

Parade Of Homes Celebrates With 'Night Before Christmas Style'

BY SARAH WETZEL
For the Plain Talk

The Clay County Historical Society is all set for their annual Tour of Homes which will take place today from 4:30-7:30 beginning at the Austin-Whittemore historical home on 15 Austin St. in Vermillion.

"They have to get through all the houses during that time then back here for refreshments," said Wess Pravecek. "We want those families to be able to join us for coffee if they want to as well. We do a little mini tour the night before only for the homeowners on the tour so they can go to each other's houses otherwise they miss out. So these wonderful sharing families can go on the tour themselves."

According to Pravecek this is one of the society's major fundraisers of the year.

"This year's theme is 'Twas the night before Christmas,'" she said. "We have four homes that are on the tour plus the historical house. Out of the goodness of people's hearts they open their homes to let people see how they celebrate the holiday with their families."

The homes on the tour are not necessarily historical according to Pravecek. "Last year the treasurer of our board had moved into a new apartment and people were curious to see what these new apartments looked like," she said. "Her apartment was decorated and it was part of the tour so these were not all historical houses. Some of the houses do have some history but some are only 15-20 years old. Her apartment was only one year old. These are houses that people agree to open their homes and you get to see how different families celebrate or decorate for the holidays, which is pretty fun."

The response for both attending the tour and having your home be part of it has



SARAH WETZEL/FOR THE PLAIN TALK
The Austin-Whittemore house, currently serving as museum and headquarters of the Clay County Historical Society will be the starting and ending point of the annual tour of homes.

grown.

"This is my second year working at the house and working on the tour," Pravecek said. "I'm just always tickled when people not only say they'll do it but they contact us and say they're interested because they know their house has some history and they want people to know about it. That's what makes this a successful community."

Tickets for the tour are \$15 apiece which should be purchased ahead of time, though there will be someone at the house all day today.

"We want to have some idea of how many people to prepare for because we're fixing the food," Pravecek said. "We'll have somebody here at the house all day if people want to buy tickets."

Refreshments will include cookies, meatballs and coffee.

"We'll have Santa Claus here," Pravecek said. "It's not to attract a bunch of kids because this isn't really a small child-friendly house but he'll be a special guest that will appear."

A newer development on the tour of homes is the option of going through by way of bus.

"We have a partnership with the Vermillion Transit Company and so 18 people can ride on the bus," Pravecek said. "We just started this last year."

As of last Friday there were only two seats left on the bus.

While tickets for the tour will be available at the Austin-Whittemore house, Nook 'n Cranny and

Vermillion Beauty Shop, bus tickets are only available at the house.

Pravecek has some fond memories of past tours.

"When I first moved back to Vermillion, it was in the 90's that I was a member and helped with the tour," she said. "It was a Scandinavian theme and I'll have to say that was awfully fun because I'm 100 percent Norwegian. We wore Norwegian costumes. It was really cool. The tree was decorated with straw ornaments and beautiful things of Scandinavian interest. Part of the state of South Dakota and Clay County was settled by Norwegians."

This year is no exception for the Austin-Whittemore house taking part in the theme.

"This year with 'The

night before Christmas' it's more of a kid theme so we just try to come up with something different and decorate accordingly and still leave room in the house for plenty of chairs for people to come and socialize when they're done with the rest of the tour," Pravecek said.

"We'll have a beautiful old sled on the front porch and skates and try to make it a warm, friendly Christmas place and just get people interested. That's the whole thing. We want to bring people in and see that this is a home and we're trying to keep it that way. The more people that can get involved the more fun it is."

"Not everybody has a big family so if they can come here and socialize with their friends and neighbors for

a little bit, that's one more place in the community people can feel welcome.

We are really hopeful the weather will cooperate. We'll make it happen."

Events like this are extremely important to the society.

"Since we're a nonprofit organization fundraising is very important to us," Pravecek said. "We raise money through membership and any fundraising event that we do."

Next Saturday, as a matter of fact, another popular fundraiser will take place at the Austin-Whittemore home.

"On the 12th we have our 'Sweets and Treats' bake sale," Pravecek said. "That goes from 10-1."

The high-quality bake-sale items will be donated from Clay County Historical Society members and locals that support the historical society.

"Sometimes I call people who aren't necessarily members but are good cookie bakers," Pravecek said. "These are beautiful baked items. It's been a really big success because people come here and they know they're going to find some beautiful top-notch goodies."

Anyone wishing to donate items should get them in by Friday according to Pravecek.

"We know people are going to be waiting on the porch at 10 to get in and buy," she said. "There are some pretty neat specialty items that people make like Norwegian cookies that people specifically look for and peanut brittle from Marion Krager. He's the best peanut brittle maker in town and he donates peanut brittle for us. These are really fun events that we like to have early in December so people can enjoy and start celebrating and at the same time support the Clay County Historical Society."

For more information, visit <http://www.cchssd.org/>.

Creating Holiday Traditions With Your Family

BY SARAH WETZEL
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For those looking to start some new holiday traditions or learn about old ones, here are a few ideas.

As far as food-centered traditions there's any number of traditions you can start and even mix and match.

Baking cookies is one example. This can easily be turned into a cookie-baking party after which the cookies can be delivered on a caroling trip.

Many families serve the same entree every year on Christmas.

Gingerbread houses are another fun tradition which can become as elaborate or as easy as you want. Gingerbread house kits are available at local stores. For those uncomfortable with actual gingerbread, graham crackers and royal icing make a great substitute.

The recipe for royal icing can be found online and includes only a few simple ingredients.

Another fun tradition is to read a special holiday books.

A personal tradition is to read 'The Christmas Box' by Richard Paul Evans or 'The Christmas Carol' by Charles Dickens.

'The Christmas Carol' makes a good short read-aloud book.

One that I am interested in checking out is 'The Greatest Gift,' a short story by Philip Van Doren Stern. This tale was the basis for the classic 'It's a Wonderful Life' movie.

Some personal favorite picture books involving Christmas are 'The Clown of God' by Tomie dePaola and 'the Polar Express' by Chris Van Allsburg.

Search the Vermillion Public Library's online catalog for more holiday book ideas at vermillionpubliclibrary.org.

Looking to the way the holidays are celebrated in other countries and religions is another way to find fun new traditions to start and also learn some history.

I have German relatives who would always send my family an advent calendar for Christmas.

Advent calendars usually involve doors or compartments which you open each day of December.

The compartments commonly con-

tain chocolate or other candy which wasn't always the case.

Advent calendars date back to 1851 with early designs containing candles or pictures.

Advent calendars began to be printed in 1908 by Swabian parishioner, Gerhard Lang. Some contained candies and others Bible verses.

Cardboard rationing during World War II cut back on the printing of the



calendars until 1946.

Chocolate-filled advent calendars weren't available until around 1958.

For more information see www.sellmer-verlag.de/history.htm or www.whychristmas.com/customs/25th.shtml

For low-budget holidays (or even high-budgets who want more fun) homemade Christmas decorations are the way to go.

While many families purchase a new ornament each year as a tradition, making yearly ornaments can be priceless.

For one method of making ornaments, mix equal parts salt and flour then add water to make into a dough. After you form your ornaments, bake at 200 degrees for three hours then use acrylic paint topped with acrylic gloss spray paint to finish.

Homemade snowflakes are also always a hit.

For free patterns visit http://www.firstpalette.com/tool_box/printables/snowflake.html.

Books on paper snowflake making are also available at the Vermillion

Public Library including 'ZooFlakes: ABC' by Will C. Howell and 'How to make a paper snowflake' by Angelina Winters.

There are also plenty of local organizations that offer volunteer opportunities for a giving-back holiday tradition.

The Vermillion Food Pantry is always looking for volunteers to assist clients directly, replenish stock and

clean up, sort food, driving to collect food donations from local businesses, or filling in when a regular volunteer can't come in.

For more information on the food pantry visit www.vermillionfoodpantry.org.

You can also benefit others by a seasonal de-cluttering. Usable items are always welcome to be donated at the Civic Council in downtown Vermillion. Proceeds from sales at Civic Council go back into the community and helping those in need.

For infant and toddler clothes and other items, Faith Fellowship of the Open Bible runs a baby closet which consists of a store of free items for mothers of young children to take as needed. Call 605-624-2921 for more information.

Another option is to organize a book drive to donate to a local school library or Department of Social Services.

It is also important to say thank you to those working the holidays including firemen, policemen and hospital staff with a plate of cookies or cards.

The holidays can also be a lonely time for those who are unable to travel like senior citizens. Those at Sanford Care Center appreciate volunteers to spend time with those residing there.

Though gifts are not the most important aspect of the holidays, it is fun to establish some gift-giving traditions.

In larger families especially, drawing names for gift-giving and setting a dollar limit makes Christmas shopping a little less overwhelming.

Gag gifts are also a fun tradition. It starts with someone giving a funny gift to a family member. Each year it is re-gifted to another unsuspecting someone.

As a fun Christmas Eve tradition, you can track Santa's progress through the North American Aerospace Defense Command at www.noradsanta.org.

VCDC Economic Development Assistant To Accepts New Position

Vermillion Chamber and Development Company is announcing that James Caraway, the Economic Development Assistant for the VCDC, has accepted a position as Business Development Manager for Sarpy County Development Co. and the Greater Omaha Chamber in Omaha, NE.

"We are sincerely sad to see James leave the VCDC and Vermillion," Nate Welch, VCDC Executive Director said. "He was instrumental in the VCDC having 100 percent of its land be approved for three Certified Ready Sites as well as beginning, launching and growing the Vermillion NEXT - (Young Professionals Network) to what it is today."

James came to Vermillion to complete his Masters and play one more year of eligibility for the Coyotes Football team, under recently retired Head Coach, Joe Glenn. He began working for the VCDC as the Economic Development Assistant in September of 2014.

"I'll be forever grateful to Vermillion, and especially those at the VCDC who have helped me get to this point where an opportunity like this is available," said Caraway. "I'm very proud to say I worked for the VCDC and know that great passion and integrity operates out of that office and its volunteers each and every day. I love Vermillion and USD; and while I'm extremely sad to leave, it's an opportunity I cannot turn down for me professionally or personally."

The VCDC will begin immediately searching for a qualified applicant to fill the vacancy. For more information please call the VCDC office at 605-624-5571.



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