checked, no one was asked to stay, usually an indication that no lice were found. But one student did have lice. Ramsay sent her back to class anyway, planning to call her back after a while.

"You don't want to embarrass the child," she said.

Besides sending the student home, Ramsay sends literature and supplies—lice shampoo if the family can't afford it—in hopes that the lice will not come back.

But that's not usually the case, Ramsay said.

"We try to be proactive in ridding them of lice, but some families are chronic," she said.

Although this was an isolated case—the student didn't have any siblings in other

classrooms who needed to be checked—the situation is not over.

The afternoon shows how quickly the lice problem can develop into one of unexpected proportions.

A boy came in early in the afternoon and said his head was itching. He had lice. From there, his entire class had to be checked, as well as his brother. His brother also had lice, so his class had to be checked, too. By the search's end, six students with head lice were sent home from school.

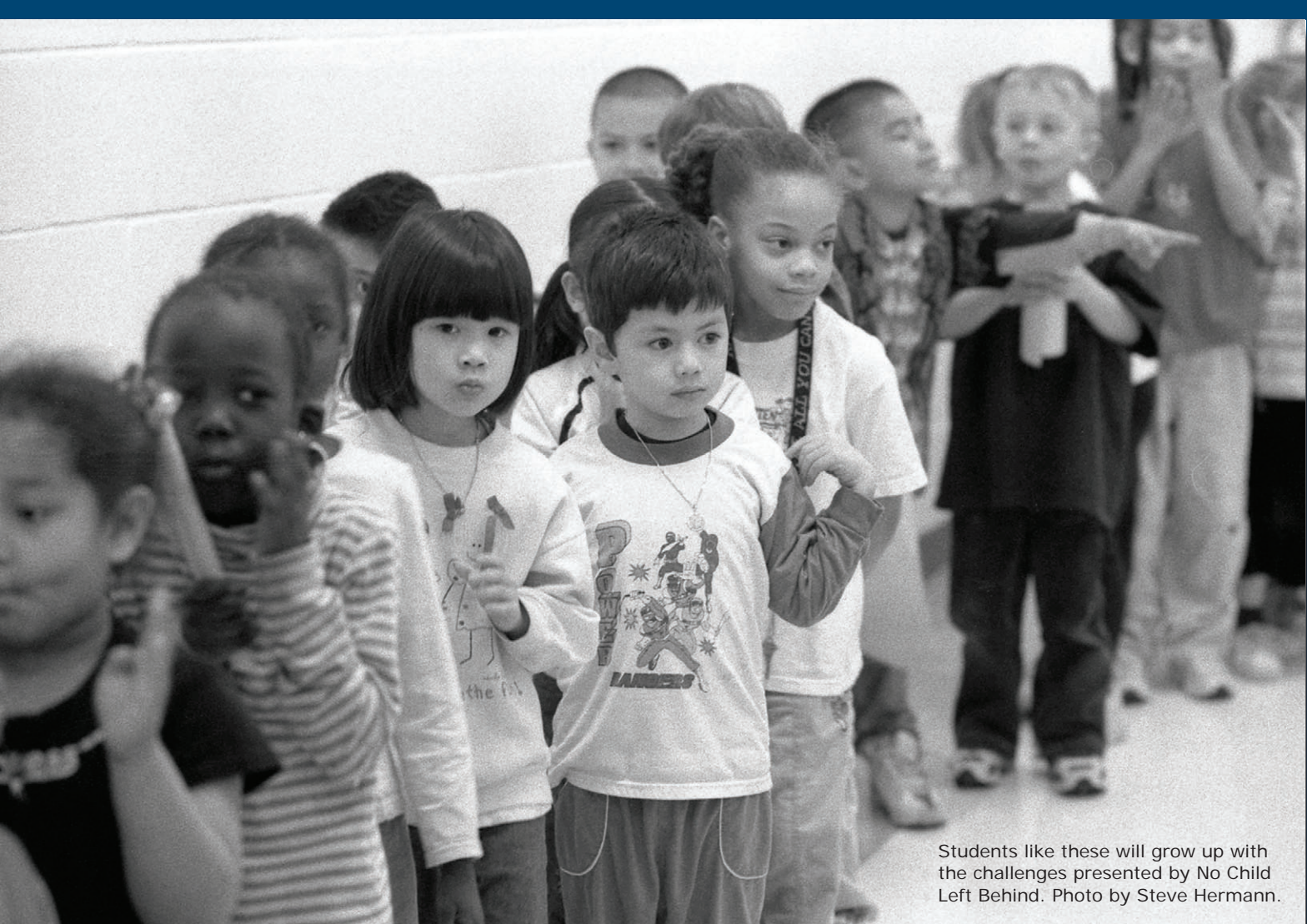
Mendez didn't seem fazed by the number of students affected.

"It's always the same students. It's in their house and family," she said.

By the month's end, 28 students of 361 checked were sent home, according to the health office summary, just another distraction to overcome.

— Jeff Salem





Students like these will grow up with the challenges presented by No Child Left Behind. Photo by Steve Hermann.

# Imposing standards

*School strives to meet expectations of No Child Left Behind* by Sean Hagedwood

**C**arla Olson laughed then grew silent when asked about the advantages of No Child Left Behind.

“I have to think of an advantage?” she asked.

Olson, who works with students in grades two through five as an English Language Learners (ELL) teacher at Clinton Elementary School, said she thinks the only advantage of the federal education law is that it requires more accountability from schools.

But Olson didn't need much time to think of the disadvantages.

“Where do I begin?” she asked.

Many educators at Clinton and other schools across the country, particularly those in low-income areas, would agree that the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 is admirable in its intentions but unrealistic in its objectives, which is a major reason it has stirred up so

much controversy in the educational community and beyond.

Olson, who is in her sixth year at Clinton and her 20th year as a teacher, said some of the questions on the standardized tests required under the law aren't appropriate for students with limited English.

She said some of her students lack the background to answer some of the questions

on the listening portion of the English Language Development Assessment, a series of oral and written tests specifically created for ELL students in grades K-12 to fulfill the testing requirements of No Child Left Behind. ELL students at Clinton have taken this assessment for the past two years and performed well on it.

According to the 2004-05 State of the Schools Report, released last fall by the Nebraska Department of Education, ELL students in fourth grade at Clinton met state standards in reading and far exceeded standards in writing. However, math scores for these students were well below proficiency requirements.

Olson said many of her students struggle with math because ELL programs primarily focus on reading and writing.

But this school year, she said, Lincoln



## How does Clinton stack up?

Here's how fourth-graders at Clinton Elementary compared to students at other schools in the district and the state on the 2004-05 State of the Schools Report\*.

### Students meeting or exceeding standards:

All students:

Reading performance\*\*:  
Clinton: 81.85 percent  
District: 86.9 percent

Math performance:  
Clinton: 64.81 percent  
District: 78.68 percent

Writing performance:  
Clinton: 89.66 percent  
District: 86.21 percent  
State: 82.99 percent

ELL students\*:

Reading performance:  
Clinton: 72 percent  
District: 49.87 percent

Math performance:  
Clinton: 42.5 percent  
District: 52.27 percent

Writing performance:  
Clinton: 94.12 percent  
District: 70.86 percent  
State: 70.19 percent

Special Education students\*\*:

Reading performance:  
Clinton: 59 percent  
District: 63.34 percent

Math performance:  
Clinton: 32.5 percent  
District: 51.07 percent

Writing performance:  
Clinton: 73.68 percent  
District: 67.12 percent  
State: 63.46 percent

Source: Nebraska Department of Education Web site (<http://www.nde.state.ne.us/>)

\* Lincoln Public Schools sets its own standards for reading and math. Therefore, test scores can't be directly compared to those of other school districts.

\*\* Overall averages of all standards tested

\* ELL students designated as Level 1 (of five levels), who are just beginning to learn English, aren't tested.

\*\* Up to 3 percent of Special Education students can take alternate tests. Those results aren't included in these percentages.

Public Schools adopted a new math series that includes a lot of story problems to encourage higher-level thinking through reading.

She said the school district also purchased flash cards to help ELL teachers work on math vocabulary with students.

Olson said students at Clinton show progress on tests each school year, but teachers won't know whether these changes have helped until test results are published this fall.

"Our students are doing a good job," she said.

Principal Mona Manley agreed.

"We always seem to do well," she said. "I hope we can continue that."

In the 2005-06 school year, Clinton received \$339,750 in federal funding through Title I, which is aimed at improving the quality of education for disadvantaged children.

Manley said this money helped the school add two paraeducators, a half-time teacher to support math instruction, a kindergarten teacher and a first-grade teacher. It also allowed several part-time teachers to become full time.

But as with most federal funding, there are strings attached.

According to No Child Left Behind, all school districts that receive Title I funding must test all students in grades 3-8 in the core subjects of reading, writing and math, and states must publish these results annually.

Each state must set standards and create assessments for schools to measure student achievement and monitor progress.

Each school must make "adequate yearly

progress," as defined by the state, toward the ultimate goal of No Child Left Behind: 100 percent proficiency by all students in all subjects by 2014.

If a school fails to make adequate progress for two consecutive years, it becomes known as a "school in need of improvement." It must receive help from its state department of education and educational service units, create a two-year plan for improving and allow students to transfer to other schools in the district that are meeting standards. The low-performing school must also provide transportation to these other schools at its own expense.

If a school fails to show adequate progress for three straight years, it must provide money for students to seek supplemental instruction at tutoring programs outside of the school.

If a school continues to fall short, it can be subject to such measures as takeover and reorganization in which the entire faculty can be replaced.

Clinton Elementary School has made adequate progress every year since No Child Left Behind began, but this will become more difficult as the state raises standards.

In every other state, students take statewide and national standardized tests each school year.

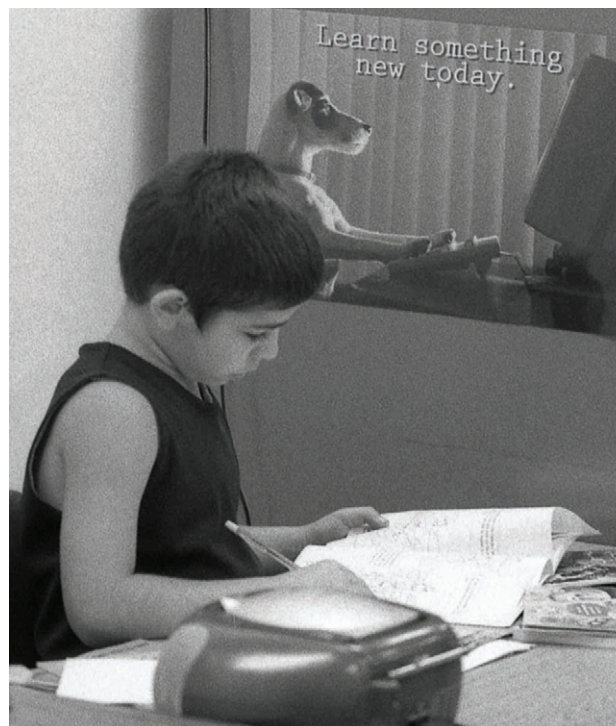
But in 2000, Nebraska came up with its own approach to school accountability called the School-based Teacher-led Assessment and Reporting System (STARS), which allows school districts to create their own assessments to be considered along with national tests and a statewide

writing assessment. The requirements of No Child Left Behind are incorporated into this system.

However, the U.S. Department of Education has found that STARS doesn't meet the federal requirements of No Child Left Behind. The state has challenged this finding

Besides reading, writing and math, students are tested in history, social studies and science. Students in different grades are tested in different subjects each year.

School districts evaluate the test results before sending them to the state level, where panels of teachers rate the quality of the assessments and student performance for each grade at each school. The results are published each fall by the Nebraska Department of



Clinton students averaged better than most in a statewide writing assessment. Photo by Steve Hermann.



# LPS budget formula reflects needs

Clinton Elementary's yearly staff budget, like those of all Lincoln public schools, is determined by a point formula that is dependent on three enrollment factors: the number of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, the mobility rate (the percentage of students who move in and out of the school each year) and the number of gifted students.

During the 2005-06 school year, Clinton had 429 enrolled students, with 395 students eating free or reduced-priced lunch (the largest percentage of any school in Lincoln), a 36 percent mobility rate, and 14 students who were identified as gifted.

After the budget has been determined, Clinton officials, not the school district, decide where the money should go. Clin-

ton has used some of its budget to hire school psychologist Karen Imm, as well as a schoolwide coordinator to promote parental involvement, Manley said.

Clinton is one of 13 Lincoln elementaries that received federal funding as Title I schools in 2005-06 because they had significant numbers of low-income children. Title I funding must be directed toward math and reading education.

Clinton has been at capacity and has seen a growth in enrollment over the past few years, Manley said, so, unlike some other Title I schools, it hasn't had the strains that come with staff cutbacks.

Clinton also receives private donations. Manley said that money goes toward supplies and equipment. —Jeff Salem

## Free lunch eligibility

Schools use the number of children eligible for free or reduced-price meals as a measure of poverty. Several factors determine eligibility, including the number of persons—related and unrelated—living in a household, their total income from all sources and whether the household receives food stamps or other forms of assistance.

Under 2005-06 guidelines established by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Nebraska Department of Education, children in a four-person household with income up to \$35,798 could be eligible for free or reduced-price meals.

Education.

In the 2004-05 school year, Clinton students fared well:

\* In reading, they achieved 81.9 percent proficiency, compared with 86.9 percent for Lincoln Public Schools. The minimum requirement set by the state was 72 percent.

\* In writing, they reached 89.7 percent proficiency, compared with 86.2 percent for the district. The state requirement was 62 percent.

\* In math, they performed with 64.8 percent proficiency, compared with the LPS average of 78.7 percent. The state requirement was 74 percent, but Clinton's score was within the "confidence band," meaning it wasn't significantly lower than the average of other schools.

Manley said her school has been concentrating on math. In addition to adopting the new math series, Clinton has hired a full-time math specialist for grades 3-5 to work with students who are struggling.

The school also employs two full-time teachers for grades K-2 who support literacy through Reading Recovery, a daily, one-on-one tutoring program meant to help students who are struggling with reading skills.

Manley said some students aren't allowed to participate in special programs like computers, fine arts and gym for nine weeks so they can work on math and reading skills instead.

"I think it's important to constantly monitor and evaluate student progress to make sure that they're succeeding," Manley said. "We've always been about that in Lincoln Public Schools, and [No Child Left Behind] is just now providing evidence to the community that this has been important to us."

Manley, who is in her first year at Clinton

after being a principal at Kahoa Elementary School for four years and Cavett Elementary School for six years, said she's pleased with the progress students at her school have made, but they still have a long way to go before they can reach 100 percent proficiency.

She said it will be difficult for some students to succeed even with a lot of support at school and at home.

Kellie Joy, who has taught third grade at Clinton for eight years, agreed.

"Children are all different, and bring their own strengths and weaknesses with them every day," she said. "Try and try as they may, there are going to be children who do not live up to the expectations of the federal government, even though their teachers, parents and themselves have seen progress all year."

Joy said she tries to explain the significance of the tests long before her students pick up their pencils to begin.

"We talk about the importance of letting other people know how hard we have worked and that it is one picture of how they are performing as third-graders compared to people across the U.S.," she said.

She also has her students make goal sheets before they take the tests. Some of her students don't care about setting goals and will succeed no matter what, she said. Conversely, some students will always come up short on



These kindergarteners will be in ninth grade when No Child Left Behind takes full effect in 2014. Photo by David Story.

the tests.

Joy said she wholeheartedly believes that all children can learn but that they develop differently.

She said the testing required by No Child Left Behind doesn't allow for individual differences in students.

Most ELL students and children with learning disabilities must be included in test results for each school. This rule puts schools like Clinton at a natural disadvantage.

According to the 2005-06 LPS Statistical



Handbook, 30.5 percent of students at Clinton participate in the ELL program. These students represent 11 languages other than English.

ELL students are evaluated by the district and assigned a level from 1 to 5 based on language ability. Only Level 1 students, who are just beginning to learn English, are exempt from testing.

In addition, 22.4 percent of students at the school take part in special education for students with physical and mental handicaps.

Up to 3 percent of these students can take a more appropriate test that measures performance in functional academics, personal management, vocational development, motor development and independent living. Eight students at Clinton took the alternate assess-

ment this school year, but for a student with severe learning disabilities, even that test is a struggle, Joy said.

Another challenge when it comes to testing is the high mobility rate of students at Clinton. More than a third of them changed schools during the 2004-2005 school year, according to the LPS Statistical Handbook.

But Joy said one of the biggest challenges students must overcome is simply living in poverty.

She said many students can't concentrate on their schoolwork because they're hungry.

"When your primary needs are not being met on a daily basis, I think that that obviously affects your education," she said.

Joy said if all students are to be held to the same accountability level, they should all be

provided the same things inside and outside of school. She said Lincoln Public Schools makes sure that all schools in the district use the same curriculum and receive the same resources, but this isn't true everywhere.

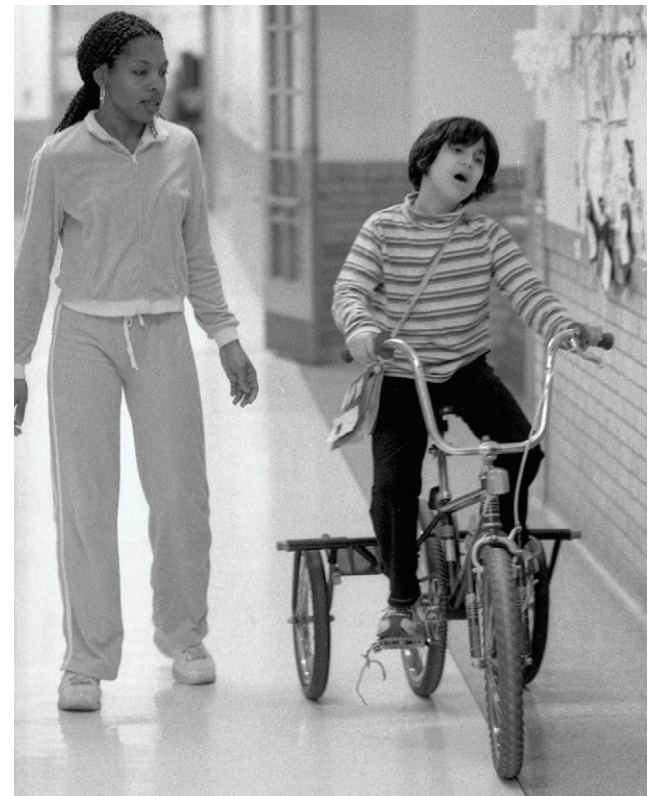
Joy said she thinks it's unrealistic for the government to demand 100 percent proficiency by 2014.

"I think the idea is good, but the standard can't be 100 percent," she said.

She also disagrees with the idea of sanctions against schools that fail to meet standards.

"It's great for education to have that accountability piece," she said. "But I think that if it (No Child Left Behind) becomes punitive, then it's probably going to destroy education." ■

## Program helps students with challenges



About 100 students attended special education classes during the 2005-06 school year, according to Kelly Schilousky, program coordinator. The classes help students with learning disabilities develop academic and social skills. Above, preschooler Alijah Whitlow, who has Down syndrome, goes to a morning program designed to prepare him for mainstream education. Top right, paraeducator Deborah Mitzlaff Koenen guides kindergartener Mach Kur as he draws on a white board.

Paraeducator Gloise Hunter watches third-grader Hawra Ali ride a bike through the hallway for physical therapy. Photos by Steve Hermann.





ELL teacher Renee Bohaty helps third-graders like Phuong Ngo, left, Ferial Hasan and Luis Mendez adjust to life in the United States. Photo by David Story.

# Bringing worlds together

*English Language Learners class helps students, families adjust to new home*

by David Bennett

**S**pin this big blue orb of ours around and pick out three countries—let’s say Iraq, Mexico and Vietnam. They sit inches away from each other on a desk globe, thousands of miles apart in reality. Zoom in to Nebraska, U.S.A. On a short table in a small classroom in a city in the middle of the United States, a teacher has taped three name cards inches away from each other. In red marker, they read “Khalaf,” “Mendez” and “Nguyen.”

The table, scarred by the activities of children, squats underneath paper butterflies and reddish Chinese lanterns hanging from the ceiling in one of Clinton Elementary’s English Language Learners, or ELL, classrooms. The table represents the world of ELL students,

children bound by a common goal to learn their new home’s native tongue.

If the United States did not welcome refugees fleeing violence or those seeking a better life, these children would likely never meet. Here, they sit side by side, a miniature United Nations diplomatic summit. At another school in another neighborhood, they would be rare indeed.

Here at Clinton, though, ELL students make up almost a third of the school’s population. Having such a diverse population presents Clinton’s ELL teachers with challenges not found in other classrooms, but also with distinctive rewards. Rewards occasionally bitersweet, but rewards nonetheless: The teach-



ers get to witness firsthand changes within their students and students' families—not just the changes all children go through as they scramble up through grade levels, but changes as they master living in their new world.

Diversity is not a buzzword at Clinton, it is plain reality. With Kurds from northern Iraq, Iraqis from refugee camps, Nuer and Dinka from war-racked Sudan, Vietnamese from several waves of immigration, a mixture of Latin American nationalities and more, Clinton welcomes a large cross-section of Lincoln's immigrant and refugee children.

Some families are new arrivals, some have been here a decade.

Kathy Mueller, in her seventh year teaching ELL at Clinton, has a background teaching special-education students. She says Lincoln is an open, generous community.

Pictures of children in traditional dress from a score of nationalities ring the top of

'Students and parents are very respectful of the American educational system. They trust us and they trust us with their children.'

**Reneé Bohaty, ELL teacher**

her classroom. At her desk, which is topped by a sign saying "This is not a messy desk. I'm saving data," Mueller outlined some of the challenges her students have faced.

At first, some students newer to the United States were terrified to be in a modern, Midwest American setting. At school in their home country (that is, if they even got to go to school), they might have been beaten by teachers for the smallest infraction. Other differences require more minor adaptations.

Mueller said one thing newer ELL stu-

dents are not accustomed to is so much processed food. Instead of mashed potatoes, the children were used to boiled. Hence, sometimes they chose not to eat at school.

With time, though, the newer students got used to it.

"Some parts (of Americanizing) make me sad," Mueller said, but she pointed out some of the best ELL successes come with parents.

For instance, the prospect of coming to the school frightened some new parents, but gradually their attendance at parent-teacher conferences improved.

Among Kurdish and Arabic Iraqis, the fathers at first took children to school and visited with teachers. Eventually, the mothers took over that role.

"It's so exciting to see moms coming out," Mueller said.

Reneé Bohaty, also a former special-education teacher, gets to see families experiencing cultural change, too. She's taught ELL students for six years and says getting to know families is both the happiest and the saddest part of her job.

Sometimes students do not have an advanced vocabulary in their native language, and their parents do not understand English well, so the children have trouble communicating with their parents in any language. Also, Spanish-speaking children at home may have to use a lot of "Spanglish." Bohaty said parents may give up some parental role because of language difficulty.

"I feel frustrated for them," she said.

Both Mueller and Bohaty say that among Clinton's students, parents of English Language Learners are especially grateful for the country's public schools.

"Students and parents are very respectful of the American educational system. They trust us and they trust us with their children. They're always saying 'thank you,'" Bohaty said.

So how do the teachers even begin to instruct children in English? Their students may have different levels of proficiency, from level one (no English) to level five, and may speak one or more languages. They say it's an organic, dynamic process, with good and bad days, but they track each child on paper to make sure the child progresses in several areas of English



Carla Olson helps third-grader Dominic Castellanos in Clinton's ELL program. Photo by David Story.



learning. If one area fares badly, the teacher can focus on it.

Many ELL teachers say that knowing another language is not a prerequisite for instructors, because at Clinton they must deal with 11 different languages, from Arabic to Vietnamese. Sometimes, though, they learn a few things from the children, such as how to count to 10 in Dinka, or say “hello” in Kurdish.

They said children are amazingly good at learning a new language when immersed in it. The students have to start out simple. Mueller makes sure that level one students, on their first day, know three important words: eat, bathroom and water.

Generally, Clinton’s ELL teachers try to focus much of their curriculum on building vocabulary.

Deanna Petersen, whose pet phrase of praise she uses with her kindergarteners and first-graders is “kiss your brain,” also teaches ELL classes at Clinton. Her first-grade class, surrounded by a dozen plush red Clifford dogs and other colorful accoutrements of early childhood, sat around a table and showed off its current project. Each student took a basic sentence pasted on a large sheet of paper, such as “I like to eat cake,” then gradually expanded the thought by adding adjective and adverb descriptors.

A visitor asked what the students liked best about their instruction at Clinton. One by one, the children gave their answers: “recess,” “reading,” “teachers.” As they went in a circle around the table, a girl with wavy dark hair and shiny brown eyes looked more and more uncomfortable as her turn came closer.

Petersen’s most reserved student, whom she called “Miss Heba,” sat for a couple of minutes. The other children tried to give her encouragement or suggested answers, but Petersen hushed them. Miss Heba stared at the floor, her discomfort at being the center of attention palpable. Finally, the girl whispered in Petersen’s ear.

She likes writing the best, Petersen announced to the class.

“Some need one on one, but some are wizards,” Petersen said later.

The girl, who is Kurdish, constructed the longest sentence in the class: “I like to eat chocolate cake at my brother’s house in the afternoon.”

Petersen said that last year Miss Heba knew no English. After kindergarten, she started opening up. The child comes from a

family of nine boys, so Petersen got to know the family before the girl came to school. Miss Heba would cower behind her mother’s legs when they came to Clinton to pick up her big brothers. Petersen would try to talk to her.

“It’s so funny, because on the checklists, I have down that she understands humor. She will laugh at things other kids don’t understand. She picks up more advanced jokes and humor other kids don’t get,” Petersen said.

For ELL students, a big stumbling block can be idioms. But, Petersen says, “little kids’ brains are wired to learn.”

Mueller, Bohaty and Petersen concur: it is amazing how fast the students pick up English.

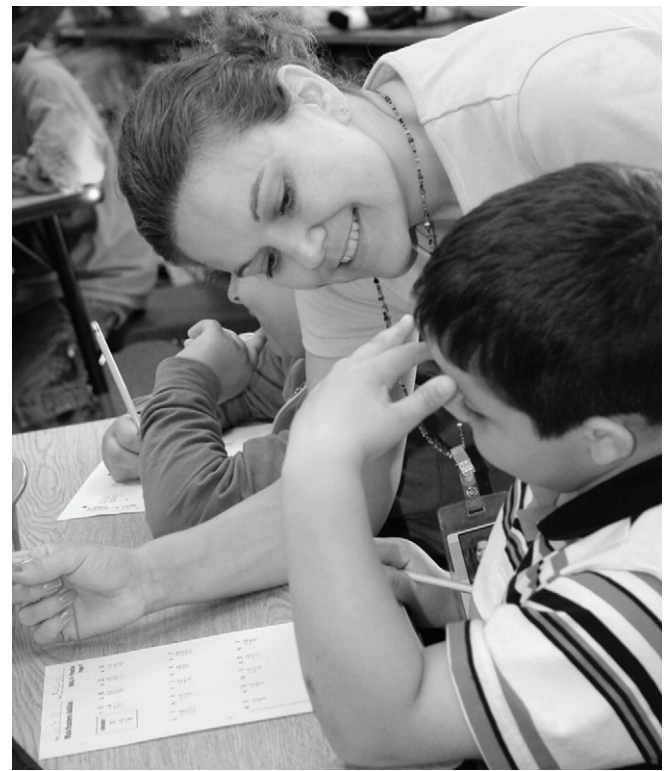
Sometimes the process can be hard, Bohaty said. For example, a group of Kurds known as Yezidi, a mainly nomadic mountain people from northern Iraq, have no written language. At refugee camps in Syria, girls would learn how to cook and sew, and boys would maybe learn a little spoken Arabic. Not growing up with a written language, Bohaty said, Yezidi children first had to make a connection between speaking and writing.

Giel, a Sudanese boy with short tufts of hair, worked on a vocabulary exercise next to Bohaty as she explained that she sends something home with her students every day.

“I have them take a book home every day, usually with pictures,” she said. They have a reading promise to read four days a week at home. If they’ve kept their promise, they get a book, toy, toothpaste or knickknack at the end of the month.

The slow but inevitable process of Americanization comes with its share of pitfalls, though. Occasionally, friction can develop when students bring the conflicts of their home countries to school.

Mueller said she had a problem with some Arabic and Kurdish children calling each other names in Arabic. She did not know what they



Renee Bohaty encourages Luis Mendez.  
Photo by David Story.

were saying, but could tell by context and body language they were putting each other down. So Mueller solved the problem by requiring all the children to use English among themselves in the classroom.

That strategy also helps make sure students get used to using English as much as possible.

A measure of success for the teachers comes when ELL students move on to regular classrooms. Some take a year, some several years, but ELL students don’t stay English Language Learners forever.

The ELL teachers clearly enjoy their work. They smile and chuckle when describing their duties. Mueller used to visit her Kurdish families when she had time, even eating dinner with them. “I like to get to look outside my little world,” she said.

When telling someone what she does, Bohaty is sometimes shocked to hear people say, “I’m so sorry” when they find out she works with children from other countries.

“I say to them it’s fantastic. ... I’m the lucky one. I’m here because I want to be here. The kids are just awesome,” Bohaty said. “I just love it because there’s not a Bob or Sue in my crowd. No Harrys or Larrys.” ■

**3:** number of words Kathy Mueller makes sure her ELL students know on the first day (eat, bathroom, water)



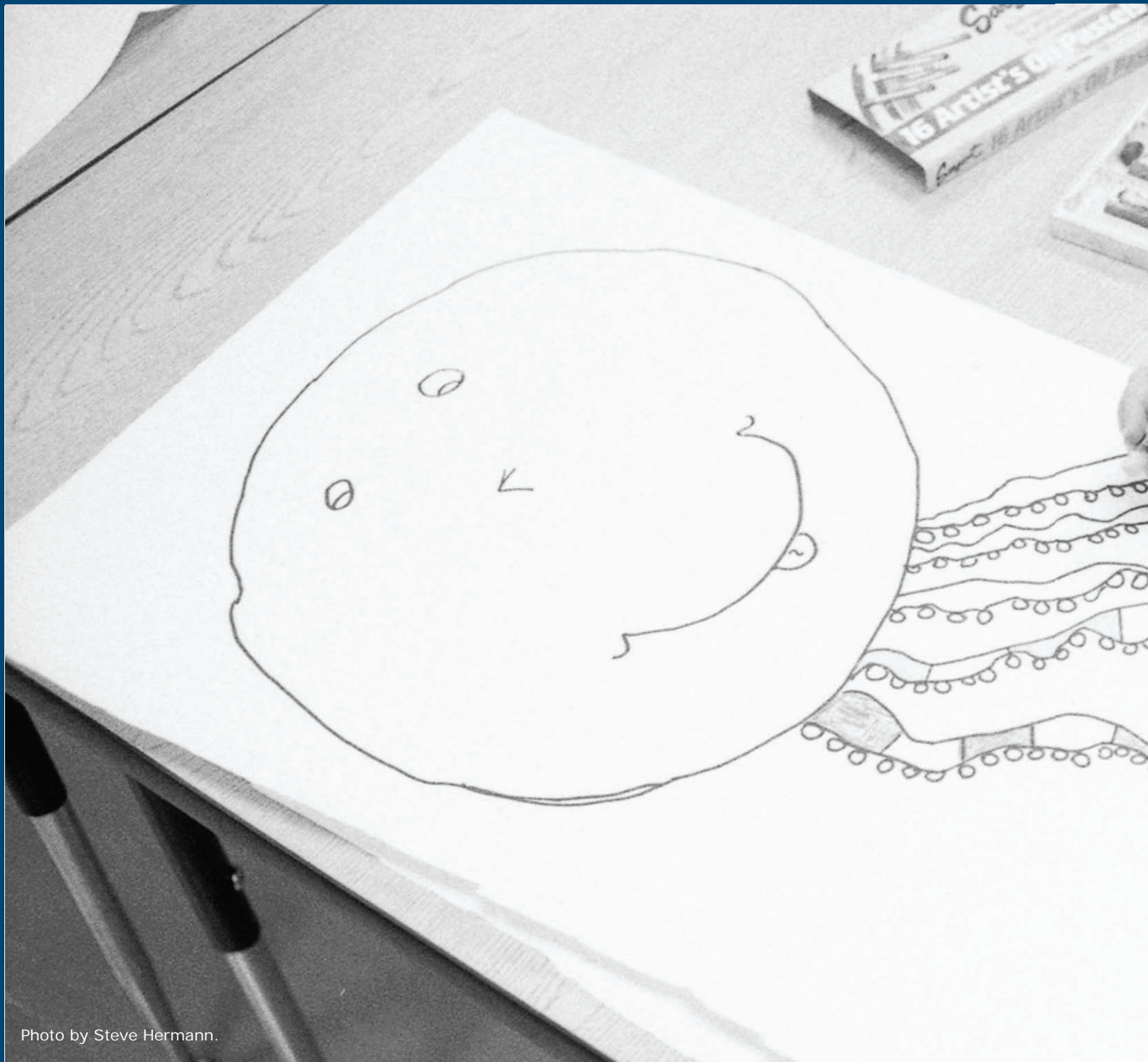


Photo by Steve Hermann.

# Art as an outlet

*Fine arts provide positive influences in students' lives*

by Sean Hagewood

**T**hirty or so band students open their eyes wide as Brendon Sibley tells them to play a whole song.

Some of the musicians struggle with the fingerings, even though the director counts slowly.





A few squawks can be heard as the students concentrate on the music booklets in front of them.

Many of the students look relieved as they bring their instruments to their laps after the song.

It may not sound like anything to them, but to their director it's beautiful music.

Sibley, who gives individual and group lessons and leads the after-school band every Wednesday, said he isn't looking for perfection from his students as long as they work to improve.

"I don't care about talent, I care about effort," he said. "As long as they're going to try,

we can make it work."

Sibley said the most rewarding part of his job is seeing his students make progress so that music isn't a chore.

According to Sibley and other fine arts teachers at Clinton, it's important for students to be able to express themselves creatively, to occasionally get away from but also to build upon their regular classroom studies. For some students, the programs serve as therapy.

Sibley, who teaches part time at four elementary schools—Clinton, Brownell, Kahoia and Norwood Park—and leads the basketball pep band at Southeast High School, said he's known many students who only attend school

regularly because of music or art.

He said fine arts programs like band allow these students to receive attention and support that they might not get at home and to become part of a positive peer group.

"Some of the kids that come from this building, their home lives are rather varied," he said. "Some of their home lives aren't all that great."

Lorinda Rice, art teacher at Clinton, said fine arts are especially beneficial for students with difficult home lives.

"I believe art is an important outlet for emotions and connections to other parts of our lives, and I use that idea with my students



all the time,” she said. “Things happening outside of the school and in the school can affect how we perform. Having a place to come and work through these thoughts and feelings by being reflective and introspective helps students perform better inside and outside of the art room.”

Rice said she doesn't expect masterpieces from her students. Instead, she emphasizes that there are no right or wrong answers in art.

“There may be requirements that need to be met, but there are several ways to reach the answer,” she said. “This allows for individualism, and students learn to see that lots of people have great ideas.”

Jill Wienke, Clinton's vocal music teacher, said creative expression is the most important thing, particularly for students who must deal with the effects of crime and poverty on a daily basis.

“They need to have that outlet,” she said. “They need to have a moment of their day where they can just come in and express themselves however they like and be told, ‘Hey, that's great!’”

Wienke also said music is a great way for students who don't speak English well to participate.

“It makes them feel very, very good,” she said. “It encourages them ... to do more.”

Wienke said she tries to teach her students a variety of musical styles to give them a sense of many cultures.

This school year, she read the book “The First Song Ever Sung,” which includes traditional songs woven into a story, to her kindergarten classes.

She also worked on a penguin unit with her first-graders, in which they read and talked about the birds before singing about them.

Her second-graders performed the musical “United We Sing,” about the importance of music in school, during Art Night in May.

Rice said she also tries to get her students to make multicultural connections.

This school year, she taught her fourth-graders about cave art, hobo art and Asian and Native American symbols. She had her fifth-graders make aboriginal dot paintings.

Rice said she wants her students to realize that artists come from many places and that art is a universal language.

She also tries to make her lessons tie in with other subjects. She said students learn vocabulary words in her classes and practice fractions by mixing paint to create different colors.

“It's a way for students ... to have an op-

portunity to make a piece of art and connect it to what's happening in the classroom,” she said.

Wienke said she tries to fit other subjects into her teachings, too.

She said she tries to collaborate with other teachers as much as possible.

For example, she sometimes works with Clinton's P.E. teacher, Joan Smith, who creates dance movements for songs.

“Music is a lot more than just sitting and singing,” Wienke said.

There's also performing.

Clinton's chorus, string ensemble and instrumental band stage two concerts each year, one in December and one in May.

Mohamed, 11, a fifth-grade trombone player, said the holiday concert was his most memorable moment of the school year.

He said he enjoyed performing for his family.

Sibley said Clinton's band program allows students who probably wouldn't pursue music on their own to give it a try.

Lincoln Public Schools provides most of the instruments for students at

Clinton, but the elementary school also owns 12 instruments, which Sibley has acquired through grants, trades and “pleading.” The students check out the instruments to practice at home.

Sibley said few students at Clinton own their own instruments—only one out of 34 band members this school year.

To join band, students must go through an interview process in April and May for the next school year and get their parents' permission. Fourth-graders start with string instruments and may switch to brass, woodwinds or percussion in fifth grade.

Sibley said he isn't too picky when he selects musicians.

“Any kid that shows any kind of interest, I try to get them involved,” he said.

In addition to lessons and after-school band, Sibley expects his students to practice 20 minutes a day or at least 140 minutes a week outside of school.

He said he won't allow his students to quit because he wants to teach them about responsibility.

Before Sibley came to Clinton four years ago, most of the band students would drop out of the program by the end of the school year. They didn't understand the commitment required in learning to play an instrument, he said. Sometimes they gave up when things got

tough or their friends quit. Sometimes, they would get out of band to avoid a bad grade.

“There were no consequences,” he said.

After his first year at the school, Sibley talked to administrators and teachers about creating the no-quit rule.

He said he also tries to make his expectations clear before kids join.

Sibley occasionally “fires” students after meeting with their parents to discuss the situation, but he only gets rid of those who continually forget to bring their instruments, never practice and never make any progress in their music books.

Sibley said he doesn't want to keep taking students away from their regular classroom studies if they don't make any effort toward learning music.

“Then, they're missing out on two things, and that's not right,” he said.

Sibley said he's only fired two students this school year, but he's lost many more from families moving. Nine of his students moved away in the first quarter, and by the end of the school year, he'd lost 13. That's actually an improvement over the 2004-05 school year, when 24 students moved away.

Sibley said losing students can affect the balance of sound in the groups.

“But we just do the best we can to continue,” he said.

Wienke has a hard time getting kids to join chorus for a different reason.

Only students in kindergarten through second grade get to take vocal music because there isn't a full-time teacher. Students can't join chorus, a before-school activity, until fourth grade.

But Wienke, who's in her first year at Clinton, said she can't encourage older students to join because she doesn't have access to them.

“Now, I have an investment in my second grade,” she said. “However, next year, they'll leave me.”

Wienke, who's been with the district for 26 years, described teaching as a profession that's rewarding and frustrating at the same time. She said her students recognize opportunities to improve their lives, but many of them don't know how to achieve their goals.

She said some of her students say they want to become professional athletes, but they don't know how to go about it.

“They have no clue,” she said.

But Wienke said there are a “zillion” rewards that go along with teaching. She enjoys seeing students learn and grow to love performing.

She said she hopes to instill that enthusiasm and passion in her students as long as she can.

“I see myself teaching ... as long as I'm able to walk through the door,” she said. “It's been a great thing.” ■

**'I believe art is an important outlet for emotions and connections to other parts of our lives, and I use that idea with my students all the time.'**

**LORINDA RICE,  
K-5 art teacher**





Fifth-graders Jiovany Castillo, left, and Khalilah Morrow get ready to play their instruments. Band director Brendon Sibley asks that students in the after-school band practice 20 minutes a day outside of school. Photo by Steve Hermann.

Only **1** out of **34** band members  
owned an instrument in 2005-06.



A pair of sneakers hangs from the power lines over Potter Street near 27th, a sign that drugs are sold in the area. Photo by Sean Hagedwood.

# Shady lanes

***Drugs, graffiti, gangs are worrisome, but neighborhood groups try to turn area around***

by Jason Wiest

**T**ry to unravel the Clinton neighborhood's problems and a mess similar to its dumpiest block results. It's impossible to deal with one issue without addressing another, and then the next, and so on.

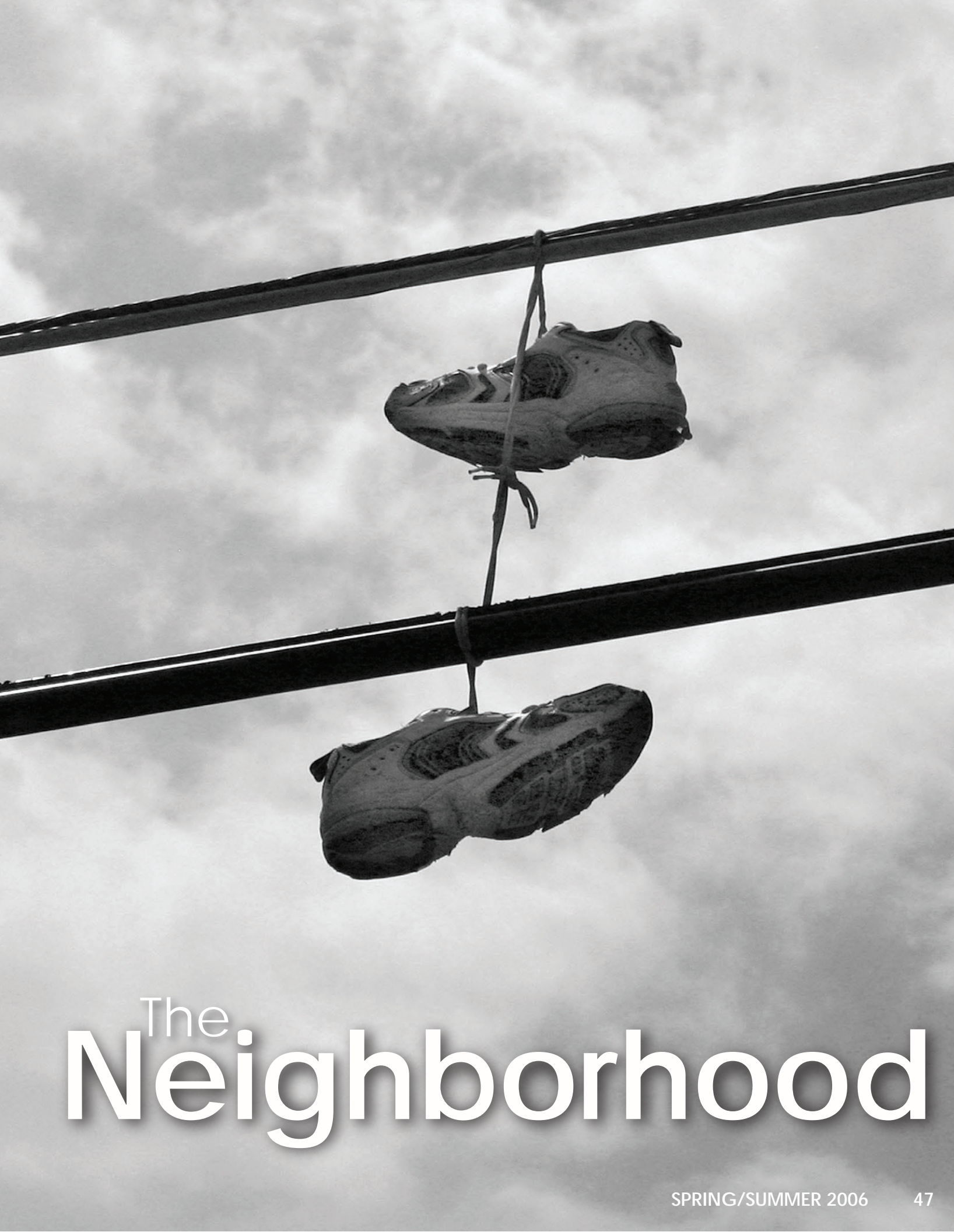
The lack of affordable childcare, health-care and safe housing would seem to connect to the lack of good paying jobs. But unemployment ties into a lack of job skills or communication abilities because of language barriers, both of which could be attributed to a lack of education.

Somewhere along the line, a lack of social cohesion enters the equation. Maybe it's because residents don't want to associate with some neighbors who lack the ability to control their drug and alcohol intake, which could be an effect of their poor life situations—or maybe a cause. Either way, both sometimes lend themselves to domestic violence, which might explain why single-parent families exist. And somehow, that might lead to a lack of trust in the police and government.

Or maybe this whole chain of thought is wrong, and the real reason for that lack of trust is back at square one with the lack of







# The Neighborhood





Lincoln Police Officer Dennis Scott points out some graffiti on the south side of the Lincoln Lumber building at 932 N. 23rd St. Photo by Sean Hagewood.

affordable childcare, healthcare and safe housing.

It seems a daunting, disheartening and damn near impossible task to untangle this network of negative elements that has woven its way deep into the neighborhood's social fiber. But although Clinton lacks many things, it doesn't lack residents who care and use every resource available to help tackle these problems.

It might be hard to see their efforts in the messy mixture of these issues and in Clinton's dumpiest block, but they're there. In many cases, the great attributes of Clinton outshine the shady aspects.

And the word "shady" is a good way to describe the Clinton neighborhood, because nothing about it is just black or just white. Clinton lies somewhere in the gray.

To say that drugs, gangs, violence and poverty are isolated issues in the neighborhood would be inaccurate. But to say that those things run rampant throughout the area would be wrong, too. The severity of these problems lies somewhere in the middle. They're not so severe that community officials should be "striking the fear of God in everyone," said Shawn Ryba, a community organizer for the Lincoln Action Program. But they do exist in the Clinton neighborhood, and if city officials who "don't live in it, don't see it and don't understand it" don't recognize and address the problems, "this stuff is going to start getting out of hand," he said.

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Ratty white tennis shoes dangle from the power lines near a section of alley stretching from 22nd to 23rd streets between Orchard

and Dudley, signaling to users that a dealer is in the area.

For those unfamiliar with the urban semantic, other signs of drug availability abound. They linger like the people waiting in cars that line the rear passage through this run-down residential area near the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's City Campus.

While the smoke can't be seen, the odor of pot hangs in the February air. At some point in the back alley's breeze, the stench mingles with and is overtaken by chemical fumes.

Community officials and police have more than an inkling that the car detailing shop down the block is a drug house, but it's too far away to be the source of these odors. Another drug house probably is nearer.

This is just one of a few sections of the Clinton neighborhood infested with drugs.





Just one of the vicinities where gangs have taken hold.

And it's one of a half-dozen or so pockets in the neighborhood that Clinton Elementary staff members, like Family Care Coordinator Angela Gebhardt, wish they could just keep students out of.

But as the bell rings at 2:53 p.m. and students flood out of the school's front doors, some will have to walk through alleys and streets just like these on their way home.

And no matter how they get there, whether by bus, cab or on foot, with friends, parents or all alone, areas like these are what some of the students call home.

Like fifth-grader Dustin and his kindergarten sister, Cora. Almost every day their mother, Barb, walks them home down sidewalks lined with shards from broken beer bottles, even though they live only three blocks from school. The precaution is necessary, she

said, because of the area's drug activity. Two years ago, a meth lab was busted on Dudley Street, just a few houses away from their home. Last Christmas, burglars broke windows out of the family's Suburban and stole a new stereo system. And today, they live only a few houses from a drug house. It's basically a drive-thru—honk and someone will be out with pot, she said.

The neighborhood is too dangerous for this family's liking, and that's why, after seven years, they are looking to move to "a more middle-class neighborhood," Barb said. Others familiar with the neighborhood, like Shawn Ryba, don't blame them. Homes in areas like these are unsafe living environments for children, he said.

Some children are left home alone with no structured activity to participate in because many of their parents can't afford after-school program enrollment fees. So instead, there are kids in the Clinton neighborhood who run the streets day and night, Ryba said.

And some get sucked into the street culture.

"They see these older kids doing these things, and they want to get involved," Ryba said. "The drugs being sold; how is that not attractive—making a lot of money fast?"

At some point, maybe before the drug dealing or using, maybe after, maybe without it, many of the neighborhood's young residents—including a few of the elementary school's students, Ryba said—also become susceptible to gang involvement.

That involvement is expressed mainly through the neighborhood's gang graffiti—making it, not drugs, the biggest problem the Clinton neighborhood faces, according to Dennis Scott, a Lincoln Police officer who patrols the area and who used to work in narcotics.

Not only is the graffiti an ugly nuisance to residents, it's also a sign of gang members staking their claim on the neighborhood.

That claim has been made by 18th Street, a largely Hispanic gang that originated in California and has existed in Lincoln for approximately seven years, Scott said.

While 18th Street used to be spread throughout the city, it is now concentrated in this area because many of its members live or hang here, Scott said. So many, that they greatly outnumber the few Serenos and Gangster Disciples gang members still in the Clinton neighborhood, or for that matter, members from any

of Lincoln's other gangs, estimated at 22, Scott said. According to a Lincoln Police Department database that lists information on 327 known gang members, 25 of them live in the Clinton neighborhood.

And 18th Street is serious about keeping Clinton its turf, Scott said.

"When other gangs start wanting to come in and take over for drug sales or whatever reason, then you're going to end up having a war," he said.

Ryba agreed.

"We're not seeing murders and homicides yet," he said. "Oh, but we will."

In the first few months of 2006, for example, a handful of drive-by shootings were reported in the area near the school, Scott said. And in March, one was reported—although unconfirmed by police because shell cases

*'It's been known in the past Lincoln-wide that it's not a place you want to live.'*

**SHAWN RYBA,  
community organizer  
for the Lincoln Action  
Program**



Shawn Ryba attends meetings and visits homes in the Clinton neighborhood. Photo by Sean Hagewood.



weren't found—at 2930 Starr St., Ryba said, just one block south of Clinton Elementary.

Those areas also display the graffiti that police think might prophesy violence.

Police don't believe the spray-paint scribbles are a gang recruitment tool, even though they are so close to the school, Scott said.

But still, the marks have made their way onto and into the school. Occasionally, gang graffiti appears on the notebooks of some elementary students, Scott said.

"For a lot of gangs and gang members, it's basically a family thing for them," Scott said. "Everybody from the youngest to oldest is going to be involved in some way."

And when family members have problems, whether they are gang-related or not, the effects trickle down to the youngest and are seen in Clinton Elementary, Ryba said.

He's seen children taken out of their homes—sometimes because the parents are incarcerated, sometimes because of child neglect or abuse—with siblings put in separate foster homes.

It's probably one of the most heartbreaking things Ryba has seen. But sometimes, it's better than the alternative.

"Their parents are frickin' just bombed on meth; kids are raising themselves—they're basically the parent," he said.

But it's not just meth, Gebhardt said. Students have painted vivid depictions of the fuzzy states their parents enter after injecting heroin into their arms. Some have told her point blank their parents are crack addicts. And some children have told her they are not just spectators of their parents' drug addictions—they are involved in them.

## The neighborhood

The U.S. Census Bureau defines the Clinton neighborhood as roughly between 17th and 33rd streets and W Street and the BNSF Railway tracks. According to the 2000 Census, it is one of Lincoln's poorest neighborhoods with one of the youngest populations.

Population	Clinton	Lincoln
Total:	5,124	225,442
Under 18 years:	30.3 percent	23 percent
65 years and older:	6.6 percent	10.4 percent
<b>Income and poverty</b>		
Median income of full-time workers (male):	\$24,369	\$33,899
Median income of full-time workers (female):	\$17,564	\$25,402
Median household income:	\$26,127	\$40,605
Median family* income:	\$32,018	\$52,558
<b>Living below poverty** level</b>		
All ages:	25 percent	10 percent
Under 18 years:	33 percent	6 percent
65 years and older:	12 percent	9.7 percent

\* The Census Bureau defines a family as a group of two or more people who reside together and who are related by birth, marriage or adoption.  
 \*\* In 2000, the federal poverty threshold for a family of four with two children was an annual income of \$17,464.

One little girl knew exactly how to make crack, Gebhardt said. She knew where her parents kept the ingredients, and after they were high, it was her job to clean out the spoons.

For a little girl or boy still in elementary school, the effects of situations like these are huge, said Ryba, who provides a neighborhood insight into student problems at Clinton's weekly student services meetings.

Some start getting into fights. Some start wetting their pants. And some start getting poorer grades—maybe because some stop regularly coming to school, he said.

The remedy for the distress these children experience is uncertain. In many cases, so many factors contribute to their troubles that they

can't easily be fixed.

But the school has become a safe haven for the neighborhood's children. Clinton Elementary offers a part-time asylum from the neighborhood's nasty elements, which sometimes lie only steps from the school, waiting to snatch the children's futures, positive or otherwise, from them.

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When Maurice Baker was looking for a permanent residence six months after moving to Lincoln in 1967, the Clinton neighborhood on the map his real estate agent handed him was covered in a patchwork of black-ink Xs.

Not to indicate places he shouldn't live in, just places he might not want to live in.

The poverty-stricken, racially diverse Clinton neighborhood just didn't match the white middle-class suburbia in New Jersey where he came from.

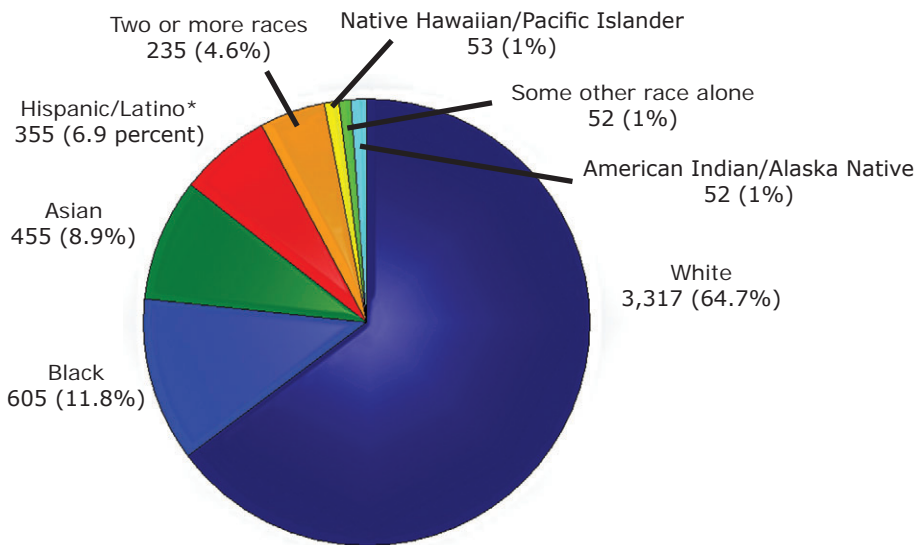
Back east, Baker's home was less than 10 years old. The neighborhood was too young for trees to have much presence.

But smack dab in the middle of Lincoln, the Clinton neighborhood was a different story. It had been around since the 1880s. Trees had taken root there, as had social problems. And these Lincolnites were nowhere near as financially stable as Baker's old neighbors. While Clinton's residents have changed again and again since Baker moved in, their economic problems haven't.

Slightly more than 25 percent of the Clinton neighborhood population lives below the poverty level, according to the 2000 U.S. Census, making it one of the lowest-income tracts in Lincoln. The median family income is \$32,018, compared with \$52,558 in Lincoln overall, and less for households in general, at \$26,127 in Clinton, compared with \$40,605 in Lincoln.

Clinton's dark side is no secret—knowl-

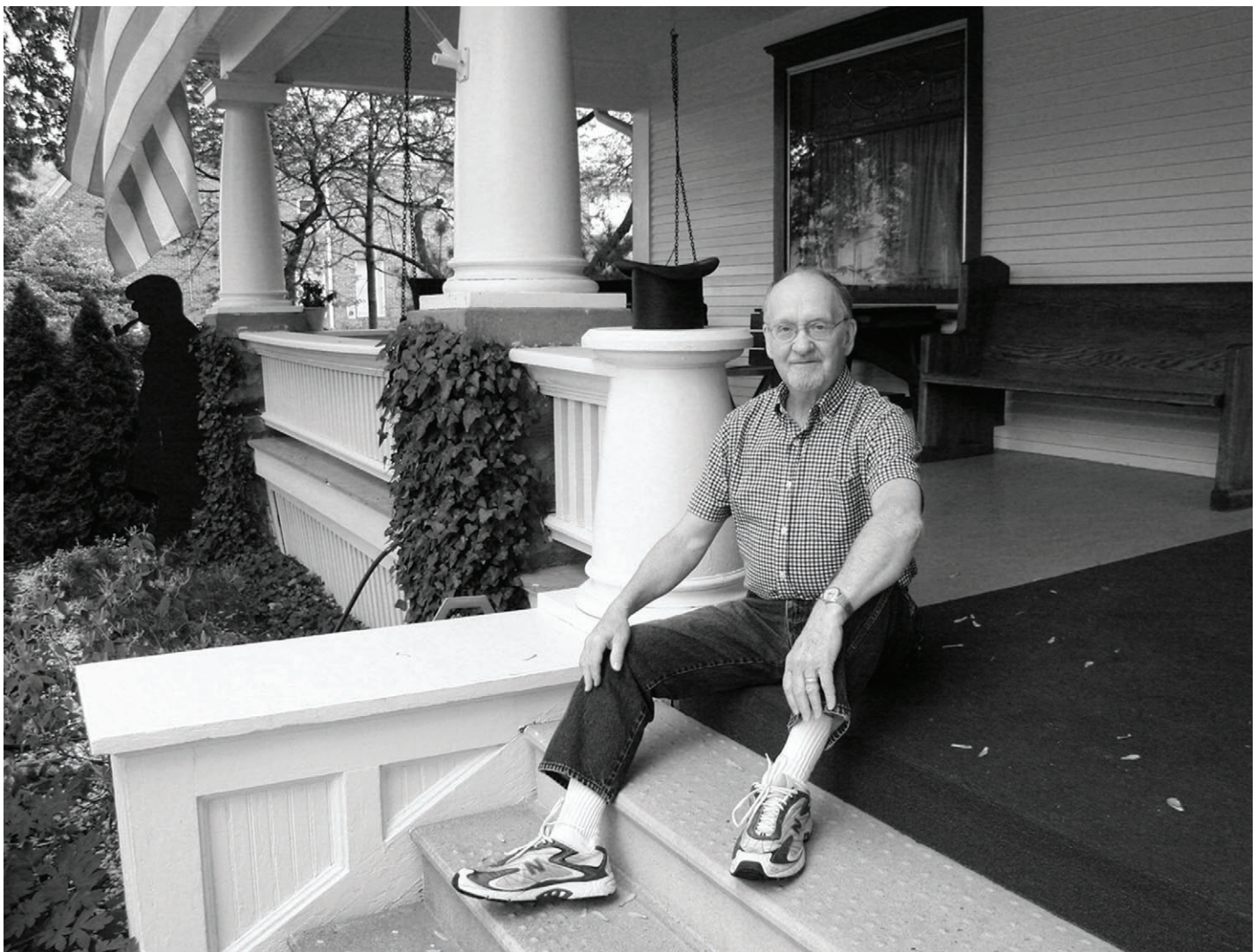
## Neighborhood population by race



Source: 2000 U.S. Census

\* The U.S. Census Bureau considers "Hispanic/Latino" as ethnicity, not race.





Maurice Baker, president of the Clinton Neighborhood Association, has lived in the same house in the Clinton area for 38 years. Photo by Sean Hagewood.

edge of it is as public as the census figures, Ryba said.

“It has been known in the past Lincoln-wide that it’s not a place that you want to live.”

But that reputation is starting to change, he said, and all it takes to see why is a drive through the neighborhood.

“You go one block to the next, and it’s just completely different,” Ryba said.

Ryba’s statement couldn’t be more accurate—the scene just a few blocks west of Baker’s home isn’t far enough away to be at the opposite end of the neighborhood, but it is at the opposite end of the spectrum.

On Baker’s welcoming front porch, an American flag flies in the April breeze. There, between a tidy lawn and the immaculate “prai-

rie box” home he and his wife fell in love with almost 40 years ago, he describes the neighborhood’s social issues.

Three blocks away, the only thing flying in the breeze is a woman’s wad of spit. She and another woman equally unkempt sit on the rickety front porch of a small, run-down house drinking Miller Lite. They shout conversationally across the dirty, dead front lawn at three men, one shirtless and covered in tattoos, who are sitting in a beat-up silver car in the middle of the street.

Quality of life and evidence of poverty vary widely from street to street, Ryba said.

A strong core group of residents has been working to improve areas of the neighborhood on the lower end of the spectrum, said Baker, who has been the president of

Clinton’s neighborhood association for a year and a half. At 38 years old, the association is the longest-standing organization of its kind in the city.

The association has encouraged people to quit waiting on others to make changes in the neighborhood and instead to get involved in those changes.

The encouragement has been effective, Scott said.

“A lot of times people put it on the Police Department and a lot of times we don’t have the resources to do everything they want us to do,” Scott said.

One way residents have gotten involved is by working to erase the nagging graffiti. Without their help, it would run rampant in the neighborhood because the department

**38:** Age of the Clinton neighborhood association, making it the longest standing organization of its kind in the city.



doesn't have the resources to clean it up.

Through collaboration with the neighborhood association and other organizations, it's easier for the department to target problem areas and issues, Scott said.

Neighborhood organizations regularly meet with police and a variety of other city agencies, including the buildings and safety department, the health department, the housing authority and the elementary school to discuss problem properties and various violations.

It's not the problems, whether they be property, drug, gang, violence, that make Clinton unique. As many people familiar with Lincoln neighborhoods will tell you, Clinton isn't the worst neighborhood in Lincoln. But it is one of the city's only neighborhoods that goes to the lengths it does to battle its problems and improve its living environment.

"There's a lot of pride in Clinton," Ryba said.

But the positive changes aren't solely an effect of one group of determined residents. Clinton also is benefiting because of its location within the city.

The neighborhood lies between the two University of Nebraska-Lincoln campuses, at times an Achilles' heel because of the highly transient student population.

But soon the neighborhood will include the 30,000-square-foot International Quilt Study Center being built at 33rd and Holdrege. This bodes well for the neighborhood, Ryba said.

"When the university builds something, they like to put some money in to protect their investment," he said.

Clinton's location along 27th Street, a major city entrance, also prompted city urban development officials to implement a neighborhood redevelopment project in 1998. The project encouraged new business along the 27th Street corridor, improving the neighborhood's real estate and generating more property tax that could be used to improve the infrastructure of the area.

Today, Clinton boasts a stronger business district, complete with banks, restaurants, grocery stores, a health center, an eye care business, gas stations and fewer liquor outlets.

It also brought the Lincoln Police Department right to its doorstep. In February 2000, the center station opened at 27th and Holdrege streets, the first fully functioning station in the city besides the main station downtown.

The new station was located there to help spur economic development, said Police Chief Tom Casady, but it has also helped discourage the surrounding area's thriving criminal activity. By making the faces of the officers more familiar, the department hoped residents would see the officers as members of the community, thereby tempering their distrust of the police and government.

The station isn't the only entity that's unique to Clinton. Free to Grow, a neighborhood revitalization program through the Lincoln Action Program, addresses the physical environment of Clinton, not only by organizing neighborhood cleanups, but also by teaming up with the neighborhood association to tip police to problem properties, many of which house the problem residents—the drug dealers, the gang members, the abusers.

After alerting police about these residents,



Jinny Ryan, left, Dequita Gray, center, and Taylor Woullard pick up trash during Join Hands Day, May 6. About 65 volunteers helped clean up litter in the Hartley and Clinton neighborhoods. Photo by Sean Hagewood.



the neighborhood works to remove troublemakers. The police barrage them with tickets for building and safety code violations, and hopefully, Baker said, they give up and move out.

The tactic also grinds drug dealing to a halt—business isn't easy to conduct when police are showing up to write tickets.

One of the neighborhood's biggest drawbacks is social isolation, which is attributable somewhat to the large immigrant population, Baker said. First-generation immigrants rarely cross cultural lines, he said. By not venturing out into the community, they aren't helping build it.

But Free to Grow also has addressed this problem and worked to establish social cohesion, and slowly the neighborhood is seeing change, he said. Now, the Middle Eastern girls who live behind his house ask him if they can play in his children's old playhouse. The girls used to make their brothers ask; in their culture, women don't speak to men in public.

For some, the change just takes time. For others, it takes prodding from a group like Free

to Grow to get involved in the community. Thanks to the group's efforts, residents are slowly getting to know their neighbors, and together, they are organizing neighborhood watches, community cleanups and social events.

When people know their neighbors, Baker said, they begin to take pride in their property. Suddenly, it is embarrassing to have a scraggly yard when the neighbors' yards are always groomed.

It's the little things that bring about big changes and help make the grass greener on Clinton's side of the fence.

But at least one thing about Clinton shouldn't change, Baker said. He would never want Clinton to become a higher-income neighborhood.

"Lower-income people have to live someplace, otherwise they become homeless," he said.

While poverty might cause some of the problems in the Clinton neighborhood, he

## Living in Clinton

Total housing units:	2,076
Owner-occupied units:	35.6 percent
Renter-occupied units:	55.7 percent
Vacant units:	8.7 percent
Number of units lacking complete plumbing facilities:	14
Number of units lacking complete kitchen facilities:	29
Units built in 1939 or earlier:	32.5 percent
Units built from 1990 to March 2000:	9.8 percent

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

said, it still wouldn't be perfect if it were predominately white instead of culturally diverse or rich instead of poor.

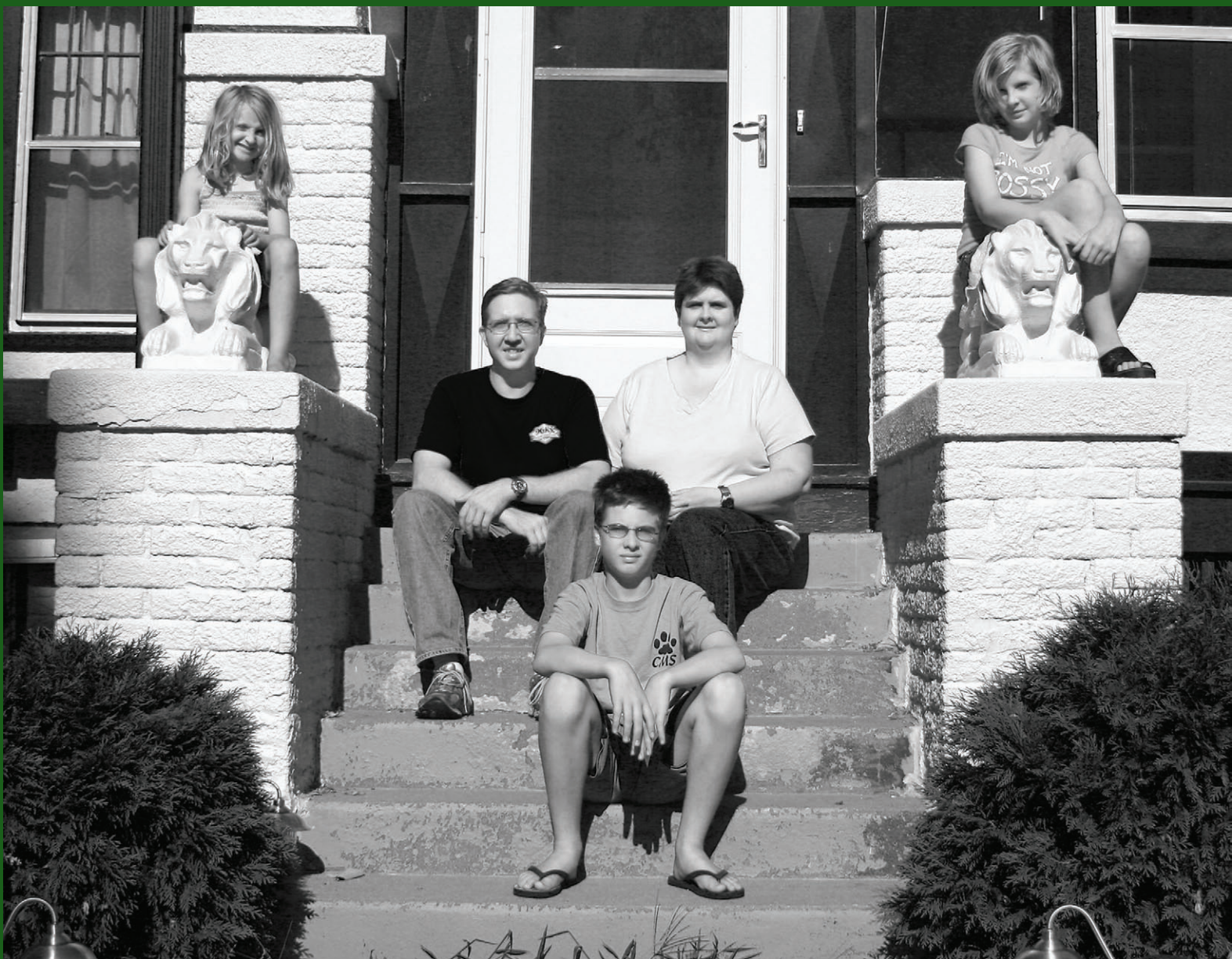
"We're a good neighborhood in spite of our warts," Baker said. ■



The Lincoln Free to Grow program helped address code violations on the infamous "peach palace" at 1300 N. 26th St. in the Clinton neighborhood. In 2003, residents reported the disrepair of the house and concerns about the tenants. By August 2005, the new owner had refurbished the house inside and out. Photos courtesy of Shawn Ryba, Lincoln Action Program.







Multiple generations of the Eddins family have attended Clinton Elementary. Seven-year-old Crystal, left, and 11-year-old Samantha, right, were both students this year. Next year, Samantha will join 13-year-old Clinton graduate Philip at Culler Middle School. Parents Robert and Gloria moved to the diverse neighborhood to expose their children to other cultures. Robert Eddins and his mother also attended Clinton. Photo by Nicholas Berry.

# Keeping it in the family

**Parents, grandparents share experiences** by Amy Thompson



Clinton Elementary School has stood at 29th and Holdrege streets for 80 years, so it's not surprising that several students have parents and even grandparents who also walked its halls when they were kids.

Robert and Gloria Eddins moved to the neighborhood two years ago. Robert Eddins went to the school for two years in the 1980s, and his mother was a student there, too. The couple, who have three children, said they see the benefits provided by the diverse school even if much of the neighborhood is clouded in poverty.

Amber Whitlow, 28, and Amon Helmstadter-Whitlow, 27, live just blocks from Clinton, which is also less than a block from Whitlow's family. Amber's father and Amon's mother also attended Clinton.

Whitlow and her husband attended Clinton in the 1980s. She said he remembers her being there when they both attended the school.

"He says he does. I don't remember him," she said with a grin.

They went to the same junior high school and met when one of her brothers became friends with Helmstadter-Whitlow. Their romantic interest in each other began when they attended Northeast High School more than a decade ago.

Today, three of their four sons attend Clinton. Payton, 9, is in fourth grade, Malcolm, 5, is a kindergartener, and Alijah, 3, attends the school's Early Childhood Special Education program.

Diana Pasco, schoolwide coordinator, estimated that Clinton has more than a dozen families who have attended the school for more than one generation and seen the evolution within.

The front of the school looks the same today as it did when it was built in 1926. However, additions to the rear of the school have increased its capacity, and it has benefited from some remodeling over the years.

Whitlow's father, Junior Mar, 52, attended Clinton in the early 1960s and said he's continuously impressed with both the external and internal changes.

"When I walk in there today, gosh, I just can't believe it's the same place," Mar said.

He and other parents and grandparents of today's students studied without computers, now available in every classroom, or the comfort of air conditioning. They certainly didn't have \$3,000 SMART Boards, the portable, interactive whiteboards featured in the three fifth-grade classrooms.

More has changed, however, than paint, linoleum and the inevitable introduction of

'When I walk in there today, gosh, I just can't believe it's the same place.'

## Junior Mar, 52, former Clinton student and grandparent of three current students

technology. Children as young as 3, like Whitlow's son, Alijah, who has Down syndrome, spend each morning working on basic skills that will prepare them for mainstream education. Gone are the days when all students with special needs were separated from regular classrooms.

Special needs students with continuing difficulties with speech or reading skills are still able to see a resource teacher as needed.

"Clinton really tries to work closely with parents to do what each child needs," Whitlow said.

All students are put on team A, B or C when they arrive at Clinton and remain with that team throughout. This "vertical teaming" means children can form stronger friendships, and siblings and parents will develop relationships with the same teachers.

Today the school's students speak not only in class but from black and white portraits that line the walls, each with personal quotes telling of the children's love for all that Clinton offers.

"The best thing about Clinton is that everyone fits," one portrait reads.

It's this mantra that brought the Eddins family to the Clinton area.

Gloria Eddins said she and her husband believe that Clinton offers a diversity that many Lincoln schools lack.

Since their return, Robert and Gloria Eddins have led a parent group for the school, which Gloria Eddins said consists of 10 parents at most.

"I've been told that many parents see Clinton and the neighborhood as transitional living," she said. "I think that's why we don't get more interest in the group. People just don't feel tied to the school. Maybe they don't want to feel tied to it."

Whitlow and Mar each said they appreciate the neighborhood friendships they see her sons enjoying. Mar said Whitlow's sons play after school in the same Salvation Army Community Center that he played in 45 years ago. Evenings find the boys playing on the same lawns and running on the same sidewalks that

their mother, father and two grandparents did.

While Whitlow said she also likes the diversity of the neighborhood and is satisfied with the education her children receive, her hesitant confession that her family would like to move to a "nicer" neighborhood reinforced Eddins' hypothesis.

"I think maybe we'd like to move out of so much poverty," she said. "Some of the kids are kind of rough."

After a short pause, she added, "including our son."

Payton, their oldest son, has been in a couple of fights, and although Whitlow said Clinton's staff has handled each situation professionally, she said she would prefer that her children not be in an environment where violence sometimes erupts.

Philip Eddins, 13, who now attends Culler Middle School, said he was glad to meet children of many races during his one year at Clinton.

"I think kids who don't want to know people like that miss out," he said.

He hasn't talked with his father or grandmother about how their Clinton experiences were different from his own or those of his sisters, Crystal, 7, and Samantha, 11. However, he said he holds a positive view overall of his time at Clinton.

"All of the teachers were good people unless students were bad to the teachers. Then they could get mean," Philip said. "And I learned a lot from all the teachers, too."

Gloria Eddins said she believes her children benefit from seeing that not all families are middle-class or wealthy.

It gives them a more accurate view of the world, she said. She talks with her children about things they see at school and has seen growth in their attitudes about material things.

"They don't complain as much," Eddins said. "They know people who got their only meal that day at Clinton, so when they say so-and-so has a new bike, they don't complain because they know Sally doesn't have food." ■



# Families learn to find support from school, each other

LPS works with Clinton families like Elizabeth Agudo, left, and her daughter Angelita, to provide them with items they may not be able to afford. Photo by Steve Hermann.

# A helping hand

by Yangkyoung Lee

Elizabeth Agudo didn't have the money to buy her son's prescription. The single mother of five from New Jersey was new to Lincoln and had nowhere to turn for help except Clinton Elementary School, where her youngest daughter, Angelita, had recently enrolled in second grade. A Lincoln Public Schools Foundation emergency fund paid for the medicine.

Nicole Eagen, who works 40 hours a week while her husband works almost 70 hours to foot the monthly bills for their family of five, has organized with other Clinton parents the 3 O'clock Club,

an informal group to help one another in various daily family emergencies.

Like many American families, those at Clinton face the challenge of balancing child care, work and other responsibilities each day. But when these challenges intertwine with other factors such as unemployment, health problems, single parenting and, in some cases, domestic violence and language barriers, Clinton families find themselves seeking help wherever it's available. Often, it's from the school and sometimes from each other.

Agudo's search for a way to pay for her son's prescription is just one example. "When I tried to give the money back, they wouldn't take it back," said Agudo, 43.

Principal Mona Manley said the emergency fund from the Lincoln Public Schools Foundation is frequently tapped.

"We never can meet our demands," Manley said. "There are so many families that request help. With the emergency fund, we buy gloves, medicine, gift cards."

By March, the school had already spent \$600 from the fund on lice treatment products for students, which is a continuing problem at the school.

But the emergency fund is not the only way Clinton helps families in need. Clinton's family care coordinator, Angela Gebhardt, is in charge of gathering donations throughout the year, primarily for the children, but sometimes for their family members as well.

"For example, there was a mother who had a job interview appointment but didn't have a dress shirt," Gebhardt said. "So that is what she got ... It is really amazing. It is the community of Lincoln that keeps this going."

Many of the school families also get state and federal financial assistance. Agudo receives Medicaid benefits, which she said help a lot because Angelita has a doctor's appointment almost every week. The mother, who is very concerned about her daughter's well-being, hasn't seen a doctor for herself since 8-year-old Angelita was born.

"I am so afraid of what might happen if the doctor examines me," Agudo said. "I don't want to know."

Eagen, 30, who was also a single mother before marrying a friend from high school last year, used to receive Section 8 housing assistance from the Lincoln Housing Authority. The program paid \$412 a month on the \$750 rent for her three-bedroom apartment. She also received food stamps worth \$145 a month. But the government assistance disappeared last year, she said, when her family's income surpassed the eligibility limit.

"Now I have to pay the full rent for this house that is literally falling apart," Eagen said.

Agudo, who does not work outside the home, said she does not receive food stamps because her monthly income is over the limit to qualify. She said she receives \$2,000 a month from Social Security because her husband died in 2002, as well as income from a state child care subsidy program for taking care of her niece's two sons.

But she said little is left after paying the bills and buying groceries for all the mouths that depend on her.

At one point, she said, 13 people stayed at her house, including her five children, her live-in boyfriend, relatives and other friends.

"I am barely making it," Agudo said.

For Agudo, Clinton is not only a school but also a lifesaver. In addition to the prescription money, the school helped furnish her house.

"When I first came here, I had nothing in





the house," Agudo said. Clinton gave her a table, chairs, bookshelves, sofas and even kitchen items, all donated from the community.

"It's amazing that a school can do so much," she said.

The material support was a pleasant surprise, and so is her daughter's changed attitude toward school.

Angelita talks about her school a lot at home and does not try to play hooky anymore.

"This is the best school among all the schools my children went through," said Agudo, whose children have attended schools in New York and New Jersey.

"The school motivates her ... Here people care. The people here are nicer than the other school staff ... Angelita came a long way. She didn't know how to spell her name before she came to this school. Now she's doing really well. They're really trying to push her through."

Likewise, Eagen's two daughters Rachel, 10, and Samantha, 7, have positive experiences at school, where teachers care about the children, Eagen said.

On March 1, first-grader Samantha was in her reading and writing class. Constantly playing with her hair, she read a personal story narrative, the theme of the day. Looking immaculate in dark-blue jeans and a SpongeBob SquarePants T-shirt, she read each word carefully in a small, high-pitched voice. Samantha went through Clinton's Reading Recovery program not long ago, and now she can help another student who is having difficulty in reading the word "once."

In another classroom, Rachel is writing about why dogs must be on a leash.

"I love reading ... about anything," the fourth-grader said. "Right now, I am reading 'Survival in the Storm.'"

The book is a diary of a 12-year-old girl living in Texas in 1935, which is aimed toward grades 4 to 8.

Both Rachel and Samantha have attended Clinton since 2001 when Eagen came back to Lincoln from Illinois to start a new life after her divorce. Now with her new husband and 11-year-old stepson, Eagen struggles to make ends meet while studying special education at Southeast Community College.

She works hard to show her kids that there is hope.

"(I work hard) because we're not going to be poor our whole life," Eagen said. "My children are going to know that they don't have to be poor."

But everyone sometimes needs help, and Eagen gets it from the 3 O'clock Club.

"There are a bunch of us who sit outside the school chatting to each other until the kids get out," she said

Eagen said they help one another in emergencies.

"If somebody has a doctor's appointment, we call others," she said. "Hey, I've got a doctor's appointment. Can you pick up the kids?' 'Hey, I have a family emergency. Can you pick up the kids?' 'My sitter canceled on me. I have to go to work. Can you pick up the kids?' ... We've come up with a lot of friendship."

Eagen said members of the group have known each other since their kids were kindergartners.

So, how many kids does she really have?

"Three kids of my own and twenty kids I help out," Eagen replies. ■





Congregants at Family of Life Pentecostal Church pray during the April 23 worship service. Photo by Sean Hagewood.

# Lighting the way by Sean Hagewood

## Family of Life Church works to inspire Clinton community

Most of the pews were empty, but the two dozen or so congregants filled the church with joyful noise, as they clapped their hands and sang:

*When I close my eyes, I can see your glory.  
When I raise my hands, I can touch your face.  
When I bow my knees, I stand before you,  
And Christ is formed in me.*

Taking a cue from the song, a few church members stood and

raised their hands toward the sky, as a steady murmur of “hallelujah” and “Thank you, Jesus” echoed through the sanctuary.

Attendance for the Sunday morning worship service might have been a little low for the week after Easter, but the people tried to make up for it with their exuberance.

That’s the congregation at Family of Life Pentecostal Church: small, but mighty.

Pastor Bill Chamberlin said 60 to 70 people belong to his church, a stone building

at 2980 Holdrege St., just east of Clinton Elementary School.

Of those, 50 to 60 attend regularly, he said, including two families with children who go to Clinton.

He said 15 to 20 children from Clinton come to Family of Life to worship, some by themselves.

Chamberlin said his church doesn’t donate money to the school because of limited resources, but he wants it to be a support base

for students and the entire community.

He said he wants the church to be a “tremendous beacon of hope and light” in an area where many people are just trying to make ends meet.

“I want the church to be a place that ... literally adds hope and encouragement to this community,” he said.

Chamberlin often walks around the neighborhood visiting families, and he sees people struggling with poverty and language barriers.

“Much of what they lack is vision and hope,” he said.

The pastor continually tells people that God isn’t “out to get them.”

He tries to explain that faith is important, especially for people experiencing difficulties in life.

“The church is vital because the spiritual portion of man helps direct his thinking and emotions and health,” Chamberlin said. “If we can help people to be spiritually healthy, it will change their attitude and lifestyle.”



But Rudy Kounetsron, a Fulbright scholar at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln who helps the pastor and works with missionaries in China, Ghana and Togo, his homeland, stresses that Family of Life isn't necessarily trying to get people to come to church.

He said he wants to reach out to people in the community, particularly those who are going through tough times, to listen to their problems and talk to them.

But he said many people don't want to open up.

"I wish we could find another way to approach people," he said.

Family of Life has two-, five- and 10-year plans to chart out the direction and focus of the church, Chamberlin said. These plans involve leadership, teaching and membership goals, he said.

The church has also spent about \$150,000 in the past three years to repair the brick on the building, improve the landscaping, install lawn sprinklers, pave the parking lot, refurbish windows and remodel several classrooms, he said. The money has come from donations and a small loan. Most of the work has been done by volunteers from the church.

Currently, church members are renovating the gym in the basement and an attached room that they hope to turn into a youth lounge.

The two-story building, built in 1921 and expanded in 1965, also includes an indoor garden that stays green year-round and a youth



Sarahi Madera, a fourth-grader at Clinton, left, and a friend play a worn-out piano in a room in the church basement, which is being renovated. Photo by Sean Hagewood.

center with a leather couch and chair, big-screen television, computer workstation and foosball table.

Chamberlin said his congregation has worked to remodel the church a little at a time since he arrived about four years ago after being a pastor in Omaha for two years.

He said he thinks it's important for the building to look nice, but fixing it up comes second to helping people fix problems in their lives.

"My heartfelt desire is that we can help people in every aspect of their lives, especially spiritually," he said. ■



Pastor Bill Chamberlin said he wants his church to be a beacon of hope in the Clinton neighborhood. Photo by Sean Hagewood.







# Fuel <sup>for</sup> thought

**Programs provide children with necessities before and after school**

by Jeff Salem

**A** bell typically starts and ends each day at schools across Lincoln. At Clinton Elementary, much happens before and after those bells that shapes the children's everyday lives. Each morning, before the first bell of a new school day, about 300 children are already lined up outside Clinton's front doors, waiting for something special inside: breakfast. The line is a stark reminder that it sometimes takes more than the teachers in classrooms to help Clinton students live and learn.

On this blustery day in late winter, some in the line wear coats and boots, others are just in sleeveless shirts, and all have empty stomachs awaiting their fill.

Beverly Wertz, a fifth-grade teacher at Clinton, is one of the directors in charge of keeping the breakfast rush as orderly as possible. It seems nearly impossible to feed more than 300 children breakfast in 20 minutes on just 22 tables in the cafeteria. It's a good thing Wertz is a pro.

She has her own system for getting the children fed in as little as seven minutes each. Wertz stands at the door where the kids exit the breakfast line at a mind-boggling pace. They look to Wertz to find out where to sit.

"We try not to sit the best buddies next to each other," Wertz said. "It helps them eat a little faster."

The breakfast usually consists of eggs, pancakes or cold cereal and a drink of milk or orange juice. Kids churn from the breakfast line with astonishing, conveyor belt-like speed, and food must be eaten quickly to make room for the next student who has just been handed a fresh tray.

By 7:58 a.m., there are more kids than chairs, and Wertz starts sending the children in directions where she thinks there may be an open seat soon.

"It's more organized chaos than anything," she said.

Principal Mona Manley said the breakfast is an important part of the students' day.

"Having a nutritious meal sets the stage," she said. "If they're hungry, they can't think about anything else but food, so they can't learn."

She also knows that what the kids do after school contributes to their success or failure in the classroom.

"It's great to have structured environments so they don't just go straight home and watch television. Plus, they have a lot of fun after school, too," Manley said.

At 3 p.m., the final bell rings, and Clinton students are dismissed from school. But Stanford Bradley's day is just beginning.

Bradley is entering his 11th year as the Salvation Army Community Center supervisor. The center, located just north of 27th and Holdrege near the police station, gives students from the neighborhood a safe place to go after school.

According to Bradley, about 50 children from the neighborhood come to the center daily. Ninety percent of those are from Clinton Elementary, and the rest are from Elliott and Hartley.

The center is more than equipped for fun,

with a hardwood basketball court, pool tables, ping pong tables and board games, and someone has even donated X-Boxes and Playstations.

But, Bradley said, it is much more than a place to socialize.

Every evening, many of the children take advantage of the center's offer to cook a free dinner for anyone who wants it, he said.

Bradley said the community center has also become the parental structure for many of the children.

"We are our kids' family," Bradley said. "It's very sad, but very true."

Bradley said he only knows about 20 percent of the regulars' parents and knows that the center is where many of the children will learn their life skills.

Among the groups that meet at the center is the Boys and Girls Club of America, and in February, the clubs used the computer lab to research reports for Black History Month. Youth Empowered by Sports program, known as YES, shows the importance of sportsmanship.

Bradley also runs the Jesus And Me program. JAM is held every Thursday for children who want to head upstairs to the center's chapel and read scriptures.

"A lot of these kids don't go to church,"



## Organizations involved with Clinton Elementary School

- Art F/X Screen Printing Embroidery
- A to Z Printing
- BNSF Railway
- Capital City Kiwanis Club
- Cavett Elementary School families
- Center for Economic Education (UNL) – Dr. Tammie Fischer
- Center for People in Need
- Clinton Books Count – Nancy O’Brien
- Clinton Neighborhood Association
- Community Learning Centers (in collaboration with Cedars)
- Cornhusker Bank
- Delta Tau Delta fraternity (UNL)
- Douglas Theaters
- Educational Talent Search Program (UNL)
- Family of Life Pentecostal Church – Pastor Bill Chamberlin
- Food Bank of Lincoln
- Foundation for Lincoln Public Schools
- Fulk Family Foundation
- Lincoln Action Program
- Lincoln Area Agency on Aging’s Foster Grandparents Program
- Lincoln Community Outreach Foundation
- Malone Community Center
- Maxey Elementary School families
- Northeast Sertoma Club
- North Pointe Community Church
- North Star High School Voice students and staff
- Outback Steakhouse
- Project Fulcrum (UNL physics department)
- Carl and Jane Rohman
- Russ’s Market
- Salvation Army
- Sunrise Optimist Club
- Time Warner Cable
- Union College Project Impact
- U.S. Bank
- Various anonymous donors
- Wal-Mart



Any child can stay at the Salvation Army for dinner. Photo by David Story.

he said. “We let them know that there are bigger things out there. There’s more to life, someone’s always watching their every action so they need to make good decisions.”

It’s just another way for Bradley and the center to reach out and help teach the Clinton students about things they might not be exposed to at home or within school.

“We are a big family here,” Bradley said. He would know. He’s been a member of the center’s family since he was growing up. He attended Elliott Elementary and did his life learning at the same center he works in today. His first job at the center? When he was 14, he ran the score clock at the Salvation Army Small Fry basketball games.

Today, that same league has 16 boys’ teams and eight girls’ teams for fifth- to seventh-graders.

The Clinton neighborhood’s strong commitment to after-school learning doesn’t stop at the Salvation Army.

Shara Ryba is the site supervisor of Cedars’ Community Learning Center at Clinton, where daycare is offered before and after school. In the spring of 2006, there were 20 students enrolled in the daycare, which cost \$90 per month for the before school program,

\$135 per month for after school and \$175 per month for both.

The community center also runs a Girl Scouts of America troop and about 15 free clubs, like drama club and math club, each year, Ryba said. Most of the clubs meet twice a week for nine to 18 weeks, but some clubs run the entire year. Members are generally broken into two age categories: kindergarten to second grade and third grade to fifth grade.

Ryba said volunteers from the neighborhood or the school help lead the clubs, and regular meetings with Manley help determine if others need to be formed.

For example, Ryba said, a reading club can be created if a few students are struggling during the school day and need some extra practice.

In the end, Ryba said, the clubs that are chosen are supposed to reinforce what has been learned in school. And sometimes the clubs help with what’s being left out.

“It’s important to fit in activities, like (physical education) that doesn’t get its fair share during every school day,” Ryba said. “We’re here to be an extension of the school—with a little fun thrown in.” ■

About **300** children are fed breakfast in **20** minutes on **22** tables at Clinton Elementary School.



Basketball is just one of the many activities available at the Salvation Army Center after school. Photo by David Story.





# A day in the life

## of Clinton Elementary School

### 7:46 a.m.

A winding line of children, laughing and making noise, waits outside the front doors of Clinton Elementary School.

The students, in various colors of shirts, pants, hair and skin, sound hungry.

At the ringing of a low-toned bell, they are ushered into the school.

It's breakfast time.

### 7:50 a.m.

The hungry students exit the breakfast line one by one.

As they do, almost all look up to Beverly Wertz for direction.

She points out open spots at tables, and the students follow her lead.

She calls it "organized chaos," but it's more organized than chaos as about 300 children eat a breakfast of Cocoa Puffs or Golden Grahams cereal, with milk or orange juice to drink, in less than 20 minutes.

### 8:03 a.m.

Cora struggles to breathe.

But Hollis Alexander-Ramsay, Clin-

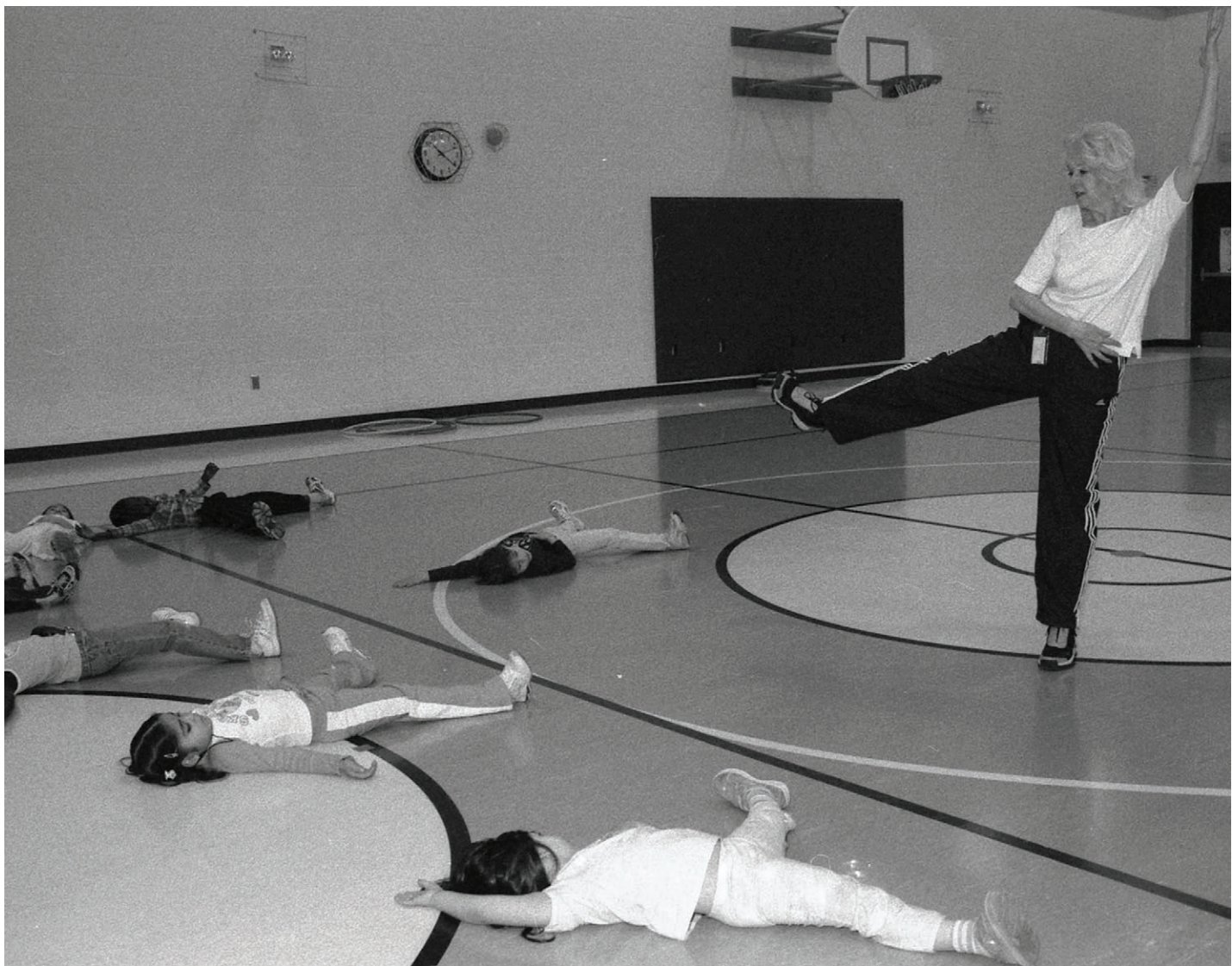


About 300 children eat breakfast at Clinton, so the line has to move quickly to ensure that everyone is fed.  
Photo by David Story.









P.E. teacher Joan Smith taught at Clinton for 34 years before retiring in May. Photo by Steve Hermann.

ton's nurse, doesn't seem too worried. The tiny blond-haired girl has been to the nurse's office before.

Cora gets hooked up to a machine with a long breathing tube protruding from a plastic box. The nebulizer eases her asthma, which is acting up this morning.

Just as a precaution, the school calls home to give the news.

### 8:08 a.m.

"I know everything about diabetes," brags Caleb, a talkative young boy.

He hands a hot pink sticky note to assistant nurse Karina Mendez. The note says Caleb ate all of his breakfast, which is a good thing. It helps the school keep track of his carbohydrate intake.

Caleb is tough. He tells the room of half a dozen listeners how to stay on top of a diabetes problem as the nurse gives him a shot of insulin.

### 8:40 a.m.

The ExCITE morning program preschoolers sit at two tables with teacher Danielle Rezac and paraeducator Fay Eby.

Their eyes are fixed on two food carts where today's breakfast is placed.

After handing out the milk cartons, the group leaders pour orange juice into the children's little cups. Some are having a hard time opening their milk cartons.

"Ms. Fay, can you help me with this?" a boy asks shyly.

"Well, you need to pull up the end on this side," Ms. Eby says, pointing to the "pull here" mark on the carton.

### 8:49 a.m.

The children have a piece of toast and some scrambled eggs on their plates.

At first, they sit quietly as they eat. Then, some begin chatting with one another about all sorts of things, including what happened

yesterday at their homes.

Ms. Rezac tries to engage the children in a conversation.

"We are going to make some peanut butter sandwiches today," she says. "How do you make peanut butter?"

Everybody chimes in to show off their knowledge.

"I know. I know. I know," a boy shouts. "You need peanuts!"

"Yeah, you are right!" Ms. Rezac says.

She reminds the children of the last class when they read about how to make peanut butter sandwiches. She says they are going to do just that later in the day.

### 9:01 a.m.

After finishing breakfast and throwing away the leftovers, the preschoolers put their dishes and silverware in a plastic basket on the table.

They brush their teeth, and some go to the restroom.

The ones who are ready to head into the



classroom line up behind Ms. Rezac and Ms. Eby.

The gym is right next to the hall where they just ate breakfast.

"Can we go into the gym?" a boy asks Ms. Rezac. "I can do some somersaults. We went there last time. Why can't we go now?"

The curious boy points to older students who come out of the gym, looking frustrated that he can't go.

Another boy standing nearby answers, "They are rich!"

Ms. Rezac intervenes: "No, they are the same people who go to the school like you guys. But we have to wait for our turn."

### 9:05 a.m.

After returning to the classroom, the kids set their chairs around a circular mat and start talking and laughing.

"When we count to three, you be quiet," Ms. Rezac orders the noisy class.

"One. Two. Three."

The whole class counts out loud.

A calm silence falls over the classroom.

Ms. Rezac takes song requests from the children.

Then, they start dancing.

"Are you a bunch of monkeys?" Ms. Rezac asks.

"Yeah! Yeah!" the children reply.

The kids shake their hips and scratch their heads like monkeys.

### 9:20 a.m.

Jill Wienke sits on a chair in her classroom, flipping through the sheet music to "Mary Poppins" as 18 second-graders squirm on the carpet in front of her.

"Before we go into this, I want someone to tell me an example of another musical that you might have seen," the music teacher says. "Raise your hand if you can tell me another musical."

Half a dozen hands shoot up, a couple of them swirling in the air.

The students answer as they're called on:

"Pocahontas."

"Beauty and the Beast."

"Cinderella."

Then, Mrs. Wienke calls on Giel.

The boy hesitates as he tries to recall what he was going to say. The teacher waits a few seconds.

She repeats the question: "A musical. What musical have you seen on a video, do you know?"

She pauses.

"You might not have seen one, Giel."

### 11:01 a.m.

Twenty-two kindergarteners sit bunched together on the tile floor in Lorinda Rice's art

classroom.

The teacher asks them about the stuffed paper fish they're about to finish: "Why do fish have stripes and spots and different colors?"

A boy in the front row raises his hand and says, "That way they can look pretty."

She acknowledges his answer and repeats the question.

A girl in the middle of the group says, "So other fish can think they're pretty."

She then asks the kindergarteners if any of them know what the word "camouflage" means.

She gets 22 blank stares.

### 11:27 a.m.

Hunter sits in the art room, eyes focused on his paper, ignoring his classmates as he works on his masterpiece.

His teacher has already stapled shut his stuffed paper fish, and now he's busy doodling with crayons.

The kindergartener draws a big blue cloud and a row of bright orange pumpkins, then a giant rectangle with a bunch of circles in it and lines coming out.

"It's a robot," he explains.

A pumpkin-eating robot.

Next, he creates a house with a stick figure standing outside.

"That's the dentist's house," he says, pointing at his drawing. "And that's the dentist."

Multicolored raindrops fall on the dentist's head. Red. Blue. Purple.

The robot gets a wig and the house gets the letter "H" on the roof.

"That stands for Hunter," he says.

Mrs. Rice glances over at him and tells him to put the cardboard box of crayons back on the shelf, pointing out that he already has crayons on his table. The scrawny boy, swimming in his black T-shirt, lifts the heavy box and places it where it belongs.

He takes one last look at his drawing and rolls up the piece of paper.

Masterpiece complete.

### 12:20 p.m.

The North Star High School students arrive with food from the food bank and form an assembly line. One group carries crates to another, which lines them up in the hallway.

Numbered backpacks are stuffed with items from each food group then

placed in a closet to wait for Friday.

The backpack program allows 50 Clinton families to have a bag filled with non-perishable food items for use over the weekend.

It's an effort to ensure that as many children as possible have the same nutrition on Saturday and Sunday that they have on school days.

### 1 p.m.

Kathy Mueller's third-grade English Language Learners students file through a sticker-plastered door into their Wednesday class.

Above the door a banner proclaims "Read Your Heart Out!"

Ten immigrant and six special education students. Black, white, Hispanic, Vietnamese and Kurdish.

A volunteer from the Lincoln Area Agency on Aging, Jo Alice Hibbard (teachers and children call her "Grandma Jobie"), helps maintain order.

"Stop kicking your desk," she tells one student.

In her dark gray sweater and black slacks, Grandma Jobie commands respect with firm but quiet orders.

The children don't make a sound as the lesson begins. They know her reprimands soon turn to grandma-hugs if they behave.

### 1:08 p.m.

A week ago, Mrs. Mueller's ELL students went on a field trip to Valentino's down the street from Clinton. The teacher now tells them to remember their impressions of the trip using the five senses—what they saw, tast-



"Grandma Jobie," a volunteer, helps ELL kindergartener Zainab Al-Mansuri with English. Photo by Steve Hermann.





Second-grader Seja Al-Awady's drawing illustrates how children should react to someone who is trying to get them to take drugs. The poster's message: Don't listen to people that tell you to drug. Tell a grownup.

ed, smelled, felt and heard.

Alice Mildenerger, from Clinton's special education team, passes out sheets for the class to fill out. Most of the children write that they tasted pizza under the "taste" column, but Mueller prods them to remember other things, such as the tomatoes and spices in the sauce.

The children's senses also pick up squirrels, dogs barking, cars honking, ice crunching and customers yapping.

### 1:26 p.m.

Michelle Sievers holds up a copy of Dr. Seuss' "I Wish That I Had Duck Feet" as 14 preschoolers look up at the cover illustration in amazement.

The librarian says the book was one of her favorites as a child.

The thought of Mrs. Sievers as a young girl brings several smiles.

"I want duck feet," a boy exclaims.

The other children cheerfully join in: "Me, too." "Me, too." "Me, too."

### 2:38 p.m.

A first-grader brings her habitat drawing to Mrs. Sievers as the girl's class works on its research project in the library.

The librarian looks over the colorful piece of paper and says: "OK, but your whale is still in midair. Let's get some ocean under that whale."

The girl rushes back to her seat and grabs a blue crayon.

### 3:20 p.m.

"Flutes, the G was scary," says director

Brendon Sibley during after-school band practice. "Play your G for me, please?"

The flutists play the note individually, some with more bravado than others.

It's Crystal's turn. She blows into the hole but the note comes out too low.

"Roll it in a little bit more," the instructor says, speaking over the announcement on the intercom.

Crystal turns her instrument slightly in her hands. She blows. The note comes out too low again.

"Faster air," Mr. Sibley says.

She tries again.

"Tighten the embouchure," the director says. "Roll it in."

She tries again.

"That one's not gonna' work," Mr. Sibley says.

He moves on to the next two flutists before returning to Crystal.

"One more shot," he says.

She tries three more times, unsuccessfully, as her classmates grow impatient. Finally, she hits the note, a little thin but clear.

"Now it's there," Mr. Sibley says.

Crystal smiles as she brings her instrument to her lap.

### 3:35 p.m.

The end of the day has arrived, and the school is mostly quiet.

One little girl stands in the entryway while a teacher watches.

The girl's eyes are wide with waiting and wondering. Her lips, pursed for a few minutes, break into a smile as she sees a lanky figure through the glass windows in the doors.

The tardy father arrives to the relief of the tiny kindergartener.

Her Cindy Brady curls bounce up and down as she is hoisted six feet in the air and returned.

"Dad's late, isn't he?" he asks as he puts a knee on the cement and reaches out to tie the pink laces on his daughter's tennis shoes. Her ringlets bob around her flushed little face as she nods.

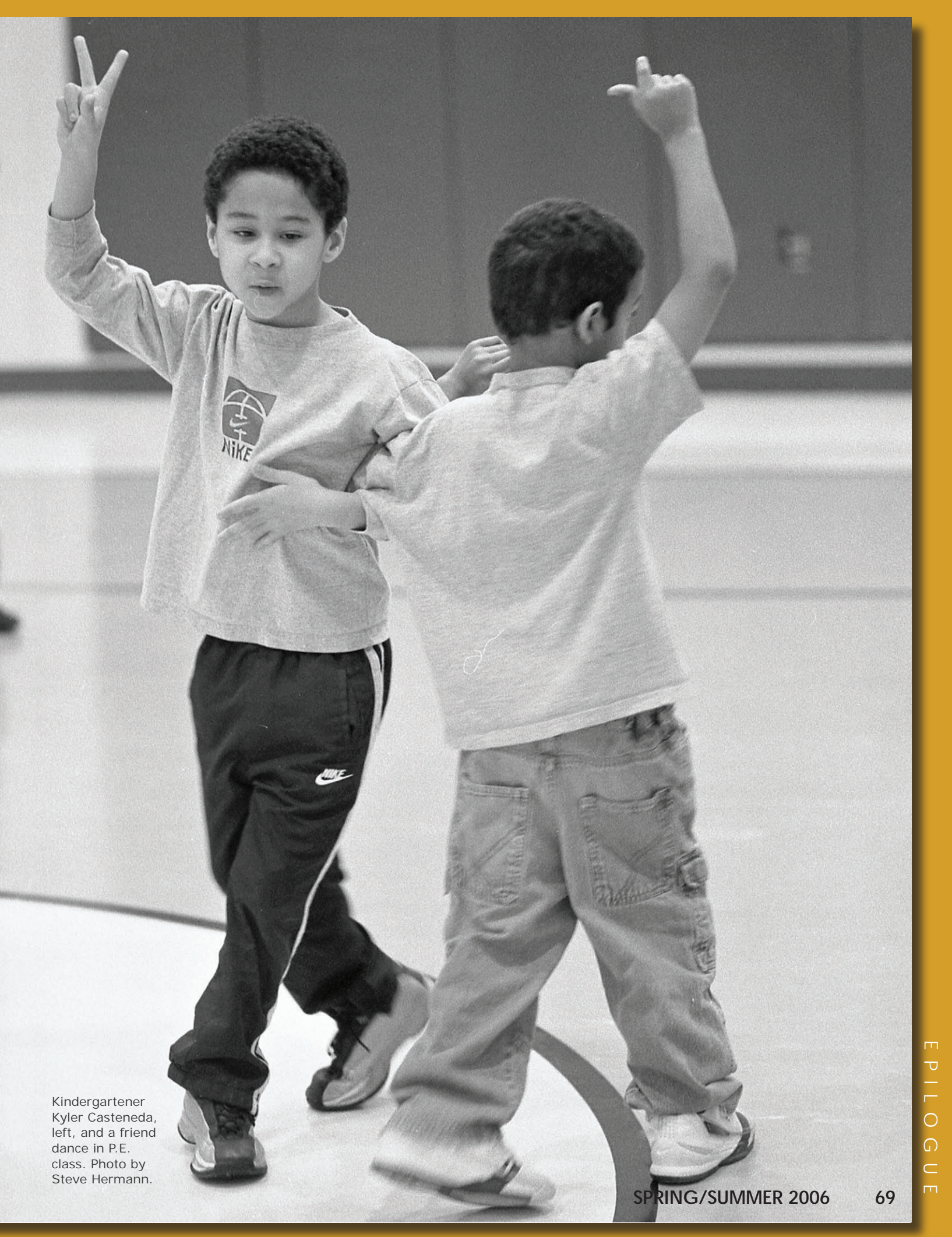
Dad's denim-clad arm scoops up the girl, while the other grasps her pink backpack. Spaghetti arms wrap around a weathered neck, and they're on their way. ■

This story was reported by David Bennett, Sean Hagedwood, Yangkyoung Lee, Jeff Salem and Amy Thompson. It was compiled by Hagedwood.



Kindergarteners like Shelly Nguyen get an early start on computer training. Photo by Steve Hermann.





Kindergartener  
Kyler Casteneda,  
left, and a friend  
dance in P.E.  
class. Photo by  
Steve Hermann.



# Contributors

## Students

**Brent Atema** of Brentwood, Tenn., was an editor on the magazine. Atema, a graduate student in journalism, received his undergraduate degree from Baylor University.

**David Bennett** of Kearney, Neb., a graduate student in journalism, was a reporter. He received his undergraduate degree from the University of Nebraska at Kearney.

**Nicholas Berry** of Omaha graduated in August with a degree in journalism. He served as the magazine's photo editor and also worked as a photographer.

**Joel Gehringer** of Omaha, a junior journalism and political science major, was the page designer for the magazine.

**Sean Hagewood** of Schuyler, Neb., a senior journalism major, was a reporter, photographer and editor and also designed graphics.

**Steve Hermann** of Omaha, a graduate student in journalism, was a photographer. He received his undergraduate degree from Winona State University in Winona, Minn.

**Yangkyoung Lee**, a graduate student in journalism from Korea, was a reporter. She received her undergraduate degree from Konkuk University in Korea.

**Benjamin McCarthy** of Lincoln, a graduate student in journalism, was an editor. He received his undergraduate degree from the University of Missouri at Kansas City.

**Craig Reier** of Lincoln, a senior majoring in journalism, was an editor.

**Jeff Salem** of Lincoln, a senior journalism major, was a reporter. He also has a bachelor's degree from Nebraska Wesleyan University.

**Andrew Stewart** of Murdock, Neb., a senior majoring in journalism and film studies, was an editor.

**David Story** of Lincoln, a senior majoring in journalism, was a photographer.

**Amy Thompson** of Lincoln, who was a reporter, is a graduate student in journalism. She received her undergraduate degree from Southern Methodist University.

**Whitney Turco** of Littleton, Colo., a junior majoring in journalism and English, was an editor.

**Jason Wiest** of Lodgepole, Neb., was a reporter. He graduated in May with a degree in journalism.

## Faculty

**Mary Kay Quinlan**, Ph.D., is a lecturer in the College of Journalism and Mass Communications. A former reporter for the Omaha World-Herald Washington Bureau and Gannett News Service, Quinlan taught the depth-reporting class that wrote these stories.

**Nancy Anderson** is a lecturer in the College of Journalism and Mass Communications. She previously worked as an editor at Newsday, a Pulitzer-prize winning newspaper in New York. Anderson taught the magazine editing class that edited and designed the magazine.

Special thanks to faculty members **Timothy G. Anderson**, who assisted with the graphics and design of this magazine, and **Bruce Thorson**, who provided photographic assistance.

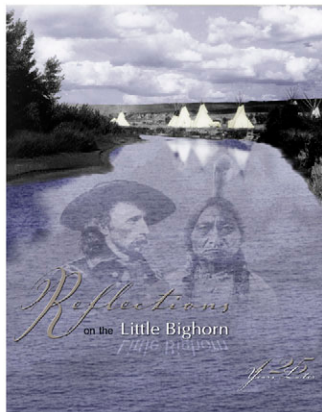


This series of award-winning depth reports is now available for order.

# Read about our students' *world-class* experiences.

At the UNL College of Journalism and Mass Communications, the world with its daunting realities is one of our most exciting classrooms. Within the pages of these student-researched, written and designed publications, read about their exciting explorations, challenging

discoveries and heart-rending revelations. We are preparing the next generation of media professionals to help us all make better sense out of our culturally diverse and ever-changing world. You could call it a world-class education.



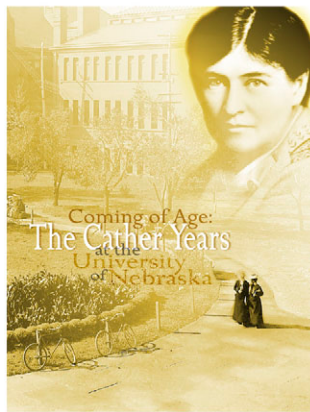
## Reflections on the Little Bighorn: 125 Years Later

Produced in 2001 on the 125th anniversary of the Battle of the Little Bighorn. UNL student journalists researched, wrote, edited and designed a 76-page magazine about the historical battle. (also available in DVD)



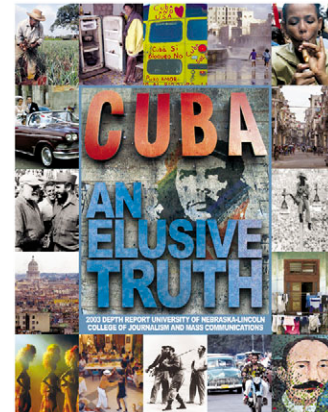
## Could Terror Strike Home?

Since Sept. 11, a broad array of national, state and local organizations have assessed two key questions: What are the potential threats and what are the potential solutions? This publication looks at how Nebraska's leaders and experts answer these two questions.



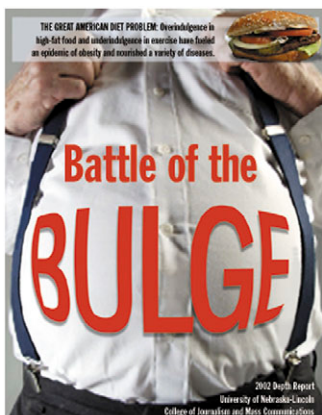
## Coming of Age: The Cather Years at the University of Nebraska

The writings from Professor Susan Rosowski's class became the basis for this publication, which was created by an editing team from the College of Journalism and Mass Communications.



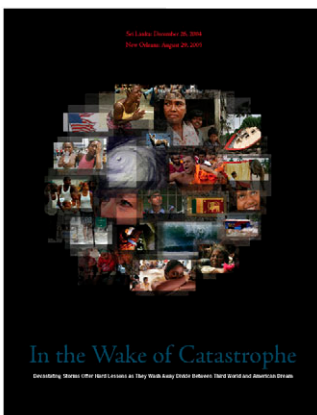
## Cuba: An Elusive Truth

A dozen UNL journalism students spent 12 days in Cuba in January 2003. Their goal was to find the truth about Cuba. (also available in DVD)



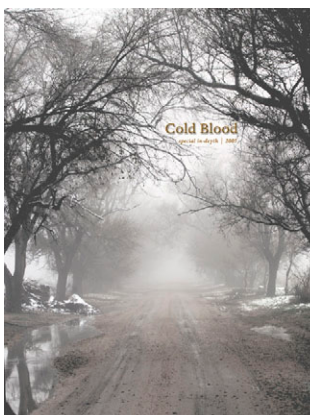
## Battle of the Bulge

This magazine takes a look at the great American diet problem: Overindulgence in high-fat food and underindulgence in exercise have fueled an epidemic of obesity and a variety of diseases.



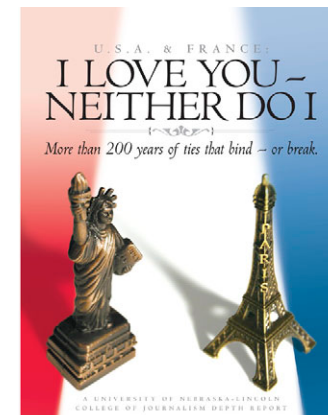
## In the Wake of Catastrophe

An Asian island tsunami and a Gulf Coast hurricane separated by eight months and 12,000 miles. What do they have in common and how are they different? What do the disasters have to teach us? What can we learn from them? Will we be better prepared in the future? The answers are contained in this magazine, written, illustrated and produced by UNL journalism students.



## Cold Blood

Truman Capote's "In Cold Blood" was among the first books in which the reporting techniques of journalism were assembled with the flair of traditional fiction writing. After a semester spent studying Capote's work, the community where the story unfolded and some of its principal characters, UNL journalism students obtained exclusive interviews from people who had refused to talk publicly about the crime or the book. (also available in DVD)



## France

France gave us our pre-eminent symbol of freedom, we fought side by side in the trenches of World War I, were allies in the struggle to purge the Nazi shadow and shared a common history in Southeast Asia. But somewhere between the collapse of the World Trade Center towers and Saddam's statue, a nasty fault line developed in this historical relationship. How did this happen? Why? Where is the relationship headed and what are the solutions? (also available in DVD)



## Platte River Odyssey

Early in 2005 the UNL College of Journalism and Mass Communications and the Lincoln Journal Star began collaborating to report on the Platte River. The stories inform and educate readers about efforts to manage and protect water in the Platte River basin.

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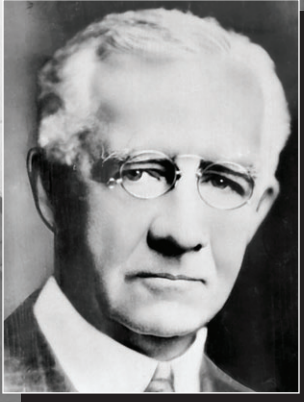
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To order the magazine or DVD send a \$10 check or money order (add additional \$10 for both magazine and DVD) – payable to UNL – to the College of Journalism and Mass Communications, 147 Andersen Hall, Lincoln, NE 68588-0443. Fee includes shipping, handling and sales tax. © CoJMC. Please specify the magazine (or DVD) you're ordering.

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# The Gilbert M. and Martha H. Hitchcock Foundation



GILBERT M. HITCHCOCK



MARTHA H. HITCHCOCK



Since 1975, the Gilbert M. and Martha H. Hitchcock Foundation has provided important funds for the master's program in UNL's College of Journalism and Mass Communications. Its initial gift of \$250,000 has grown to \$1 million, and the foundation helped fund the Andersen Hall renovation.

In 1885, Gilbert M. Hitchcock founded the *Omaha Evening World* newspaper. Four years later, by purchasing the *Omaha Morning Herald* and combining it with the *Evening World*,

Hitchcock launched the *Omaha World-Herald*.

Gilbert Hitchcock died in 1934 and Martha Hitchcock took up her husband's torch. In 1944 she established the Gilbert M. and Martha H. Hitchcock Foundation to honor her husband's memory. She died in 1962 and left \$5 million to the Hitchcock Foundation. In 1975 the foundation's board decided to support the journalism graduate program.

Hitchcock Foundation dollars help both graduate students and faculty by providing fellowships for graduate students and seed money for professional projects by faculty. It is and has been the goal of the Hitchcock Foundation to educate graduate students and keep them within the territory serviced by the *Omaha World-Herald*.

Neely Kountze, the Hitchcocks' great-nephew, is currently president of the Hitchcock Foundation.

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