

Counselor works to open outlooks

By Heidi Woerner
Lincoln High Advocate

Diane Leggiadro's career doesn't leave her dealing with stoic adults or the elevator music of an office building.

Leggiadro, a peer-helping counselor at Lincoln High School for 11 years, says the best thing about her job is having a chance to work with lively high school students.

"I just like young people," she says. "They're just plain funny, so straightforward and honest."

She explains her job title this way: "Peer-helping gives the permission to act on and be nice to someone who isn't ordinarily treated nicely."

Leggiadro, along with counselor Marybeth Lehmanowsky, instructs a helping skills class designed to teach selected students peer-helping techniques.

"The purpose is to help make LHS feel like a warm, accepting, welcome place for students," she says.

Students who take the class learn to broaden their perspectives and become more aware of their peers, Leggiadro says.

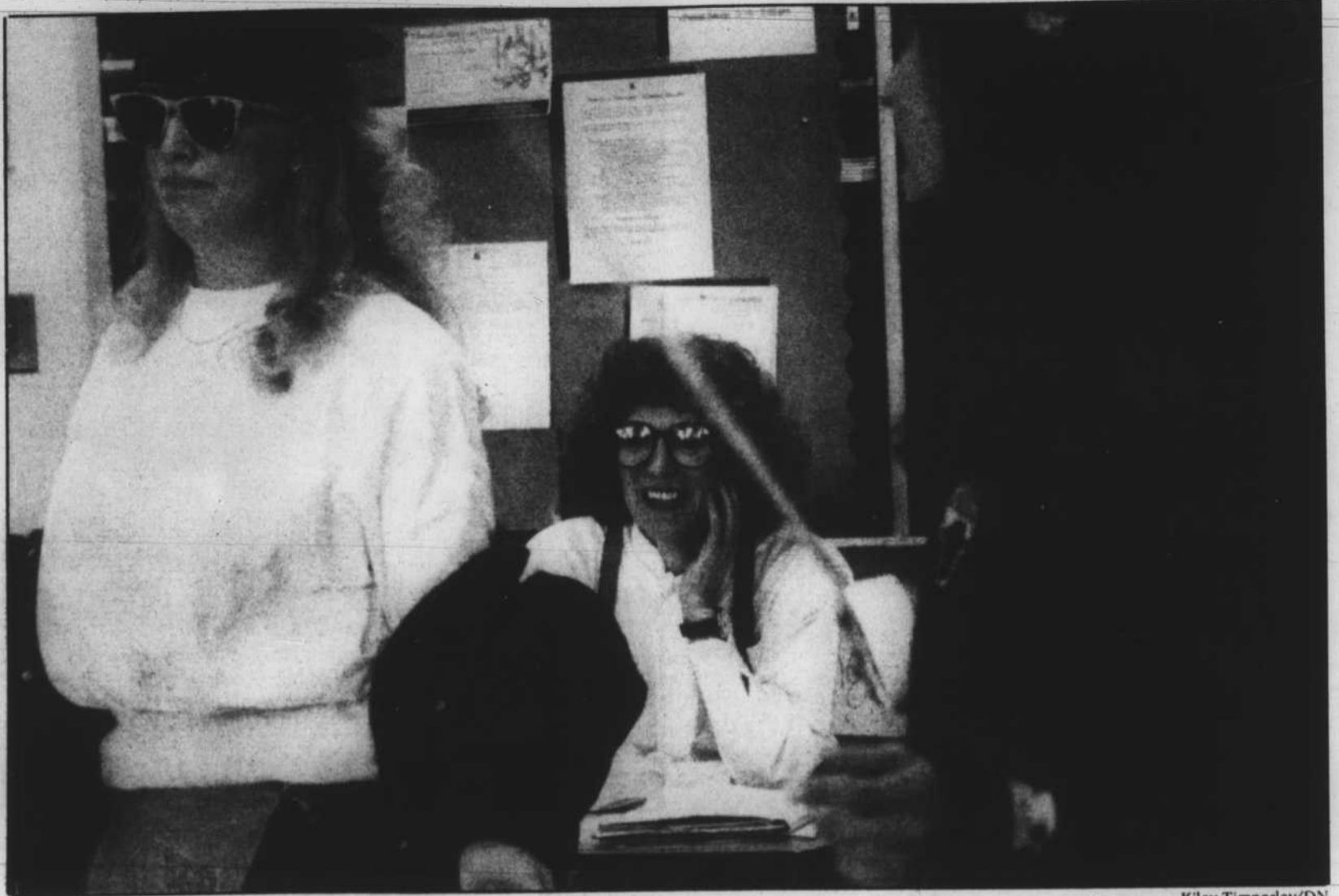
"The goal is that everybody is at least in as good a position or better after an encounter with a peer helper," she says.

As both a counselor and a parent, Leggiadro says, the class is helpful to her, too. The opportunity to be around teenagers has provided information that carries over into her everyday life.

"I'm a lot more conscious about the questions I ask," she says.

Leggiadro says she also gains a special bond with her students as the semester passes — a basic trust takes place between students in the class.

Teaching the class, she says, is



Kiley Timperley/DN

Diane Leggiadro watches in amusement as a group in her peer help class acts out stereotypes at Lincoln High School. Leggiadro says even she is stereotyped sometimes in the eyes of students, parents and staff.

"one of the most significant things I do everyday."

Leggiadro says she thinks schools should take advantage of the positive effects students have on one

another.

That belief, she says, is one reason for her involvement in such programs as student meditation, AIDS peer education, English as a Second Language and an Elliott school

mentor program.

Leggiadro's job stereotypes her in the eyes of students, parents and staff. She says they subscribe to the set expectations of what counselors are required to do, act or be-

lieve.

But Leggiadro does not.

"A counselor is not where you go just to get things fixed," she says.



Julia Mikolajcik/DN

Kelita Svoboda, a Lincoln High student council president, sits in front of her school. Svoboda is a senior and plans to attend UNL in the fall.

Svoboda

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This also is the way to end other stereotypes, Svoboda says.

"You get rid of them," she says, "by talking about them and forcing people to be aware."

Svoboda says people in general are judging less in terms of stereotypes because they just don't fit anymore.

"People just don't fit stereotypes," she says. "At LHS, there are 2,200 people leading 2,200 different lives."

But she says she thinks at a smaller school, where everyone knows each other, it might be easier to stereotype.

Not that stereotypes are not non-existent at Lincoln High — but Svoboda says they're lessening.

"There are no barriers to stereotypes," she says. "It's just a social thing."

A social thing that Svoboda may be able to change as she pursues a career in government.

She plans to attend the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and major in political science or international relations.

"That's kind of up my alley."