



Pei—University is Lincoln's greatest architectural resource

I.M. Pei, internationally known architect, spoke Tuesday to UNL students about the changes that teaching methods of architecture have undergone.

The 61-year-old Harvard graduate described architecture as a "multi-discipline art" and disagreed with the idea that, in architecture, form must follow function.

"Today," Pei said, "we look upon architecture in a totally different way than when I was learning." He said three ideas are incorporated in current architectural planning: the art, the science and the politics of architecture.

The major part of the program was a question and answer session in which students asked Pei's opinion of Lincoln's architectural design.

Pei, who is designing the new National Bank of Commerce, said the University is Lincoln's greatest architectural resource. He

anticipates "drawing the University into the downtown area" with the bank's construction.

A native of China, Pei said Lincoln "is so safe that young people walk around at night."

Pei said he feels individual factors of a city have a bearing on the types of buildings constructed within it. "You must work to capture and maximize each situation," he said.

Having worked mostly with urban renewal, Pei says he believes that people need space. Plans for the new bank include an open space which he said will be for the public's enjoyment.

In designing any structure, Pei said he favors two or three people working on the initial design. "People need to bounce their ideas off one another," he said. "From conversation comes approach and out of approach comes possible solutions."

Dignity league—trying to make life more normal

When Nancy Erickson answers the telephone, it may take her a few seconds longer.

Not because the phone isn't within reach or that she doesn't like talking to people. It's because Erickson suffers from polio. She has to handle the receiver from a wheelchair and with metal hand controls.

Erickson, a counselor at the Lincoln Rehabilitation Services Center, finds jobs for other handicapped people and the funds to send them to school.

She has a bachelor's degree in psychology and a master's degree in educational psychology.

But Erickson is an individual case. And of the 10 to 15 per cent of Lincoln's population that is permanently disabled, many have things other than answering the telephone to worry about. Things like job discrimination, transportation and public apathy.

That's why Erickson, in addition to her full-time job, is president of a group of Lincolnenites called the League of Human Dignity.

Formed in May 1971, the league has about 40 members. Sixty per cent of the group is physically disabled. Ages of members range from 18 to 60.

The group's long-range goal is making life for the disabled more normal and to equalize their chances at employment, she said. But there are preliminary obstacles to tackle, she added.

Adequate transportation is one, Erickson said, and this became the League's first priority about a year ago.

Unlike most persons, she said, many handicapped people cannot drive a car and cannot climb the stairs of city buses. Therefore, many rely on friends or on taxis, which can become expensive. What they need is their own set of buses, specially designed for the disabled, Erickson said.

A year ago, league members applied for and received a demonstration grant through the Lincoln City Council. The grant, if federally approved, would supply them with buses for a year, Erickson said.

But to apply for the grant they first had to raise \$10,000 in two weeks to show there was community interest, she said. They raised \$12,025.

The three buses that were requested were recently approved in Washington and will arrive next week. If at the end of the year they are successful, the Lincoln Transportation System (LTS) will take over operating expenses.

"But once they (the disabled) get out, they have to be able to get in," UNL student Kurt Andrews added. Andrews was the league's Nebraska Organization for Volunteers in Action (NOVA) volunteer from September 1971 to September 1972.

"Getting in" refers to entering buildings, Andrews said. Flights of steps, heavy doors or narrow doorways may be inconveniences for non-handicapped persons, but for the disabled architectural barriers can mean not having a steady job.

A Nebraska law passed in 1965 requires that all new buildings after that time be accessible to the physically handicapped. Erickson said it's a "great law," but that it is rarely enforced.

She cited the Lincoln County-City Building as an example. Despite minimal efforts, it is still

inaccessible for the physically handicapped. The ramps are too steep and to enter, a handicapped person must go several blocks out of his way, Erickson said.

The league currently is conducting a survey of 200 Lincoln buildings and also is preparing a booklet of "ammunition" against contractors and builders, called "Lincoln for the Disabled". It will explain the details of making buildings accessible to the handicapped.

If informing individual offenders is one goal,

members of society," Erickson said.

Erickson described the league as a "consciousness-raising" experience. The group is unique because of the combination of disabilities among the members—multiple sclerosis, polio, deafness, cerebral palsy and others.

Erickson said she hopes the league will eventually attempt to reform employment practices.

She said she didn't know how many of Lincoln's disabled are fully employed now, but she said it's a small number.



League of Human Dignity President Nancy Erickson . . . said the group members want a normal life, not therapy.

educating the average citizen about the disabled is another, Erickson said.

Despite the league's accomplishments, like any other new group, it has new-group problems, Erickson said.

She said one is interest. Overall attitude of the members is split between two groups, she said. On one side are the "well-adjusted" who are willing to keep trying, but there are also those she called the bitter who "think the world owes them a living."

But, according to Andrews, the real problem was in getting the group off to a start.

When the group began in May it had 50 members, but when an Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) fund request was denied in June, interest fell and members quit. In September, Andrews said he found himself among a discouraged group of about 12 persons.

What they needed most was a person like himself who could work full-time, he said. Andrews was the group's "community organizer," he said, doing whatever he could wherever he could.

The first problem he said, was the meetings. "It's easy to get together and complain about your problems," he said. "But they had no plan of attack, no strategy."

It is a self-defeating, stay-at-home attitude that harms handicapped people most, according to both Erickson and Andrews.

"There's no reason they can't all be contributing

A bill which would include the physically and mentally handicapped in the fair employment act will be presented to the Legislature soon. Passage would make employment discrimination against the handicapped illegal.

Both Andrews and Erickson stressed the independence and self-pride of the group.

"In general, volunteers come here with the idea, 'I want to help you,'" Erickson said. "This is fine, but we're not interested in therapy."

Andrews said the group has been described as "radical" and "militant."

"It's aggressive," he admitted. But he said the names are probably because the group tries to keep close tabs on what other groups are doing for the disabled. For example, he said, a while ago Lincoln tried to build a horseback-riding academy for the disabled. The league, opposed to the idea, has managed to postpone action.

"It was their (the city's) 'good' idea," he said, "but they didn't try to contact the disabled themselves."

Despite the legislative, "social-activist" attitude of the League of Human Dignity, it's the "human dignity" role in the eyes of the average citizen that is hardest—and most important to put across.

"People tend to equate physical disability with mental disability," Andrews said. "But they're not helpless and they're not touched in the head... They're just like regular people."