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Old Main in the mist



One had to look closely when venturing outdoors in southeast South Dakota earlier this week, thanks to a thick blanket of fog that obscured even familiar landmarks. The spotlights that illuminate the towers of USD's Old Main had a difficult time piercing through the shroud of gray that covered the building. This photo was taken at dawn Monday, Jan. 27.

(Photo by David Lias)

Dream of Red Earth Coop getting close to reality

By David Lias

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The dream of a number of Vermillion citizens to open a cooperative food store came a step closer to reality last week, thanks to a membership boost provided by musicians Jami Lynn and Dylan James.

The duo performed a free concert Thursday night, Jan. 24, in the Red Earth Cooperative's downtown Vermillion storefront, located at 108 E. Main Street, before a capacity audience.

Red Earth Cooperative has been developed with the goal of becoming a member-owned, one-stop grocery. It has been formed to be a source of local, healthy food in southeast South Dakota.

Its members work mainly on a volunteer basis, and have developed a business plan. Red Earth will consist of retail store offering a "one-stop shop" grocery experience with attention to local foods and sustainability.

The members and the cooperative's board of directors are working on the grass-roots level to build membership. To be successful, those involved with Red Earth have determined they need 250 members. The members help the co-op financially by paying a \$40 annual fee. They also will provide volunteer labor when needed to help sustain the business.



Dylan James and Jami Lynn, in concert at the Red Earth Cooperative Jan. 24.

(Photo by David Lias)

Thanks in part to last week's concert, the cooperative's board of directors signed up new members and made progress toward reaching that 250-member goal.

"I feel this (the cooperative) is a unique way to use your purchasing power," said Ryan Munes, who serves as the board's secretary. "By being part of a co-op, you're able to use your

purchasing power to make decisions on items that you buy."

It doesn't take a stretch of the imagination to realize why Munes has become involved with the Red Earth Cooperative.

"I studied wildlife ecology, and I've returned to school – I'm going to school here at USD, getting my graduate degree in biology, and I've always had a passion for the

environment," he said. "As being part of a co-op, I'm able to select food items that I support based on the way that they're made – if they're more sustainable, or items that are organic, or grass-fed beef.

"Part of the reason I got involved with it (the cooperative) is there is no reason why we can't grow our

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School board wary of sentinel idea

By David Lias

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Judging from discussion Monday night at the Vermillion School Board meeting, it appears that school sentinels won't be part of the future security plans in the community's four public school buildings.

Hours later, on Tuesday, the South Dakota House passed HB 1087, the "school sentinels" proposal, which will let school districts choose to arm employees or other volunteers against attacks. The South Dakota Senate will next deliberate the measure.

Under compromises hashed out earlier in a legislative committee, local law enforcement has to sign off on the plan, and any sentinels have to undergo more than 40 hours of training.

A portion of the bill that remained unchanged is its local control aspect, which was the focus of discussion among Vermillion School Board members Monday.

"The House amended the bill to require 47 hours of gun training, and also a decision by the school board to allow a gun or guns in the school, or who is going to be appointed to have a gun would be made in executive session," Superintendent Mark Froke said.

He noted that all education groups in South Dakota appear

to oppose the legislation.

"In Vermillion, I don't think we really have a need for it, because we have the resource officer at the high school, who is also in close proximity to Jolley (Elementary)," Froke said. "Also, the police station is just as close to the other two schools (Austin Elementary and Vermillion Middle School) as I am.

"Of course, they (local law enforcement) are trained individuals who can respond to a problem," he said. "The main thing I see is the possibility of accidents if you have guns in the schools."

School Board President Chris Esping noted that legislative summaries that she's read in recent days include many e-mails from several schools that are in favor of the school sentinel bill.

"These are schools that are far away from a hospital, or would have 20 minutes or more of response time for a first-responder," she said. "It (the bill) does give the school boards the authority, and that's the other arguing point – that it should be a local decision, which I agree with."

"Every school is different," Dave Stammer, school board member, said, "and way out west, it could take 30 minutes before you get one law enforcement officer on the scene. In Vermillion, for our

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