

Tool Library helps the poor handyman

By TOM VISOKY
Of the Emerald

Tools are handy to have around — they can save the do-it-yourselfer a lot of time and money.

Unfortunately, even the simplest do-it-yourself projects often require specialized tools that the average "poor college student" doesn't own and can't afford to buy. How aggravating!

But, fret not, the Action Now Tool Library, located at 1557 Agate St. next to the Food-Op, offers help for the frustrated student handyman.

The tool library's two-room, baby-blue plywood shack is crammed with a huge inventory of tools — hammers, wrenches, vices, powersaws, drills, rakes, shovels, toilet plungers and more — that University students can borrow for up to three days, free of charge. Non-students also have access to the tools, but must pay a membership fee of either \$2.50 for three months or \$10 for the year.

In addition, the Library, which is funded by incidental fees, rents lawnmowers and rototillers, for one day only, for \$1.50 and \$3 respectively.

The Tool Library started in 1971 as an offshoot of Action Now's campaign to build local low-cost housing for the poor. According to recently retired director Katie McLaughlin, volunteers were eager to build the homes but lacked the necessary tools.

"They said 'we will build the houses if you give us the tools,'" McLaughlin says. "So, voila — the tool library."

McLaughlin says when she took over as director two years ago, the library was in a sham-

bles, and many tools had simply disappeared.

"The place was really slipshod," she says.

Since then McLaughlin has helped straighten things out. The tools are off the floor and a new tool identification system coupled with overdue fines has reduced the tool attrition rate considerably.

Because the Tool Library is used so heavily, McLaughlin says she instituted a late fine of 25 cents per tool per day to ensure that people would return tools as soon as possible.

The fine may not seem like much, but it adds up quickly if a person has borrowed a lot of tools, she says, adding that students who don't pay the fine will have it taken out of their general deposit.

Students also are held responsible if they break or lose any tools they borrow, McLaughlin says.

The demand for various tools varies from season to season, she says.

"In the summer it's power tools. In the spring we're almost totally wiped out of garden tools."

There is often a long waiting list for the more popular tools such as rototillers, drills and power saws. However, because of the heavy demand, the person at the top of the list does not necessarily get the tool, McLaughlin says.

"We simply call down the list, and whoever is home gets the tool."

Although the Tool Library's hours have not been set for the coming year, the Library is open most week days. Call 686-3702 to check on exact week day and weekend hours.



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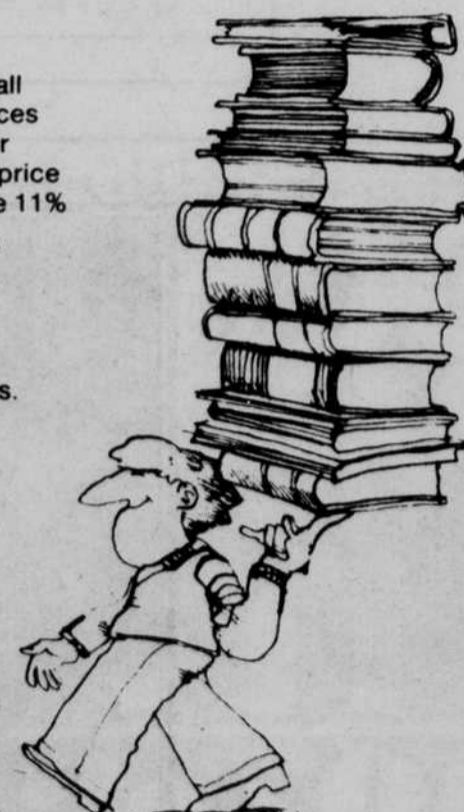
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