



VISITORS IN ALBION -- Petra Kleinlein, a UNL student studying for her Ph.D. in psychology, and Martin Despang, associate professor of architecture at UNL, visited Albion last Friday.

‘Eco-architect’ looks forward to working with Albion community

If the details can be worked out, a young internationally known “eco-architect” from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln said he would like to form a relationship with the Albion community and possibly work on projects here.

Martin Despang, a native of Germany and associate professor at the UNL School of Architecture, has developed a friendship with Paul and Lori Hosford of Albion over the past several weeks.

Because of this friendship, Martin and his friend Petra Kleinlein, also a native of Germany, visited Albion last Friday and spent some time looking at the Boone County Museum and the community.

Martin said he liked both the people and the prospects for projects here. He said he would like to form a relationship between the community and the School of Architecture for possible future projects.

A chance meeting between Paul and a renowned Australian architect, Chris Abel, in Lincoln last December led to the connection with Despang.

As a member of the Boone County Historical Society Board of Directors, Paul and others on the board had been talking about museum improvements that could create a controlled environment in a portion of the building to prevent deterioration of artifacts there.

Because the museum budget presently does not include funds for the cost of heating and cooling the building, Paul was exploring the possibility of a new design that could reduce or eliminate energy costs and still produce a controlled environment.

Possible development of a small art gallery in downtown Albion has also been under discussion,

and energy efficient design would be needed for this project as well.

That type of work lines up with Martin’s expertise, and he is enthusiastic about the possibilities.

Despang said he is also interested in Albion’s comprehensive planning process and the possibility that “green” projects, aimed at reducing energy costs, could result from this process.

Martin and his father, Guenther, are partners in Despang Architekten, an architecture firm in Hannover, Germany. Many of their projects in Germany have incorporated “green” technologies such as passive solar in various types of buildings ranging from homes and coffee shops to schools and grocery stores.

Several of their designs are award-winning. One of those projects, a kindergarten school building in Hannover, is included in the prestigious Phaidon Atlas of 21st Century Architecture.

A primary interest for Martin is called “postfossil” design. This architectural design uses as little fossil fuel as possible. For example, the previously mentioned kindergarten building design is “off the grid,” which means that all energy for heating and cooling is provided only through passive solar and other design concepts that use the building to assist in heating and cooling.

A UNL biography of Despang states: “He is practicing what he was taught and what he continues to teach -- that the consistency of architectural quality in concept, development and execution, can make life better.