

# VIEWPOINTS

# Another problem to solve

I've lived in Vermillion long enough to learn that we are a community of progressive people. We respect the efforts made by citizens in the past to make our city a fine place to live.

And we have a fairly positive history of addressing problems, when they arise, and fixing them.

Many of the things that make the Vermillion community unique – things that came about because of the dedication and hard work of past generations – have or are in the process of wearing out. They grow obsolete as time marches on.

The city has a pretty good track record of recognizing when the community's needs are no longer being met, and doing something about it.

Work was already underway on The Bluffs Golf Course when my family moved here. I did have a chance to golf at the old course while The Bluffs was still under construction, and was able to experience, firsthand, the old course's cow pasture-like qualities – a trait that certainly isn't appealing when communities near Vermillion had much more challenging and enjoyable courses to offer.

Not all of the improvements that have been made in Vermillion have come easily. The idea of building a new fire station sparked controversy, as did the lengthy, time-consuming and at times bitter process the community endured to finally house city government in a state-of-the-art newly constructed city hall.

One of the city's latest improvements – the expansion and remodeling of the city library – was accomplished with practically no perceived resistance. That may be due to a rather mutual opinion throughout the community that the facility was not meeting the community's growing needs. Step into the library today, and one has to wonder why it took so long for those improvements to be made.

There's a new item that's been added to Vermillion's to-do list: a new swimming pool.

The present pool in Prentis Park is about five decades old and has, for several years now, shown its age. It leaks. A lot. This summer, park and recreation department staff estimated that about 10,000 gallons leaked out of the pool every day.

It's not just water that was lost and had to be replaced daily this summer. A significant amount of the chemicals used to treat the water to make it safe for swimmers also flowed away on a daily basis over the past three months.

Vermillion Parks and Rec Director Jim Goblirsch, who hasn't been on the job for very long, has brought a fresh perspective as he reviews this latest challenge the city must face. You can read a bit more about it elsewhere in this edition of the *Plain Talk*.

Clearly, the problems with the swimming pool can't be ignored any longer, and we commend city leaders and staff for the action that's been taken so far as they look ahead.

It's a job they shouldn't, and really can't, do alone. All of the great things that have happened in Vermillion over the past two decades came about because of citizen involvement and support.

We know the public has been involved in the overall process of trying to determine how to best solve the swimming pool problem.

We encourage Vermillionites to continue to be model citizens. The pool is, simply put, yet another "problem" that needs solving. Please lend your input to the mayor, members of the city council, and staff of the city parks and recreation department to help them plan the best solution.

## BETWEEN THE LINES



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# Public libraries: Check out books, movies and people?

*"I have always imagined that Paradise will be a kind of library." – Jorge Luis Borges, writer*

Building a new library has been on Deb Matthys' bucket list for who knows how long. As the director of a local community library, for years Deb, her staff and patrons have had to move back and forth among several disjointed rooms in a makeshift library at city hall.

"Finally, we will have real bookshelves," Deb sighed when announcing the groundbreaking for the city's first-ever free-standing library, slated for completion next spring.

Although, while her present library digs are not the most desirable, Deb hasn't let it stop her from being the answer place for the general public.

"We are much more than a place to check out books, movies and e-readers," she explained. "We are a total resource center. Whatever you are looking for," she said, "we will locate it for you."

Come to find out, Deb's philosophy is spot on with what's trending in twenty-first-century libraries across the nation and around the world. Libraries today are vibrant centers for learning, entertainment, discovery, exploration and even gaming.

According to a National Public Radio report, titled "At Libraries Across America, It's Game On," Aug. 11, "about 15 percent of libraries in the U.S. currently lend games to cardholders to take home.

Offering gaming has increased circulation of books by 15 to 20

## MY STORY YOUR STORY



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percent at the Houston Public Library, which has several Nintendo Wiis, Xboxes, Nintendo DSs, iPads, PlayStations and big-screen TVs. With gaming as a primary draw of services, young and old alike are spending more time at the library, noted Sandy Farmer, manager of the Houston Library's youth services.

"Families come — parents have things to do on the computers, because a lot of the families don't have computer access at home, so the kids have some things to do and while they're here," Farmer explained. "They find out, 'There's Superman. I can read Superman.'"

This reinvention of library services doesn't stop there. Get a load of what's for check out at the Surrey City Centre Library, Surrey, British Columbia, Canada. People! As a part of the human library program, users request experts on such topics as health, disability, religion and immigrations – you name it. And then, volunteers chat with patrons at the library café. However, this concept isn't unique to Surrey, as many libraries across Europe have established human libraries.

In addition to what you'd expect to see – volumes of books, racks of magazine and journals, computers and study areas, some libraries today

have kids' play rooms, meditation rooms, coffee houses – and meals? That's right – hot and cold meals are being offered at the Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County, Ohio. In June alone, Cincinnati, Ohio, library branches served more than 5,000 lunches for children to try and fill the local hunger gap.

"This wonderful collaboration between the public library, Cincinnati Public Schools and Window Arts Enrichment allowed us to help fill the crucial nutritional needs of children while also offering opportunities for literacy programs enabling kids to stay more focused and attentive," said Maria Sferra, a regional manager for the library system. "Consequently, they also become better readers."

There's more. After Hurricane Sandy, the Greenwich Library opened its doors to nearly 5,000 residents who had lost power and heat in their homes. "Under normal circumstances, our libraries are places for education and entertainment," said director Carol A. Mahoney. "In times of need, we are safe havens, offering everything from outlets to charge electronic devices and Internet access, to a cafe serving simple meals and snacks."

Warm and welcoming places to relax, meet friends and get advice, sources of brain food and real food – long live libraries!

Sources: surreylibraries.com, library history buff.com, ilovefairfield.com, libraryjournal.com, npr.org, floridatoday.com, cincinnati.com

## 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.

## PLAIN TALK POLL RESULTS

**The South Dakota State Fair will be held Aug. 29 through Sept. 2 in Huron. Do you plan to attend?**

No	60
Yes	10
Undecided	5
Total Votes	75

To participate in the Plain Talk's weekly poll, log on to [plaintalk.net](http://plaintalk.net).

# After 32 years of service, Larson gets 2 more

By Bob Mercer  
State Capitol Bureau

When Vern Larson was forced from statewide office, for a second time, by term limits, he needed something to do.

That's why the longest-serving constitutional officeholder in the history of South Dakota spent the past few summers working at the I-90 rest stop near his hometown of Vivian.

He greeted tourists and helped with travel plans. He grew a soul patch, too, to commune with the motorcycle riders – "bikers" – rumbling through.

Such was retirement. There are solid reasons for term limits. And, it's what a majority of South Dakota voters wanted in 1992.

Constitutional officers can't serve more than two consecutive four-year terms in the same office. Legislators can't serve more than four consecutive two-year terms in the same chamber.

Then there is Vern Larson, who is an example of what's wrong about term limits.

Vern liked going to work daily at the state Capitol. Forced from office,

he stayed his first winter in Arizona and didn't enjoy it. He turned 64 last Oct. 25 and went back for a second winter.

This time, he liked it. But he missed winter and legislative session at the Capitol.

When he ran for statewide office in 1978, as the Republican candidate for auditor, he grew a moustache to make him look more mature than his 30 years. He won, kept the moustache and kept winning.

Altogether Vern won election for auditor six consecutive times. The fifth came in the 1994 election, two years after voters adopted term limits. In his sixth run, in 1998, Democrats didn't run a candidate against him.

That reportedly was the first time a constitutional officer went unchallenged on the South Dakota ballot.

Term-limited in 2002, Vern decided to try something new. He ran for state treasurer and won. He was re-elected in 2006, without an opponent again.

Last week, Vern Larson came back to the Capitol – this time, to a third constitutional office.

Earlier this year, Jarrod Johnson gave his resignation as state commissioner of school and public

lands. That led to two phone calls to Vern.

The first came from Dusty Johnson, the governor's chief of staff, inquiring about Vern's interest and availability. The second came from Gov. Dennis Daugaard, offering the appointment effective Aug. 15 when Jarrod left.

Vern happily accepted. He doesn't plan to run for election in 2014. Instead he'll serve until after a new commissioner is chosen by voters next November.

He said the office was left in "excellent" condition.

Vern took the oath of office Thursday morning in the state Supreme Court chamber from Chief Justice David Gilbertson, who called him "an old friend."

Among the various Cabinet and elected officials in the room was a fellow in the back: Rob Swanson, one of the first people the then-new auditor hired back in 1979.

Vern Larson publicly thanked the governor, mentioned Rob and said his office door is open. "I'm looking forward to the opportunities and the challenges," he said.

Fifteen minutes earlier, he chatted with some reporters.

"It's good to be back," he said.



Vermillion  
Since 1884 • Official County, City and School District Newspaper  
201 W. Cherry, Vermillion, SD 57069 • Publication No. USPS 657-720  
Publisher: Gary Wood • Editor: David Lias  
Published weekly by YANKTON MEDIA, Inc. • Periodicals postage paid at Vermillion, SD 57069.  
Subscription rates for the *Plain Talk* by mail are \$27.56 a year in the city of Vermillion.  
Subscriptions in Clay, Turner, Union and Yankton counties are \$41.34 per year.  
Elsewhere in South Dakota, subscriptions are \$44.52, and out-of-state subscriptions are \$42.  
POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Plain Talk, 201 West Cherry Street, Vermillion, SD 57069.

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