

Falling In Love With Art

BY SARAH WETZEL
For the Plain Talk

Virginia Johnson did not study art, at least not for her degree.

That has not stopped her from taking her natural talent and nurturing it.

Much of her artwork is currently on display temporarily in Sletwold Hall in the W.H. Over Museum.

"After I retired in 2009 I happened to pass by the University," she said. "I'm professor emeritus and when you're professor emeritus you have a few benefits so I called a professor and he said sure, just show up. So I showed up to his drawing class. I thought why not?"

Johnson also wanted to audit a painting class but it was full so she took her art instruction into her own hands.

"There was a small group that had been meeting for years," she said. "It was just half a dozen to a dozen people who met at the Episcopal Church on Main Street. We met every Thursday. That's how I got started. I bought books and books. It's something I never did pursue because you're a pre-med then you're in medical school then you're a resident."

Johnson was responsible for starting up a genetics program in the state which is now Sanford Genetics as well as a chromosome laboratory or genetics lab in the medical school.

Now, after being a wife, mother, geneticist and Professor, Johnson looked to continue her learning journey.

"I just decided to do something," she said. "I did drawing and painting and just got into it, learning on the fly. Acrylic was the medium I chose just because it's the medium that everyone tries first. That's what you try before you go into oils. I never got into oils because I got into acrylic and I was used to it."

But what to paint?
"I started with landscapes because landscapes are forgiving," she said.

"If a mountain is crooked nobody cares. If a tree has a missing branch or a crooked branch no one can tell. Flowers aren't perfectly symmetrical and you're supposed to put them kind of off to one side or the other. I tried to draw my granddaughters from a photograph but it was so hard. Faces have to look like you, not any old face but your face and that's so hard."

"I just got into still life because it's the easiest thing to do," she continued. "Just get some apples and pears



SARAH WETZEL/FOR THE PLAIN TALK

Art by the local Virginia Johnson is currently on display at the W.H. Over Museum. Many of the flowers she paints come from her own garden.

and put it on a table. I tend to take a picture and draw from the picture rather than drawing from a bunch of apples. The light changes."

Though the art group Johnson began with has since discontinued, she continues to learn on her own.

Johnson was particularly impressed by a book on how to paint more luminously.

"It was so precise and it taught me how to mix," she said. "You're actually mixing the color not on the palate but on the canvas. You put a little yellow and then you want green so you put blue next to the green. To make structure like a circle or a ball you put the color on the side and you do less and less. How you create shadow is by laying on the white and then a little pink and then more until you create a dark side value-wise."

Johnson has also taken her other interests into her painting.

"I kind of fell in love with flowers," she said. "I'm a gardener. I have

a good-size garden. Those daffodils are out of my garden. The thing about flowers is you can do all the colors. I did the whites much later because they're more challenging. To create form with white is a little difficult. When you think about it, it's not really white. It's the yellows and the grays that give it shape. Then I got into glass a bit, like the vase with the daffodils and the glass in the still life. I thought I could do it and I tried."

It takes Johnson a couple of weeks to finish each painting as she fits art into the other things she enjoys doing in her life such as exercise, meditation and playing bridge.

"I'm not rigid," she said. "I do three hours or four. I find I can't paint at night because the light isn't there. When I paint at night it's always beautiful. I have extra special fluorescent lights but the following morning the sun comes out and I don't like the colors."



COURTESY PHOTO

On Wednesday the following business leaders from Vermillion participated in Junior Achievements Excellence Through Ethics program. Pictured: Front L to R: Teddi Gertsma, Alexis Tracy, Jamie Neitzke, Kelsey Collier-Wise, Rachel Olson. Back L to R: Jon Pociask, Jerami West, Barb Goodman, Nate Welch, Crystal Brady, Tom Sorensen, Nick Olson, Craig Thompson. Not pictured: Mike Carlson, Layne Stewart - Coordinator.

Students Learn The Value Of Ethics Through Jr. Achievement

Junior Achievement partners with over 350 local business executives and community leaders across the state to prompt students to begin questioning their own set of Ethics. Through the JA Excelling through Ethics program, nearly 8,000 South Dakota middle and high school students will be challenged to think about the impact of their choices. These community members provide each student an opportunity to think critically about situations they may face in relation to ethics. The JA Excelling through Ethics program was created specifically for South Dakota students. The curriculum, along with the experiences of the volunteers, encourages students to begin thinking about their own personal set of ethics, morals, values, perspective, and character. Junior Achievement's efforts to inspire and prepare young people to succeed in a global economy are enhanced by offering an engaging experience through this program.

On Wednesday, Dec. 2, more than 250 Vermillion students participated in the program. Business executives and community leaders shared real life ethical decisions they have faced and talked about how they responded. Through these discussions, the students gained a better understanding of their responsibility to society, and comprehend the role ethics plays in the workplace and in life.

Junior Achievement of South Dakota President, Kayla Eitrem, said, "We are grateful for the time executives take to share their personal experiences and challenge the students to think about the impact of ethical decision making. JA realizes the impact of these discussions can benefit the students both now and in the future."

106th Annual State Oral Interpretation Festival Set For This Weekend In Sturgis

The first State Declamation Contest was held in 1910 as part of that year's State High School Track and Field Meet. In 1911, the first state-wide Declamation Contest was held independent of the State Track Meet. From those modest beginnings over 100 years ago the contest has evolved into the modern State Oral Interpretation Festival of today. This year students from 81 South Dakota high schools will compete in the 106th Annual SDHSAA State Oral Interpretation Festival on Friday and Saturday, December 4 and 5, in Sturgis at Sturgis Brown High School.

Vermillion students participating are: Brennan Stone and Ethan Simmons are partners who qualified in the Duet Interpretation event. Their performance is from a play titled, 13 Ways to Screw Up Your College Interview. The following students are part of a Readers Theatre group and they will be presenting a cutting from the musical Heathens: Erica Moen, Sophi Dudley, Libby Sykes, and Natalie Swanson. Erica Moen also qualified in the Non-original Oratory category. She will recite a speech titled "Here I Stand."

This year's State Interpretation Festival competitors have qualified for the Festival through a combination local school, district and regional competitions. The Festival will feature a combined total of 296 Class "AA", Class "A" and Class "B" entries. The Class "B" State Oral Interpretation Festival competitors were determined by advancing from one of the ten district contests to a Class "B" regional contest and advancing from their region contest to the State Festival. The Class "A" State Festival competitors qualified for the State Festival after advancing from one of five Class "A" regional contests. Class "AA" contestants have advanced to the State Festival as a result of intra-school competition in their own schools. The 2015 State Oral Interpretation Festival will showcase competitive performances by 91 entries from 13 Class "AA" schools, 104 entries from 30 Class "A" schools and 101 entries from 38 Class "B" schools.

Coming Together To Find Ways To Grieve

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The recent terrorist attacks in Paris have inspired many to do their part in showing their respect and support for those directly affected.

Some like Susan Heggstad of Vermillion have found unique ways to personally remember and honor victims of recent acts of terror.

Heggstad organized a candlelight memorial at Clay County park where she and a few fellow mourners set candles afloat in the river to honor the victims similar to the flower and candle ceremony that takes place on the Ganges River in India.

"My reasons for initiating this event are two-fold," Heggstad said. "I'd been feeling quite overwhelmed and saddened since the attacks in Paris, not knowing how to process those feelings. I was feeling especially saddened to have the realization that completely unaware of just how many terrorism-related deaths there have been recently, in other places in the world. This could be due to the fact these incidents are not



SARAH WETZEL/FOR THE PLAIN TALK

Everyone finds their own ways to cope with tragedy and Susan Heggstad of Vermillion decided to share her experience of honoring victims of recent terrorist attacks.

always being reported, or I'm not seeing the headlines, or that it's just so easy to block it out when it feels far away and there doesn't seem to be anything one can do about it, anyway.

"I'd been brainstorming ways that I could do something symbolic to help ease my grief," Heggstad continued. "I settled on floating some candles down the river as a way of recognizing those losses. I started looking into the numbers of deaths due to terrorism,

and found that there were several hundred for November alone. When a fellow church-member stood and asked the congregation to remember the victims of terrorism around the world in our prayers, I knew I had to share my fledgling idea with them, as well."

It is easy to feel overwhelmed and helpless, according to Heggstad, when one ponders the magnitude of these tragedies which occur more frequently than we might realize.

NOTICE TO CLAY COUNTY RESIDENTS

DETRIMENTAL USE OF RIGHTS-OF-WAY ALONG COUNTY HIGHWAYS IS ILLEGAL

Instances have come to the attention of the Clay County Highway Department of violations of South Dakota Codified Law 31-32-3.1, entitled **INTENTIONAL DUMPING ON HIGHWAY RIGHT OF WAY PROHIBITED**. This statute applies to all public highways, all County Highways, and Township Roads. The piling of snow on County Highways, or within the Right-of-Way thereof, causes a serious hazard to the traveling public and constitutes a Class 1 misdemeanor. These piles of snow can cause serious injuries or fatalities if struck by a vehicle. They also cost the County funds to remove or push back. Because the piles of snow can become very solid, and at times contain debris, serious damage to County snow removal equipment can occur.

The County can recover the cost of equipment damage from the individual responsible for the snow piles, SDCL 31-32-9. In addition, the person performing this misdemeanor also may be legally liable in the event of a vehicle accident. Please remove or flatten any piles you may have placed on public highways, as well as refrain from piling snow in the future.

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