



COREY SCHLUTH/WAUSAU DAILY HERALD

Kevin Korpela, a part-time architect, has organized an "action reading" for people to read their literary writings on the 400 block in downtown Wausau.

Wausau architect also builds ideas

When Kevin Korpela isn't helping to build buildings, he's building new ideas.

The part-time project architect with Becher-Hoppe Associates in Wausau also has his own business, observatorydrive.com, which he describes as an idea services firm, a way to turn lofty ideas into realities.

When he lived in Madison, the native of Wausau created the Radio Architecture Project, a one-hour show dedicated to architecture issues, and when he lived in Superior he started the Social Injustice Consortium to try to get the city to turn an old high school into apartments instead of tearing the building down.

Since moving back to Wausau, Korpela, 37, organized an "action reading" for people to come out and read their literary writings on the 400 block downtown.

"I think (the idea services firm) came from the notion of architecture school," he said. "People have their opinions about academic research ... but for me it was very helpful given the nature of academic studies. It allowed me a venue to look at issues which are much more beyond one's self and that had implications on the people that live around us."

What was your first job?

My first job was a newspaper delivery boy for the Wausau Daily Herald. The importance of that, having your first paid employment is a very important idea, but what was also important was that delivering papers there was a lot of time by yourself when you were going house to house. What I



BREAKING THE MOLD

NICK SARGENT

would do to occupy my mind, I had just finished my studies at school (for the day), so what I would do is invent things in my head. Since my father had all (these) great tools, and I wanted my own set of tools and of course a car someday, and I liked the CJ-5 Jeep.

I thought, "How could I fit all my tools in the backspace of the CJ-5, a shelf system or rack to secure my tools safely yet have easy access." One week it was a CJ-5 the next week I realized that wasn't enough space so then I found the extended Jeep and I figured that would be more conducive to the number of tools I wanted.

What energizes you?

I think it's two things: organizing information and finding patterns. That is, you have a large amount of things and how do you connect those things so they make sense, so they are valid in their relationship from one thing to another. Whether that's writing a paragraph or constructing a logo for a business or the expansion of a building, there's a lot of information in all those ideas. ...

No. 2, I really enjoy watching other people's creativity.

At what age do you feel someone becomes an adult?

I don't think there is an age defined for being an adult. I think an adult is two things: understanding and sacrifice. You have an understanding of those friends and family around you and what their possibilities are and help nurture those possibilities. You work to help them to reveal those possibilities.

You also have to make sacrifices, you have to understand the importance of making sacrifices.

What's one thing people don't know about you?

When I was a little boy, for nearly an entire summer I wore the same green denim pair of pants and green cowboy hat. Though I heard the story related later that my family would often essentially steal my pants from my bedroom when I was sleeping and they would wash them on a very regular basis.

Whom do you admire?

I admire my family. I have a brother and two sisters and then my mom and dad. I have a story for each of them on why I'd admire each of them and their children and their spouses. ... My dad is very careful with his word selection and how he uses his words and the meaning behind words. Those are things I think I've realized over time that are important: What is a word? What is its meaning? And more importantly, what is the context around that word? ...

With my mother it's the notion of her great kindness. I think that's something we should all strive for. The combination of

those traits my mom and dad have shown to myself and to my siblings and their children, I think, are things that should be respected and understood and hopefully applied in a similar way.

What class did you hate most in high school?

For the past four months I have been thinking about that because this is the first time that I have lived in this town in 20 years. What I think at the moment, I know that my fellow students and instructors were all very good people and I did enjoy their company — I didn't like high school at all. Only because it was a personal issue of the development of the social skills at that particular time. Even though I was successful in high school and able to attend a university (after graduation), the notion of awkwardness was quite prevalent for me. I don't regard it as an enjoyable experience. Yet I think high school is an absolutely important element of one's development as an adult.

If you were told you could keep just one physical possession, what would it be and why?

I would keep one No. 2 pencil, but it'd have to be a modified No. 2 pencil. It would have to have a really big eraser and an endless supply of pencil lead. I think even though I do spend a lot of time visualizing things and organizing words and images in my head, in the end those images need to be on paper. Even when the image is perfect in my head it invariably never is, because it's not yet on the paper in front of me.