

Whiteclay beer sales drop

Alcohol is not allowed on the Pine Ridge Reservation. Yet, only a few miles away from Pine Ridge, millions of cans of beer are sold each year in Whiteclay, NE – most of which are illegally smuggled into the reservation.

Regular protests have been held in Whiteclay because of the amount of beer sold in its liquor stores and the unsolved deaths of two Native Americans in Whiteclay in 1999. Whiteclay has a population of 14 people and sold about 4.9 million cans of beer in 2010.

Activists say that the beer sales in Whiteclay are contributing to the high rate of alcoholism on the poverty-stricken reservation and have called for closing the liquor stores in the tiny Nebraska town that lies just outside the reservation boundaries.

The Oglala Sioux Tribe last year filed a federal lawsuit that sought \$500 million in damages from the Whiteclay stores, their distributors and big-name beer manufacturers. A judge dismissed the lawsuit, saying the tribe didn't have a legal case.

Efforts to curtail beer sales through the Nebraska legislature likewise have gone nowhere. A bill introduced this year that would have increased the state's beer excise tax by 5 cents a gallon

to help law enforcement, including better policing in Whiteclay, was killed in committee earlier this month.

Despite these defeats, there is some signs of progress. A report by the Nebraska liquor control commission showed that Whiteclay beer sales continued to fall last year, with 3.9 million cans of beer sold. That's at drop of about 1 million cans of beer since 2010.

Activists have attributed the decline in beer sales to increased awareness of Whiteclay and the efforts of Pine Ridge residents to discourage drinking.

It isn't enough to make alcohol illegal on the reservation, attitudes toward drinking have to change if progress is to be made to reduce or eliminate the damaging effects of excessive alcohol consumption on the reservation, where one in four children are born with fetal alcohol syndrome or fetal alcohol spectrum disorder.

Nearly 4 million cans of beer sold in one year in one tiny Nebraska town is still a lot of beer. But the trend toward less beer smuggled into the Pine Ridge Reservation from Whiteclay is heading in the right direction.

– Rapid City Journal, March 26, 2013

Thank you, Sen. Johnson

These days, we would say he's "got our back."

For 28 years, Sen. Tim Johnson, D-SD, has had the back of South Dakotans in Congress.

He has helped secure money for the Lewis & Clark water development project, fought for country-of-origin labeling for meat and voted in favor of Social Security and other programs for seniors. He favored the farm bill and conservation efforts and was an ally of the state Indian tribes. He also worked in conjunction with the state delegation to secure money for the downtown railroad relocation in Sioux Falls and to save Ellsworth Air Force Base from budget cuts. A moderate Democrat, he's worked on thousands of smaller things for individual constituents and the state as a whole.

In between the work in Washington, where he was named Senate banking chairman, he has kept in contact with South Dakotans and continued to feel like he was "one of us." He's a South Dakotan who traces his roots back for generations, a University of South Dakota graduate and a hard, often behind-the-scenes, worker.

Although his speech changed and he uses a scooter for mobility after a brain hemorrhage in 2006, he — along with a well-chosen, experienced staff — worked as hard as he could for South Dakota. And people re-elected him, just

like they had time and time again. He never lost a statewide election.

Most politicians have detractors, and granted some don't always appreciate Johnson. In recent years, he has been less visible in the state, for example.

On Tuesday, our senior senator said he will retire after serving out his term until 2015. He's 66, and it's time to plan for a slower pace with his wife, Barbara, and their grandchildren. He'll come home to South Dakota to live but might spend some winter months in Virginia as well, he said.

Before he goes, Johnson has some work he'd like to finish and he has a laundry list of priorities with a promise that he will continue to work hard to make the people of South Dakota proud. We encourage those efforts. His announcement is the beginning of a long campaign to fill his seat, and we need a senator who will remain attentive and engaged for the people of South Dakota.

While there still will be almost two years before Johnson leaves his Senate post, today it's appropriate to thank him for his generosity of time, knowledge, commitment and grace to a state that benefited from his work.

– Argus Leader, March 26, 2013

LETTER TO THE EDITOR POLICY

The Plain Talk encourages its readers to write letters to the editor, and it asks that a few simple guidelines be followed.

Please limit letters to 300 words or less. Letters should deal with a single subject, be of general interest and state a specific point of view. Letters are edited with brevity, clarity and newspaper style in mind.

In the sense of fairness and professionalism, the Plain Talk will accept no letters attacking private individuals or businesses.

Specific individuals or entities addressed in letters may be given the opportunity to read the letter prior to publication and be allowed to answer the letter in the same issue.

Only signed letters with writer's full name, address and daytime phone number for verification will be accepted. Please mail to: Letters to the Editor, 201 W. Cherry St., Vermillion, SD 57069, drop off at 201 W. Cherry in Vermillion, fax to 624-4696 or e-mail to david.lias@plaintalk.net.

VIEWPOINTS



‘I have no idea why I’m here’

“If the infinity of the sea may call out thus, perhaps when a [person] is growing old, calls come to him, too, from another infinity ... more deeply mysterious; and the more ... wearied by life the dearer are those calls...” – Henryk Sienkiewicz, 1842-1916, polish journalist, 1905 Nobel Peace Prize winner for literature

MY STORY YOUR STORY



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itself, her stature is much slighter.

“Have a seat, Genevieve,” the receptionist loudly instructs the woman, who replies by humming the next bar of music.

As the aide turns toward the sea of seats in the waiting area, I catch a glimpse of the old woman's face. Bright eyes defy her weathered skin, which descends in flaps and folds around her forehead, cheeks and neck. Rings of flesh, creased like keepsakes in a scrapbook, aptly recall struggles and strife over the span of her sojourn of what could be some 90 years or more.

The young aide heads toward the waiting room, guiding Genevieve, who cautiously follows, light-footed, almost childlike shuffling along, toe and heal, toe and heal. Carrying her along in perfect harmony is that melody, cradling her in the past.

The two plop down in adjoining seats. The aide, whom I imagine is fulfilling her employment duties, holds Genevieve's hand, and then with the other raises her phone to her face, chuckling over an inaudible but apparently engaging string of text messages.

All the while, Miss Genevieve contentedly continues her trilling, fullthroat now. It's as though she is keeping time with a choir set back in her freedom days, during her before-life, a place where she was independent, not having to rely on anyone's strength or direction but her own.

Yet, when the nurse announces her name as the next patient to enter the exam room, Genevieve's frailty and forgetfulness are on display when she spouts the only words I heard her speak, “I have no idea why I'm here.”

As I observe this lovely old lady, who is wearing a daintily flowered jacket over a starched collared blouse, slacks with creases straight down the front of her pant legs and shiny penny loafers, I surmise she once was in a church choir, a music instructor or a soloist.

I wonder about her children, perhaps old themselves. Have moved on? Or who knows, maybe they've already passed from this life.

For this former pillar, I presume, lovingly caressing tunes now waltz with her, as she travels into and out of reality, back and forth in time.

The music calling Genevieve stands as an immutable value upon value, blessing upon blessing.

Music has procured her a place, anchoring her into being, ratifying her old age. Duly noted here.

PULPIT REFLECTIONS

A gift of a phone call

By Deacon Denny Davis
St. Agnes Parish

For those who do not know me, I am Deacon Denny Davis from St. Agnes Parish here in Vermillion, and I have been asked to write for the pastor's column today and I appreciate the opportunity.

When I was thinking and reflecting on the scripture readings around this Good Friday and Easter Sunday time, I received a phone call from a wonderful pastor here in town about a woman who had just moved to Sioux City and needed help with the move.

This woman has nothing but her two children and a small amount of belongings, but no other support either here or in Sioux City. I told the pastor that I would call her and see what I could do.

When I called I discovered this woman who didn't even have a way to get back to Vermillion to show me what she needed. She and her two small children were in a shelter where they slept on the floor and needed to get all her belongings to Sioux City so she could start a new life.

If she lost her belongings, she would have to start all over again without the means to do so.

After talking to her, I realized that this was Jesus carrying her

cross alone and falling on her journey. All I could do, like Simon of Cyrene, was to pick up that cross and walk with her and her children.

Brother and sisters, I think the stories we read during this holy season have to become that real for us. Otherwise it becomes just another church season with rituals and what I call “smells and bells” but never really gets into our lives today, in this place, right now.

Jesus never said “worship me.” He said “follow me,” and I think he meant it. In our Catholic tradition we have a new pope who I think has begun already to show us what we as Christians are called by the Gospel to do with the “least of these.” (Matt. 25)

We all strive to follow the same God in our Judeo-Christian tradition. Our pope is a universal spiritual leader, not because he is catholic, but because he also is seeking the truth through wisdom as we all are on this journey called life.

I am so grateful for the gift of that pastor's call about this woman. It was not just a call to help one who is obviously poor, but a call for me to always strive to walk in “the way.” Isn't that what all of our religion is for? May compassion bring us all together as “one.”

Moving investigations ‘out of infancy’

South Dakota Secretary of Corrections Dennis Kaemingk told The Daily Republic for a story published Saturday that the DOC's use of social media to locate walkaway inmates and parole absconders is “in its infancy.”

It's time to make the effort grow up.

In October, Kent Davidson, 36, left a DOC facility where he was serving his parole. He never came back. The DOC issued the usual alerts to law enforcement in an effort to locate him, to no avail.

Then, earlier this month, Davidson's name popped up in the news when the state Attorney General's Office sought the public's help in locating him for questioning regarding a homicide in rural Chamberlain. In short order, Davidson turned up in Sioux Falls and surrendered to authorities after a standoff.

After being told Davidson's name, staffers in The Daily Republic newsroom began researching him on the Internet. They found that his Facebook page was public and contained all manner of details about his life and whereabouts over the previous five months, including his engagement to Mitchell resident Crystal Schulz, whose body was found earlier this month and sparked the manhunt for Davidson.

We should point out that although authorities have called Schulz's death a homicide and have questioned Davidson about it, the crime remains under investigation and he has not been charged with playing any role in the death. Authorities have repeatedly said charges of some kind are anticipated.

We also should mention that we do not blame Kaemingk or the DOC for Davidson's actions, whatever those actions were. Davidson was the one who chose to violate his parole.

We do blame the DOC, though, for not being more advanced in its use of social media to locate walkaways and absconders. If anybody with a computer and a Facebook account could learn so much about Davidson in so little time, there's no reason the DOC shouldn't be doing the same.

– The Daily Republic, March 27, 2013