

SISTER

Continued from Page A1

and Switzerland. Once she opened the photo album, it became July 1981 all over again.

There was Seckinger's airbrushed (remember those, complete with red carbon paper?) to and from the United States. A ticket from the Julia Belle Riverboat.



KARIN SECKINGER

Another stub, from Tower Park in Peoria Heights.

There were plenty of photos Seckinger took — of Grandview Drive and Downtown Peoria, pre-Civic Center and pre-Twin Towers. There also was a clipping of a photo the Journal Star took — of Seckinger and three of her fellow travelers, at Wildlife Prairie Park west of town.

Seckinger said. "I really enjoyed it."

The Peoria visitor found it slightly bizarre to see so many familiar images so far from home. But those images helped Seckinger travel far from her home in the southern German state of Baden-Wuerttemberg.

Now a schoolteacher, Seckinger has been all over the United States and Europe and to Africa, among other places.

Prior to that first Peoria trip, she had traveled to France, Italy and Spain, but not off the continent. For a European, those journeys aren't much different distance-wise than a Peorian going to Tennessee or Texas, perhaps.

"I became more interested in getting to know countries, people," Seckinger said about the fallout from her Peoria visit. "Meeting the people, getting new friends."

"It was the first time it really opened my mind to the world."

That's part of the point of sister-city relationships, particularly among the young, according to Eric Hoadley. He is president of Friends of Friedrichshafen, a Peoria-based private group dedicated to strengthening the ties.



LINDA HENSON/JOURNAL STAR FILE PHOTO

Karin Seckinger, second from right, and three others from Friedrichshafen, Germany, were pictured in the Journal Star in 1981, when they visited Wildlife Prairie Park.

"So many people think the world is only as big as what they currently know, and people don't go out of their comfort zone," Hoadley said stateside. "What

the youth exchange really does is open those horizons so people realize there's so much more to the world than the mall and my circle of friends."

A pair of similar cities

Friedrichshafen has a shopping mall, but that's not what attracts thousands of tourists annually from Germany and beyond.

The city of about 60,000 is a transportation hub, with ferries crossing Lake Constance — "Bodensee" in German — to other domestic points and to Switzerland.

The lake provides a variety of summertime beach and boating options. Much of downtown Friedrichshafen parallels a lakefront promenade that leads to a castle occupied in the 19th century by kings of Wurttemberg.

The Peoria riverfront is not nearly as expansive or majestic. One area in which the cities are sympatico, however, lies in their relationship with their largest corporations; Caterpillar Inc. is to Peoria what Zeppelin GmbH is to Friedrichshafen.

Around the turn of the 20th century, Count Ferdinand von Zeppelin began to construct airships in the Friedrichshafen area. The modern-day successor to Zeppelin's firm, a Caterpillar dealer, still is a major presence in the city.

Zeppelin Museum Friedrichshafen, which claims

to house the world's largest aviation collection, occupies a former railroad station downtown near the ferry docks.

The Zeppelin connection — in place since the mid-1950s, as has been the U.S. sister-city initiative — helped lead to the Peoria-Friedrichshafen connection.

Caterpillar executives in the 1970s became friendly with Friedrichshafen city officials, according to Peter Gerstmann, the Zeppelin president and CEO. The Peoria mayor then, Richard Carver, also helped forge the bonds.

"There were a few similar things in the cities," Gerstmann said. "The industry in the cities, how they work together."

"It would be good to have an exchange of experience, and exchange of people. And it would start with a partnership city."

Putting a financial value on the Peoria-Friedrichshafen relationship is difficult, Gerstmann indicated.

Please see CITIES, Page A14

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