

WHEEL

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Burbank, it could easily be ascertained that the county roads in places do indeed need repair.

But does that make this only a rural road issue?

"The thought that raising funds to help bring our county and township roads and bridges up to safety and quality standards is a 'rural' issue is a little naive," Packard said. "If one lives outside of Vermillion proper, I believe the need for additional road and bridge funds is obvious. If you live in Vermillion and drive to the Missouri River, the Vermillion Landfill, Spirit Mound or Sioux City you most likely have driven on federal, state, county, and township roads. Our USA road network was built through share responsibility. Now the cost of repair and upkeep needs to be shared.

"It is imperative to improve the roads and bridges outside of Vermillion to a standard that decreases tire and windshield damage. During the federal financial meltdown the counties were asked for 'Shovel Ready Projects' proposals. Clay County submitted approximately \$4.4 million in "shovel ready projects". The County was awarded approximately \$87,000. Shortly after the 'award' the state reversed the award due to their needs elsewhere and Clay County received nothing."

If a wheel tax is allowed to move toward and past Feb. 5, that would mean that the county would be eligible to receive additional funding from the state that will come to it via other tax measures over the next few years. It has been implied in recent state bill literature and in discussions with people like Powell, that if a county chooses not to keep or vote in a wheel tax they would become only eligible for the monies already allotted to them. This mean no additional funding would come via the new revenue, a loss of monies that could seriously devastate the Clay County commissioners' hopes of taking care of their roads.

"In the words of Senator Mike Vehle who has been quoted several times, 'if you produced it, a road moved it - not much is airlifted out,'" Powell said. "If you got it a road brought it - not much is parachuted in."

"The counties have not been funded to the extent they were years ago. The state legislature wisely

gave each county an opportunity to raise some funds on their own. They did not mandate a wheel tax. They gave each county the right to assess, at first a \$2 a wheel tax on no more than four wheels. In 1995 the option was to go up to \$4 wheel not to exceed four wheels."

Due to a lack of a wheel tax over the past two decades, Clay County has not received any additional funding it could have had. Now, they will be potentially shorted even more.

"Clay County has been shorting itself for over 20 years by not paying a wheel tax," Powell said. "The commissioners enacted the tax and the people voted it down at least twice. The state will not give us money we have refused to pay ourselves. "Senator Vehle stated to me after my suggestion to raise funding, 'you are a commissioner from Clay County and you are asking the state for fund and your county has repeatedly refused to pay its fair share?' I knew he was right."

Powell added that Clay County has avoided paying this tax for too long now and that in itself is a harbinger for potentially more bad news for the county's efforts to improve its roads.

"If it is voted down again then roads and bridges will not be rebuilt," Powell said. "The state has no intention of giving us money we should have been paying by way of the authority the legislature gave us. If you refuse to pay to maintain you home, farm, vehicles and equipment it will catch up and open your eyes. Any business that does not improve its operation and maintenance is most likely going to fail."

Why are the roads failing?

As money has become an issue over the years, thanks in large part to not having additional revenue through various taxes not being passed - i.e. the wheel tax - the county has struggled to keep up with the escalating use of its roads.

The all area of the state has boomed population-wise over the past 20 years and that means more travelers. More travelers means more use of roads and that means more wear-and-tear.

Thus the loss of revenue would directly impact that wear-and-tear as the funds weren't there to keep up in the race.

"Through the years the counties have received less and less federal and state funds for road and bridge repair," Packard said. "At

this same time the county has become responsible for more and more expenses over and above road and bridges. Veterans administration, 4-H , and court /law enforcement responsibilities have greatly increase while funding has been cut, eliminated, or laws passed in Pierre with unfunded mandates, which force the county government to increase spending on these and similar important areas.

"During past few years, Clay County has continually raised the budget dedicated to the highway department but the increase in repair costs and the continuous deterioration has only allowed the county to use a band aid approach. The resurfacing of 302 Street accomplished in 2010 nearly broke the county financially."

The roads, which begin and end at the corporate city limits of Vermillion, Wakonda, and Irene are now faced with a situation where the funds don't match the need.

That could mean the county would fall behind the deterioration of roads in and around Vermillion.

"Run down roads and bridges will drag down our economy, create excessive vehicle repairs and create a very unsafe transportation system," Powell said. "Sixteen dollars might mean a lot to some but it is a justified users' tax."

It's not wise to tell anyone how to spend their money or how much is not much, but when the cost benefits could lead to a lack of financial loss down the road that does mean something.

To some, a wheel tax would be akin to an insurance policy.

"I will say that to some folks anything added to the bills may be difficult but the \$16 annual expense and the result of improving roads is minimal when compared to the cost of a pack of cigarettes or a couple of beers, a bottle of wine or your cable bill per month," Packard said. "Compare South Dakota vehicle registration fees with neighboring state and we pay a quarter to a half of the costs. My daughter just paid over to \$300 to register her used car in Nebraska."

Next week The Plain Talk will further the discussion on the Wheel Tax when questions concerning how the potential road construction issues and the wear-and-tear of the roads could affect the Clay County landscape and if it could deter growth in the area.

SMITH'S

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framed and hung in the eating area of Mr. Smith's today.

"The best bread in the world is not in Paris," Amy Bloom of 'Oprah Magazine' wrote. "It's not in San Francisco, and it's not being made in some chic little bakery/art gallery in SoHo either. The best bread in the world is waiting for you right at the front of Jones' Food Center, 812 Cottage Avenue, in downtown Vermillion, South Dakota."

So what is the key to the bread's magic? "We all have to make dinner, so you might as well make it a nice one," Smith is quoted on the store's website. "But you never - in our culture - have to make bread. So to choose that, it's an act of giving. An act of love, I think. Every loaf."

The love and giving certainly paid off and as the popularity of Smith's bread grew, so did the menu.

"We did the bread and then we thought hey, these breads that Larry is making, they make fantastic sandwiches," Starr said. "We had a team get together and we created this menu and it's been hugely successful ever since."

This success is part of what carried Mr. Smith's through the remodel of the store as the grocery portion of the store prepared to close in 2012.

According to Starr, Jones' Food Center was open about 15 years before the company decided to expand the Ace Hardware portion of their store.

"Ultimately we decided to close the grocery store and move the hardware store over but we knew with the business that [Mr. Smith's] did, we had to keep that open somehow," Starr said. "So in looking at Target and some of those other places, you know merchandise stores, they operate with food service businesses. We thought we'll give this a try."

Since the expansion of the hardware store, Mr. Smith's has undergone a few changes including a major remodel about a year ago.

But there is one thing that has not changed.

"All of the breads that we use from this location were basically created by Larry Smith and these are the things that he did that caught the eye of Oprah Magazine," Starr said. "We bake these specialty breads from scratch. The breads take time, energy and passion."

It is more than just Smith's bread that makes him impressive.

"He has Parkinsons disease," Starr said. "He was diagnosed many years ago."

According to Starr, this could not keep Smith down.

"He has never once let this disease get the best of him," Starr said. "He is one of the most upbeat, one of the most inspirational gentlemen you'll ever meet. The way he treated the disease was by working here and baking breads and kneading the dough. He was the reason we said, 'We're naming this operation after you."

"You're the one that has been here. This is largely in honor of you and everything you've brought."

According to Starr, Smith still lives in the area but Parkinsons has not allowed him to work for a number of years.

"He has inspired so many people for so many years," Starr said. "He trained his people so well that they were able to carry on what he created."

So what does Mr. Smith's

offer?

"It's unique," Starr said. "You can go to any major sandwich shop in town. We do something different."

Customers of Mr. Smith's have many options to choose from as they choose either signature sandwiches and soups or customize their order by making the sandwich hot or adding garnishes, meats, vegetables and sauces.

And, of course, choosing bread.

"You gotta hang your hat on something special and these breads are what basically do it," Starr said. "These are items you're not going to find at your local Subway or Jimmy Johns. These are items that people recognize. There's a big difference in what we offer and that's why they keep coming back."

Customers can also choose to have Mr. Smith's come to them.

According to Starr, the dine-in vs take-out is about half and half.

"People call ahead and place orders, people eat here, people call in and we deliver it to them," Starr said. "It's kind of however you're feeling that day. Whatever it takes, we'll make it happen."

Once you find a favorite menu item, Starr says, you should switch it up.

"People come in and say my favorite is the Big Smith," he said. "Typically I'll get that on a Focaccia roll but I'll try it on this today. I'm going to try it hot, I'm going to try it cold. We allow people to try anything that they want."

The experience is apparently most of what keeps customers coming in, as there is no indication on the storefront that the building houses anything other than Ace Hardware and Wells Fargo.

"It's something that college kids come in, they experience, they tell others, others come in and they say oh my goodness you're not kidding," Starr said. "And let's be honest, the Oprah deal was something that really carried us. For many, many years we had people coming across the interstate saying 'Hey, here's the place they talked about in Oprah magazine. Let's go see what the fuss is all about,' and they come in and are blown away with what we offer."

According to Starr, quality is number one on Mr. Smith's priority list.

"We don't claim to be the cheapest out there but our quality is unmatched and that is why people keep coming back," he said. "It's one of those things that you get what you pay for. There's a lot of tender loving care that's put into these things. That's why people find us so interesting."

In a culture where everyone is concerned with 'what's next', Starr said part of coming up with the next best thing is listening to the customers.

"Customers feel like they can give us suggestions and a lot of the time we'll try it and if it works, we'll offer them," he said. "That's something we've always been a fan of since day one.

"A lot of our regulars know us well enough and we know them well enough that they're always talking to us," Starr said. "We know them on first-name basis and they know us and it's a partnership that has worked for a long time."

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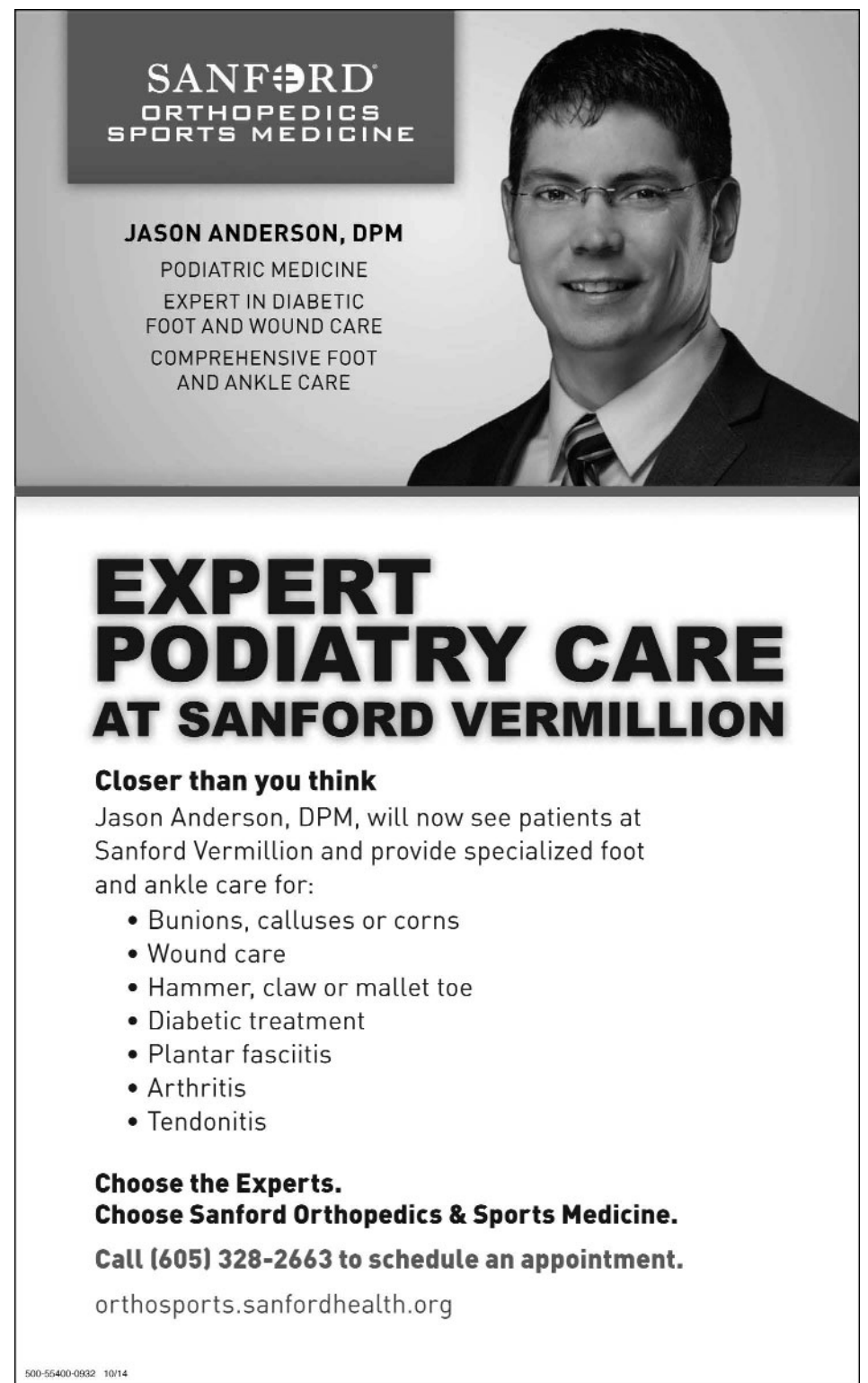
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