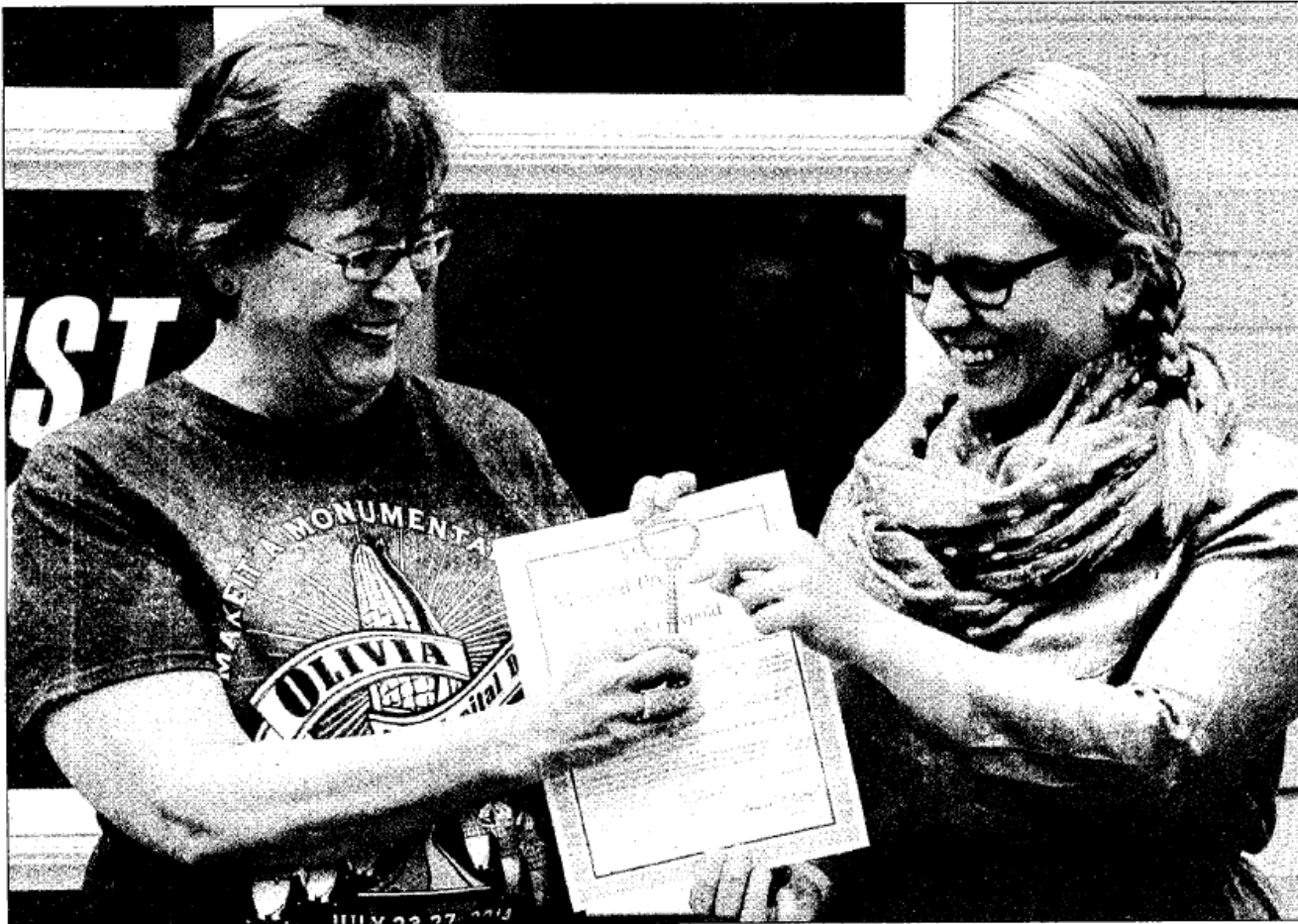


# Researching corn and the people who live it

By Shelby Lindrud  
Editor



Annka Liepold (r), a Ph.D. student from Munich, Germany happily receives a Mayoral Proclamation and the key to the city from Olivia Mayor Sue Hilgert during the Corn Capital Days festivities Sat., July 26. Liepold was visiting the city to research her dissertation topic on the history of corn in the American Midwest.

As Annka Liepold, Ph.D. student at the University of Munich in Germany, began researching her dissertation on the history of corn in the Midwest, one small town kept popping up – Olivia. Through her research she learned all about the city's history with corn, including all the seed plants and the massive agriculture operations that call the city home. So, when she came to Minnesota to dig into the University of Minnesota's archives, she also took the opportunity to visit the town she had heard so much about. The fact that it was Corn Capital Days, a festival to celebrate the city and its relationship with corn, just made it all the more perfect.

"Everyone here depends on corn," explained Liepold. "It keeps the town up and running."

While she visited Liepold talked with many people about the city, corn and how the two have grown together.

"It was a good choice, picking Olivia. I've learned many things," said Liepold. "Being here opens a lot of opportunities."

Much has been said about corn, from genetic research and hybrids to its place in the national food chain. But, Liepold hopes to uncover more about the effect corn has had on society as a whole. In Olivia, Liepold saw first hand how the city and its residents relate to corn, going so far as to call the city the Corn Capital.

"Here they have a very positive view on corn," Liepold said of the people in Olivia. It is a change from all the demonization corn sometimes gets in the national and international press.

It was also a pleasant surprise to see Olivia faring so well, in a time when many small towns are struggling to stay afloat.

"I think it is a healthy environment, from what I see,"

Liepold  
Turn to page A2

## Liepold

Continued from page A1

said Liepold.

Liepold was hosted by Olivia Librarian Allison Girres and received help from many people, including Dick Hagen.

"She has been an excellent host," Liepold said of Girres, adding Hagen was also a key figure in her visit. She was thrilled by the residents' interest in her work and how happy they were to help her out.

"The people are so open and helpful," said Liepold. "I've been honored by all the help."

Another honor she wasn't expecting took place Sat., July 26 in front of the library. Liepold was given the key to the city by Mayor Sue Hilgert, who welcomed Liepold to the Corn Capital.

"I'm very excited," Liepold said before receiving the key and other Olivia goodies, including a Corn Capital Days t-shirt and a stapler. "I'm thrilled to be such a welcome guest here."

For Liepold, who was an American Studies major during her undergraduate years, focusing on corn during her graduate studies was somewhat of a stretch.

"I grew up three doors down from a farm," but wasn't a farm girl herself, said Liepold.

Instead her topic came to her through research.

"I stumbled upon it," as she was looking for her master's dissertation topic, Liepold shared. She wanted to focus on a food subject in the United States and corn kept popping up.

"I was just fascinated," said Liepold.

She found it interesting that the corn chain touches so much and is grown so widely through the country, though it is mostly used as a non-food crop. The United States, like Germany, is a grain based society, but corn is vital in the livestock industries and is becoming more important on the energy market.

"The plant itself has always been a Guinea pig," said Liepold.

In Germany corn is not a major crop, though its popularity is growing due to ethanol and other biomass energy opportunities. The German government has begun to subsidize the crop, as it is here in the United States, and more and more German farmers are turning to the crop.

Her dissertation is also showing Liepold how farming as a whole has changed in the United States, right along with corn.

"Agriculture has gone through a lot of changes," said Liepold. Now huge corporation farms are taking over the role of smaller, family-run farms and there are more corporate interests and environmental activists. "They're still growing food, but the changes are amazing."

Liepold hopes her research will help Germany as it embarks on this new agriculture path, perhaps help the farmers avoid a few of the pitfalls American farmers had to deal with.

"It really changes the landscape," said Liepold.

Liepold was only in Olivia for five days, before she returned to the University of Minnesota for more archive

work. She'll be returning to Germany shortly, but she will be back in the United States next year. She will be spending a term at the University of Kansas in Lawrence, again connected to her research.

Her visit to Olivia was a success, giving her a lot of information for her paper and the city was more than happy to host her. If Liepold ever wants to come back and visit she'll be more than welcome. Besides, she has the key to the city.