

Community Welcome Celebrations In Full Swing

BY SARAH WETZEL
For the Plain Talk

As University of South Dakota students, faculty and Vermillion residents are returning from summer vacation, it seems fit to celebrate.

Community and University events were held this week beginning with a business fair on campus Wednesday.

“At this event, you can highlight your business, pass out coupons, candy, etc., advertise for positions that you may be hiring for, etc.,” said Lindsay Sparks, Director of Transitions and Student Programming.

Businesses also had another chance to cater to the student population Thursday downtown as students had the opportunity to ‘Explore Vermillion.’

The event was meant to connect students with the businesses in town and encourage them to come downtown to Main St.

“Some of you may remember Coyote-Bash from a few years back; this is an updated version of that event that fits within the students’ academic schedule,” Sparks said.

Businesses were invited to have giveaways and prizes as students rocked out with a DJ and had fun on inflatables.

The street was closed to make way for



SARAH WETZEL/FOR THE PLAIN TALK
Sanford Health and the Dakota Hospital Foundation hosted a community celebration Wednesday featuring a free dinner, activity tables and inflatables.

the festivities.

“To encourage students to visit as many businesses as possible during this event, we will have raffle tickets for each participating business to give to students that will allow them to participate in raffle drawings

throughout the night for things like VermillionBucks, an iPad mini, movie tickets, and much more,” Sparks said.

Another celebration was held Wednesday which was more community-based.

The Dakota Hospital Foundation and Sanford Vermillion teamed up to hold their annual Community Celebration featuring activity tables, inflatables and food.

“The first year we did it, we had one or two new physicians who had just started and we used it as a welcome event for them and just a thank you to the community,” said Mary Merrigan, marketing director at Sanford Vermillion. “It went really well so we decided we wanted to continue doing this each year. We’ve been doing it pretty much in August every year since then.”

Guests enjoyed bouncy houses, activities by the Great Plains Zoo Express and the Sanford Arts program plus a delicious meal of taverns, chips, lemonade and ice cream for dessert.

“We’ve had Great Plains Zoo Express coming for a number of years and that’s always a really fun table for people to check out,” Merrigan said. “Also our Sanford Arts program has been with us for a couple of years and they always have some sort of art activity for the adults and for the kids and that’s really fun to see that activity taking place too.”

According to Merrigan, the Vermillion

school district has been more than accommodating.

“We love having it at the high school,” she said. “It’s such a great setting. We so appreciate the school district letting us use their space. We use the lawn out front and the commons area and it just works out really nicely with plenty of parking. We’ve served close to 350 each year. It seems to grow every year a little bit.”

Though there was plenty of fun to be had, Merrigan said it is just as fulfilling to sit and visit.

“It’s just a lot of fun and a great way for us to see community members and visit with people if they have any questions,” she said. “Of course right now we’re in the middle of our construction project for the hospital so a lot of people have questions about what’s happening with that and it gives our board members for the Dakota Hospital Foundation a chance to visit with folks too.”

According to Merrigan, the event was a gift to the community.

“It’s just something that between the hospital foundation and Sanford Vermillion we host it between the two,” she said. “It’s something we plan for every year and we’re just happy to do it because it’s a fun way to bring the community together and just enjoy the evening.”

Vineyard

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Sturgis wine. They liked our design and they liked the fact that we were South Dakota’s first winery. Once we were named the official wine we had like a month to produce the wines.”

He said that first year, because of the limited time frame, Valiant Vineyards partnered with Napa Wine Company out of Napa, California to produce the wines because they couldn’t produce them fast enough. Bottles of that first year of the vertical series (a series of wines based on vintage years) are currently are selling for \$700.

“People have really enjoyed collecting the series of wines,” Nygaard said. “To purchase the entire 15 year series prior to this year’s wines were going for \$1,750.”

He noted that some even purchase cases of the wines to give as gifts.

“Our affiliation with Sturgis really launched me,” he said. “Each year it grows. This year our sales of the Full Throttle Cabernet are up more than 500 percent over last year.”

The Full Throttle Cabernet was developed seven years ago.

“Mike Ballard, the owner of the largest biker bar in the world, Full Throttle, approached me and said he had space available and asked if we would be interested in forming a partnership,” Nygaard said. “He had the space available to build our own bar. So, we came to a royalty agreement and designed the cabernet. It is a higher alcohol content wine because we pair it with South Dakota brandy, to make it ‘Full Throttle’.”

Nygaard said his son Leif, a master vintner and distiller in his own right, designed the wine, which received 92 points and a gold medal from the Tasters Guild Of America.

However, with all of the accomplishments tied to the western part of the state including opening a second winery, Stone Faces, Nygaard said he is very proud of what has been accomplished locally right here in Vermillion.

“We just have very close ties to the community and to the university,” he said. “We have employed more than 260 people here, a great many of them have been university students.”

He said the vineyard has hosted more than 150 weddings and the hotel has provided a home base for many people who visit the community regularly.

“We had one couple who had two students attend USD,” he said. “They made Valiant Vineyards their home away from home. Every time they came to visit their children, they stayed here.”

With this weekend’s 12th annual Great Dakota Wine Festival set for Saturday and Sunday, Nygaard said he hopes people come out and enjoy the relaxing atmosphere.

“We will have the wine tasting and tours, as well as music, but we will also have distilled spirits and more,” he said.

Other events will include education sessions about locally grown grapes, cooking wine demonstrations, an amateur wine making competition, arts and crafts vendors and grape stomping.

For more information about the festival go to <http://www.valiantvineyards.us/Events.html>.



COURTESY PHOTO BY CHAD CABLE

The Great Dakota Wine Festival set for this weekend at Valiant Vineyards. Part of the fun will include stomping of the grapes. Other events will include education sessions about locally grown grapes, cooking wine demonstrations, an amateur wine making competition and arts and crafts vendors.

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