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PLAIN TALK

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Volume 127, Issue 49
USPS 657-720



Friday,
December 7, 2012
75¢



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INSIDE:

- City to remove landfill building, Page 02
- Local unit has new leader, Page 02

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After a two-week moving period, the Vermillion Public Library re-opened Nov. 19, giving patrons their first glimpse into the newly-construct portion of the building.

(Travis Gulbrandson/Vermillion Plain Talk)

Workers begin renovation of existing library structure

By Travis Gulbrandson

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For close to three weeks now, patrons of the Vermillion Public Library have had the opportunity to get their first inside look at the building's new expansion.

And while it offers such incentives as lots of natural light, increased

space and a fireplace, the project isn't finished, as the older portion of the building is now being renovated.

"It's a bit crowded right now because we had to move everything into (the new) area," City Manager John Prescott said. "Once the entire building has been renovated, then we will be moving a lot of those items back."

Despite the close quarters, Prescott encourages Vermillion residents to come and check it out.

"This will provide an opportunity for people to see the new main floor," he said. "We have bookshelves, there's the fireplace, the seating area, the restrooms – all of that is newly constructed."

The opening came on the heels of

a two-week period in which the library was closed, and all the materials from the old building were moved into the new portion, either on shelves or in basement storage.

"In that time, we moved everything – and I mean everything," said library director Jane Larson. "All the staff pitched in and helped. They all shelved, they all moved items. We

moved all our desks in here. Everybody had to set up their own work area again, and help hook up all the computers.

"We did not get Internet or phone until Monday morning when we opened, and the phones came on at five minutes to 10, and we got

■ LIBRARY, Page 11

Simunek leading holiday drive for local vets

Bring items to Plain Talk office

By Travis Gulbrandson

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One USD student is doing her part to ensure that homeless South Dakota veterans have a happy holiday season.

Miss South Dakota candidate Autumn Simunek, a sophomore majoring in music education, is heading up a drive to collect items those veterans and their families for when they gain a permanent residence.

"In the Miss South Dakota program, we all have personal platforms, and mine is 'Serving Those Who Served,'" Simunek said. "I do a lot of volunteering for veterans and advocating for them, being their voice when they can't have one."

The drive began on Dec. 1 and will continue through Dec. 13, with the Plain Talk office acting as local drop-off point.

The donations will be taken to the Veterans Outreach office in Sioux Falls, and will be distributed to veterans from there.



SIMUNEK

Among the items being sought for donation are towels, single-bed sheets, shower curtains, alarm clocks, hygiene products, four-person flatware sets, gift cards and household items, as well as winter coats, gloves and hats.

"The drive is just collecting necessities they need," Simunek said. "I think (the drive) is

■ VETS, Page 12

USD grad discusses Afghanistan successes

By Derek Bartos

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VERMILLION — "Nothing comes easy to the counterinsurgent."

That was the message of U.S. Army Capt. Christopher L. Mercado, a 2004 distinguished military graduate of the University of South Dakota, who spoke Nov. 28 at USD's Farber Hall about his experience combating insurgency in Afghanistan. Mercado was the company commander of the Bushmaster Company, 2nd Battalion, 18th Infantry Regiment during its counterinsurgency effort from February 2011 to February of this year in the Imam Sahib and Dast-e Archi districts of the Kunduz Province.

"Insurgency remains one of the most prevalent forms of conflict in the modern world," he said. "Combating insurgency is very difficult business, and finding solutions to these ambiguous problems requires committed teams consisting of outstanding soldiers and leaders."

Mercado said his company's efforts began well before its deployment in February 2011, as the soldiers underwent six months of training in Europe to prepare for the mission. Not only did they train physically, but they also had to create a campaign that had a chance to be successful, he said.

"The campaign plan we designed was to influence the people of Imam Sahib and Dast-e Archi through engagement, to choose the government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and Afghanistan's legitimate



U.S. Army Capt. Christopher L. Mercado speaks at the University of South Dakota Nov. 28 about his experience with counterinsurgency in Afghanistan. A USD graduate, Mercado led counterinsurgency operations in the Imam Sahib and Dast-e Archi districts of the Kunduz Province from 2011-2012.

(Derek Bartos/P&D)

national security forces over the Taliban," he said.

The company determined that to do this, it had to create a partnership with the Afghan Uniformed Police.

"Together with the local police, we would combat disinformation and propaganda with frequent meetings with village elders, mullahs and tribal leaders," Mercado said. "We wanted to be first with the truth and we wanted our

Afghan partners to be right there by our side."

Equally important was the company's mindset, he said. The company focused on discipline, strength, honor and fraternity.

"This is important because this mindset sets the conditions for effective counterinsurgency," Mercado said. "Maintaining a proper mindset is critical to bringing fence-sitters into the fold and to reconcile or reintegrate accidental or former gorillas."

When the company finally arrived in Afghanistan, it had to wait to implement its plan.

Mercado said the soldiers first had to build a combat outpost in Imam Sahib, as the commute from the current operating base to the company's area of responsibility was more than three hours. However, it had a small window to do so.

"Intelligence showed the insurgents fighting around Imam Sahib were not local. They had left the area for the winter months and weren't expected back until the start of the spring offensive," Mercado said. "We had a limited opportunity to build the outpost uncontested. If successful, I could literally build and seize the initiative from the insurgents and force them to fight on my terms. I could literally change the nature of the fight with the opening move and control the tempo with subsequent actions."

The Bushmaster Company took the gamble and began building the outpost in extreme conditions. The soldiers stayed on site, only traveling for supplies. They had no running water, no sewage and slept in the dirt.

■ USD, Page 12



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