



Late game heroics help Tanager seal win against Watchdogs

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Darrel Christopherson is pictured speaking during the 2010 Veterans Day observance in Vermillion. He described his 2001 visit to Pearl Harbor, and the American flag he received there and brought back to Vermillion. (Photo by David Lias)

'He really had a way of connecting with people'

Vermillion remembers Christopherson's unique role in the community

By David Lias

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It is a story that never grows old, filled with some of the awful truths of the human condition, and some of its best qualities, too.

It's a story that brims with patriotism, history, respect, and service to country and community.

It's a story that will live on in Vermillion, even though the man who told it so well is gone.

Darrel Christopherson, one of the dwindling number of the nation's Greatest Generation, and a survivor of the Dec. 7, 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor, died Sunday night at his home in Vermillion. He was 87.

Just six days earlier, Christopherson and another survivor of the Japanese attack returned home from Hawaii. His final trip to visit Pearl Harbor was made possible by South Dakotans committed to sending the veterans to the site of the attack to help commemorate its 70th anniversary last December.

People in Vermillion didn't hesitate

to demonstrate their feelings of loss and overwhelming respect. Virtually every American flag fluttering in Monday's breeze was lowered to half staff as word of Christopherson's death quickly spread.

His funeral was Thursday at the First Baptist Church in downtown Vermillion. His final resting place will be with his peers who proudly served the nation in the military. His burial is planned at a future date in the Black Hills National Cemetery in Sturgis.

"I don't know that I would characterize as having a really close friendship with him," Bob Fuller of Vermillion, said of Christopherson. "But we would chat now and then."

Those who know him say he didn't mind letting his Pearl Harbor experience define him, especially after his retirement. One could sense, they all say, that he wanted to make sure that people never forget the sacrifices that all veterans, especially those who suffered and died 70 years ago at Hawaii, have made to protect the nation's freedom.

Fuller, who served on the

Vermillion City Council in the 1980s, is happy to have a memento from Christopherson hanging on the wall in his home.

"Darrel had a hobby of woodworking, and when I left the city council in 1990, I was presented with an appreciation gift," Fuller said. "It is a clock that Darrel had mounted in a wooden plaque that was cut in the outline of the state of South Dakota. I have had that hanging in my house ever since, and it really serves as reminder of two things – my service on the city council, but more importantly, my friendship and association with Darrel."

Fuller said Christopherson possessed a unique gift. "He really had a way of connecting with people," he said. "I do remember him mentioning the number of times he had visited the schools and talked to the kids about his experiences at Pearl Harbor. That was another side of him. He was pretty talented."

ABOARD THE USS VESTAL

Christopherson was only 17 years

old when he joined the Navy in February 1941.

"All I thought about was joining the Navy to see the world," he said. "I had no idea we'd be involved in a war within a year," he told the Plain Talk on a story published on Dec. 7, 2001, the 60th anniversary of the Pearl Harbor attack.

He was onboard the USS Vestal, a Navy repair ship that was moored to the USS Arizona, when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor.

Christopherson was in sick bay as the attack began.

"We heard the aircraft buzzing the bay," he said. "We looked through the portholes and as soon as they flew over, we could see the red ball under the wings and we knew they were Japanese planes."

The 600-foot Vestal was in a precarious situation, as it was tied to the battleship Arizona – a prime target of the Japanese bombers. A general quarters alarm was sounded on the Vestal, and the 650-man crew headed



Christopherson was only 17 years old when he enlisted in the U.S. Navy in February 1941. Ten months later, he was aboard one of the many ships attacked by the Japanese at Pearl Harbor.

■ DARREL, Page 07

Wristbands take community, Food Pantry to heart

Travis Gulbrandson

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In the past, Beacom School of Business student Josh Anderson has sold different items to earn money.

For two years he sold T-shirts over Dakota Days, followed by sunglasses the next year.

But now, he is selling wristbands that read, "I 'Heart' Verm," and half of the money generated will go to the Vermillion Food Pantry.

"Sometimes it almost feels like the community just kind of ... sees the students as being here to abuse the town. This is just a way to change the view," Anderson said.

Steve Howe, executive director of the Vermillion Area Chamber & Development Company, agreed.

"Oftentimes you hear of some sort of a divide between the university and the community. There's that discussion of tenuous relationships between town and (school)," Howe said. "When Josh approached me, I thought, 'You know what? Those types of things are overblown. This shows that the students do feel at home here. They do like it here, they do want to make this a better community. That's the feeling I got here.'"

Anderson ordered the wristbands back in November, but only started his push to sell them last month.

"I started with an order of 1,100, because the higher quantity I could get cheaper, so obviously that's more money



for the food pantry," he said. "But if it takes off and there's more demand, it's an easy re-purchase."

The letters on each wristband are debossed, which means they are pressed into the band itself, rather than just painted

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■ BANDS, Page 09

Planning under way for Feb. 12 Relay for Life

By Travis Gulbrandson

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"After every storm comes a rainbow – curing cancer one color at a time." That's the motto of this year's annual Relay For Life, which is set to be held from 1-5 p.m. Sunday, Feb. 12, at the DakotaDome.

Each year visitors come to raise money for the American Cancer Society, raise awareness for cancer research and show support for loved ones who are battling the disease.

"We're hoping to get a really big increase (in participation) this year, because we've been doing a lot of promoting either on campus or throughout the community, and we've been getting a lot of good feedback for it," said Emilee Davenport, University of South Dakota sophomore and the event's vice president for recruitment.

Interested parties can register either individually or as part of a team. Most teams consist of around 10 to 15 people, Davenport said.

"As a team they come up with a theme for their campsite, where they set up chairs and snacks for the whole day," she said. "Or, they'll all come up dressed in one color. If they're relaying for breast cancer they'll come in all pink, or for ovarian cancer they'll come in all teal just to show what they're relaying for. ..."

"A lot of times, it's just people's co-workers or their family and friends who decide to get together and do it for someone they care about," she said.

The participants then walk or run around the track at the Dome, raising money as they go.

■ RELAY, Page 09



Accepting New Patients.
Nephrologist, Byron Nielsen, M.D.



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