

Coffee House is alternative to bar scene

By Lane Van Ham
Staff Reporter



Allen Schaben/Daily Nebraskan

Andrew Robinson, senior engineering major, shows off a cup of Mexican Mocha, one of the Coffee House's specialty drinks.

New University of Nebraska-Lincoln students probably have a long time to wait before their 21st birthday. The question is: What can one do instead of hitting the bars?

One alternative is The Coffee House, 1324 "P" St.

"We're about the only place people can go for the loose term 'hanging out' where there's no alcohol," said Jim McCabe, Coffee House owner.

McCabe opened the Coffee House in July of 1987 with the idea that Lincoln needed a place similar to those he'd seen in other towns.

"I'd been to coffee houses a lot in San Francisco and Oregon and I always thought it was rather weird that a college town like Lincoln did not have a coffee house," he said. "It was one of those things I kept mentioning for four or five years, and finally someone said, 'Well, if you're going to keep complaining about it, you've got to do something about it.'"

McCabe said his vision of the Coffee House was based on the European model, rather than the beatnik coffee houses of the 1950s.

"The European (coffee house) is more open, a little more quiet, where the '50s coffee houses were more funky, casual, rustic, strumming guitar in the background kind of things," he said. "The European is more concerned with varieties and quality of coffee and pastries."

The atmosphere at the Coffee House lends itself to many possible activities and attracts a wide variety of clientele, of which students are only one component.

"I had the idea of a place you can sit around and have conversation and small meetings with other people drink coffee, relax, play games... I don't think there's any other place that has this, which is why we can get a cross-section," McCabe said. "We get some business people in the early morning and then students more in the afternoon and evening."

The Coffee House also features a constantly rotating display of art on its walls, arranged by one of McCabe's employees who is also an art student.

"We have big walls, and a very very high ceiling in the front, and started thinking, 'What am I going to do with these walls so they're not so bland?' It seemed like art was a logical outgrowth, and we rotate it every 6 to 8 weeks for variety," McCabe said.

From time to time the Coffee House also features poetry reading and live music, but McCabe said apart from an upcoming benefit for Lincoln's community radio station KZUM, there is nothing in the works in this regard.

The Coffee House serves light lunches in addition to items such as bagels, muffins, cookies and cheese cake. All of the items are brought in from other places, and McCabe said he has had difficulty finding the quality of food he'd like to have.

"There really isn't much as far as a good bakery in Lincoln," McCabe said. "I've found private bakers to be the best thing so far. I'd like to have high quality English pastries, which aren't as sweet as French, but they're hard to find."

Of course, there is always the obvious -- coffee, and other drinks.

"Some people who aren't familiar with us come in and just ask for a cup of coffee. When they find out we have five different kinds, they don't know what to get," McCabe said.

McCabe added that there are some compensations for those who don't like coffee, such as tea and Italian Sodas.

The Coffee House is open Monday through Thursday from 7 a.m. to midnight, Friday and Saturday from 7 a.m. to 2:00 a.m. and Sunday from 1 p.m. until midnight.

Diebenkorn works now at Sheldon

Forty-one portraits, figure studies and still lifes by American painter Richard Diebenkorn are on display in the Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln through July 30.

The exhibition of etchings is taken from the Sheldon collection for the American Federation of Arts and will tour 11 cities after closing at Sheldon.

"Diebenkorn's etchings provide us with unexpected insight and commentary on a lesser-known aspect of the artist's oeuvre," said George Neubert, gallery director. "Diebenkorn is among a small number of contemporary artists who enjoy an international reputation as one of America's most respected painters."

"The character of his art, its mastery and authenticity, is brought to full force in this first serious effort in printmaking by this American master," he said.

Diebenkorn is noted as an abstract painter, but he also has produced an important body of figurative and representational graphic works, Neubert said. The works in the Sheldon exhibition record the artist's experiments with figurative compositions.

The exhibition is supported in part by the Nebraska Arts Council and is part of Art Access, a pilot project of the American Federation of Arts supported by the Lila Wallace-Readers Digest Fund.

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