

Making A Difference At Christmas

BY ALISSA WOOCKMAN

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When it comes to the spirit of giving, Yankton's Slumberland never sleeps.

Yankton's Slumberland Furniture has been donating new mattresses to needy families for more than 20 years as part of a corporate holiday bed giveaway.

This year, the giving continues as the local store has donated 24 mattresses to those Yankton residents that could use a warm, resting spot for the holiday season.

Local franchise owner Peggy Olson welcomes the opportunity to continue the tradition.

"I grew up around here and I come from a very humble background," she said. "My mom and dad grew up on a farm and we didn't have much when I was growing up. It's always been, 'You give.' It doesn't matter what you get, it's giving. That is what makes you feel good."

Slumberland has donated more than 20,000 new beds to families nationwide since its Making Homes for the Holidays program began. Each year, more than 1,000 new beds are given away across the 12 states Slumberland serves.

"I'm thankful that we have a profitable enough business that we can afford to purchase mattresses on our own – out of our pocket – and give it back to the community," Olson said. "I know how important it is to give back to the community that supports us."

Yankton's United Way and



Yankton's Slumberland Furniture store recently donated 24 mattresses to needy families in the area as part of the franchise's holiday bed giveaway. The beds were delivered last Friday, just in time to provide a warm bed for the Christmas season. Pictured are, from left: Craig Anderson; Jenny Bollig; Peggy Olson, owner; Mary Crossman; Larry Olson, owner; and Barb Hemlick.

KELLY HERTZ/P&D

Knights of Columbus organizations have spent the past several years partnering with Slumberland to aid in the charity program.

Using its connections to social services and child protection agencies in the area, United Way develops a list of people who could most benefit from a new

bed.

"We don't have any strict qualifications," said Lauren Hanson, executive director for United Way. "The agency thinks the need is there. They know the family and the living situation and they are the ones that assess the need and tell us."

The process usually begins mid-July. United Way reaches out to its partner organizations, who send referrals on the individuals most in need. These referrals could come from Department of Social Services and Child Protection, Head Start, Systems of Care, school principals and counselors

and a variety of other non-profits, along with any other agencies that work with families and children.

"I think it really is just about bringing hope to people," Hanson said. "A bed is something that you can sometimes take for granted. It is really a large spectrum that brings a lot of joy to a lot of people. It's not just a mattress."

These donations have always benefited community members in Yankton. Recently, the donation has extended to a few families in Vermillion. Lewis & Clark Behavioral Health offered to deliver a few beds to some of their clients there.

"We are so happy to do it for these guys," Hanson said. "It's just so nice for us to be their little elves. We call the families, tell them to be home at this time and the Knights of Columbus make the route. It takes a lot of people to make it happen, but every year it works out."

Last Friday, the Knights of Columbus volunteers donated their time and vehicles to load and deliver the 18 twins and 6 full sets, including the box springs and bed frames, around town. These donations made the seasons of both the giving and receiving ends a little brighter.

"It is part of who we are – doing charity things like this," said Howard Kathol, Yankton Knights of Columbus member. "When you go in, everyone lights up. You can see that people really need the beds."

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ber one projects that we have out there."

But, he stressed it wasn't the only big project on the horizon.

"Another one that we have coming up, more behind the scenes, is the construction of the new northeast substation," Prescott said. "In 2016 we will be doing a lot of the engineering work, easements, design work and bidding of some of the materials. Some of the materials have a 12-18 month lead time from when you order them to when you actually receive them. Construction is then planned to begin in 2017. So, it is another large project we will be working on in 2016."

Welch said the investments the city is making will play a direct role in how he is able to market Vermillion.

"On the economic development side, any time the city can make investments like those it really positions Vermillion to be ready and available for what that next project is, whether it be an expansion of an existing company or a new company coming in," Welch said. "One thing that Vermillion has done a very good job in everything from the infrastructure all the way to that ready land and available buildings is just being ready for those projects. We will continue to do what we do in promoting the community and being available for opportunities and promote the community for whatever that project is."

He stressed that one of the toughest things is looking in the crystal ball and looking for what is coming.

"Sometimes you can get a good sense from our local businesses on what they might be looking for, but those will be some of the things that really compliment what the city is doing," Welch said. "On the economic development side, another thing we will hopefully be able to do is build off the momentum that we have, not only with the VCDC and economic development, but also just with the community in general. I think VCDC has seen a nice resurgence of energy and optimism and even

confidence in being able to have projects and do those projects.

"What we try to do is build off those things. One of the things we will try to do in 2016 will be to try to take that next step in enhancing and entrepreneurial community. How can we help the current businesses grow for that next generation of companies and how can we be attractive for new companies to come in and grow? So, those are some of the things we will do on the economic development side."

He said that he hopes on the Chamber of Commerce side they will be able to continue the momentum established this year.

"We have a record breaking year with the number of new chamber memberships and engagement, as well as new programs building to really help bring a benefit not only to the chamber, but also the business community and just the community itself," Welch said.

He also noted that there will be new exciting events offered in 2016.

"In visitor and tourism we have a lot of really great things going," Welch said. "We added a couple of new events this last year and we have a couple of new events that we will be adding that will not only on the short term bring people in as visitors, fans, but will provide Vermillion with another opportunity to put Vermillion on the map as a destination that people want to come to."

Welch noted that in the end, projects like Prentis Park will help spur more growth.

"We want to do is capitalize on all the great investments that the city has done at a place like Prentis Park, not only for community members to experience, but when we are promoting for visitors to come in and experience Vermillion," he said. "That visitor is really our front porch of economic development. When people come in the community they see that beautiful park. They can picture themselves living here; they can picture themselves working here. It really enhances that quality of life. So, we really want to be able to capitalize on all that great stuff the city has done and Prentis Park is a

great example – everything from the Shakespeare Festival and how we can enhance that. The ball park is a great example of a gem we have in this state and figure out how we can enhance that, and it all piggy backs off of the great work that the city has been doing."

Prescott noted another project that both the city and VCDC have been working on and that they are expecting big things from this year is Bliss Point.

"While VCDC owns the land, the city helped them with the infrastructure planning and getting the TIFF district set up," Prescott said. "I think this next year we will see a project where the city will help them get the park established at Bliss Point. We are hopeful that we will see that where again the public investment in the infrastructure of the playground equipment will then dovetail into what the chamber is doing addressing the housing need in our community."

"People go by there and if they see a park and see a couple houses there, it becomes a lot easier to see themselves living there. Versus it was a real leap of faith in my eyes to say, 'OK, here is the plat but there isn't a house out there.' Even to some degree before the infrastructure was out there it was a leap of faith. Where now, it is a little bit more concrete. Now they see this is a development and can see what it is going to entail. I see that as another good opportunity where we are going to be able to build the overall community. That is exciting."

Welch added it was a complete community investment that he expects to really expand in 2016.

"What was exciting was everything from the city to the investors to the VCDC going out on a limb and the community members investing in everything from the individual home buyers to our realtors to then we had spec builders," he said. "It was all an initial jump where that first 10-12 percent of those that are going to buy first, but then it is that 35-50 percent that really do make that market. Bliss Point in this next year really will be in that market were we will be able to see people really get into it. Hopefully, we will be able to have more things

like the playground or a couple of homes out there that will really help people see what is going on. Not just one home with a bunch of fields around it. Hopefully it will spur building out there and bring in more spec building out there.

"We still have a 40 percent commute. If homes are built and available we will be able to find buyers for them. We are excited to have that land ready and available for them. Right now there are ten lots that have been sold, we have another 7-8 that have options on them where people are looking at future options. We are right on track."

Prescott noted that the availability of lots where individual homes can be built is a big deal for Vermillion's future growth.

"If you go back three years ago, one of the continual questions we at the city – and I think the Chamber – was are there available lots to build on?" he said. "In particular, for single family homes. So, through this project and over on Mickelson, there are now available lots in the community, where you don't have to go back very far and we were looking around there were not many lots available. I would say around the 2011 timeframe we started getting a lot of calls about lots to build on. It was a difficult process. I think now, realtors can say there are these lots here or here, where before they were trying to find that one that was available or trying to split two lots into one. I think that is huge for our community."

He noted that each time a new home or business is built in Vermillion it helps twofold.

"From the city standpoint, when a new business comes in we get both property taxes and income taxes," Prescott said. "But still, what the end result is we become more of the destination. When you get people who are now able to work in town and live in town, then they are going to spend their dollars in town, they become an ancillary resident. They are going to volunteer, join churches, get involved, more than if they are here during the day to work and leave the community at night and on weekends. You become a more complete citizen when you both live and work in

the community. Yes, there is tax dollars with the development and additional spending and that certainly makes the cities role much easier, but it also helps the overall community."

Welch noted that the commercial growth on the North side of town is ongoing, with a new business going up and others in the planning stages.

"Just in the overall importance of that it will put another business in this development and will bookend this commercial row which will help spur additional growth," he said. "I can tell you it is continuing to spur more conversations. When people are looking they want to know where are the numbers. Those rooftops help bring additional businesses and these can be the same businesses that have been looking at Vermillion for 20 years. But all of a sudden they have an office complex that can house up to 200 employees right here, it starts a domino effect and we have already started to see that. We are optimistic that this spurred growth right here is spurring additional growth."

As for what they hope will be the biggest changes of 2016, Welch said his was easy.

"I hope that we are not sitting in this room (at VCT), I hope someone else is in this building," he said. "I believe the VCT is an amazing opportunity for someone in Vermillion. But we all know we have had challenges with it. We are working very hard to get it filled and I hope that we are not meeting in this room I hope someone else is in this room."

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