

# UNL helps in riverfront

By Harry Baumert

The University of Nebraska has been helping Omaha return to the river—the Missouri River, that is.

In 1967 four UNL architecture students came up with a plan to redevelop an industrial section of downtown Omaha near the river. Their "Marina City" development called for a hotel and convention center, apartment complexes and a plan for traffic flow.

Since then, public and private interests in Omaha have focused on both sides of the Missouri, from Blair through Omaha and south to Plattsmouth. That area is the planning ground for the Riverfront Development project. Included are plans for industry, recreation, transportation, commerce and housing.

### Re-emphasis on urban land

"Return to the river" is a Riverfront slogan symbolizing a re-emphasis on the use of urban land along the Missouri.

According to Omaha City Planning Director Alden Aust, the Riverfront project began as a number of independent planning ideas around the Omaha area. The architecture students who spearheaded the first Riverfront plans for downtown

Aust said the design presented by the students centered on a section of the city cluttered with railroad tracks and warehouses.

\$200 million

Aust said the model drawn up by the students has been refined twice and enlarged, and now includes plans for a Central Park and a Downtown Education Center. Total cost for the downtown part of the Riverfront Development will be \$200 million, according to Aust.

Aust said the Mayor's Riverfront Development Committee, was formed in August of 1970 to deal with overall planning for the Riverfront. Former Omaha Mayor Eugene Leahy is now president of the Riverfront Communities Development Foundation, a private corporation whose purpose is primarily fund raising, according to Aust.

One of the students who came up with the Marina City design is William Holmes. He now works for an architectural and engineering firm in Omaha. He said he and other students were in the fifth year in the architecture program at UNL and did the design as a senior project. They worked under George Peng, a former UNL professor who is no longer with UNL.

Holmes said the College of Architecture took a new turn in 1967, adding an urban design option to its curriculum.

### City planning 'hot'

"City planning was and still is a very hot thing," he said, and added that the new option allowed students to approach the study of

architecture more comprehensively; and to apply design ideas not only to single structures, but to whole cities.

Carlyle Sorenson, another former UNL architecture student, said the conceptual design they made in 1967 resulted from a "consortium effort" between the College of Architecture and Omaha City Planning. Sorenson is now a partner in an architectural firm in Minneapolis.

"It's easier to go out into a blighted district and take care of a problem that exists instead of fictionalizing a problem," he said. He added that the new option in the school opened more avenues for study and practical experience.

The two other former students who worked with the plans, Richard Buss and Arthur Morry, could not be reached for comment.

The University of Nebraska's representative on the executive committee of the Riverfront Development Corporation, Herbert Locke, said the University has been involved with a number of subcontract studies with the Riverfront.

One of these studies, "North Omaha Recreation and Culture," was completed in June, 1974. Headed by Professor of Architecture Roger Schluntz, the study included citizen input and proposed ways to improve cultural and recreational opportunities in Omaha's north side.

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