

The Heartbeat of Vermillion: Nick Severson

By Katie Clausen
For the Plain Talk

For Nick Severson, being the heartbeat of Vermillion is deep seeded. Much like the plants in his beloved garden, Severson's roots run deep.

"I'm six generation Vermillion," Severson said. "My life family lived in Clay County in the 1880's, even before South Dakota was a state."

Severson wears his Vermillion pride proudly, and has been one of the signature people of the community who have a certain air that brings us all together.

"I'm a really strong supporter of USD athletics," Severson said. "I am very active in attending USD Sports and theatre and even some concerts."

Severson is a 2002 graduate of Vermillion High School, who then went on to graduate from the University of South Dakota with a degree in Political Science and Public Relations, with plans to return to continue his education in Addiction Studies.

Severson is always looking at ways he can improve himself and Vermillion.

"I hope I can contribute in some way," Severson said. "And make the community better."

If community involvement is Severson's goal, then he's already set the bar fairly high. He became an advocate of Vermillion as early as high school.

"I started the tailgating



Nick Severson has a heart full of Vermillion and much of that is on display when his garden is in full bloom.

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club and that tradition kept on," Severson said. "That was all about Vermillion pride."

Severson has a personal and passionate interest in helping Vermillion grow.

"While I was the manager of the Vermillion Area Farmers Market I was involved in getting the Saturday Market started," Severson said. "Now I like going downtown on Saturdays and seeing all of the people enjoying themselves."

By starting the Saturday market downtown Severson has already helped people come together. With a passion for giving back, Severson is often thinking about some of the issues that are unfortunate standards across the U.S.,

and of potential ways to correct those issues.

"There is always some underlying poverty," Severson said. "I wish there was more I can do."

Growth is essential to the economic survival of Vermillion, and Severson has also been an activist for economic development, sometimes tossing around his own ideas among friends and fellow business owners.

"There is always hope for some economic diversity," Severson said. "I think Vermillion has room for some more things like manufacturing, retail and restaurants."

As someone intrigued and interested in food, Severson has also been working as Chef Jim's right hand man, at Café Brule, for

two years.

"I really like cooking," Severson said. "I don't have an official title, I just do a little of everything."

When Severson is not cheering on the Coyotes or serving up hot plates at Café Brule, he can be found participating in one of his many hobbies.

"I like being active," Severson said. "There are so many opportunities here."

Severson gardens, collects USD memorabilia and antiques of all types, in addition to participating in Vermillion Community Theatre and catching a Tanager game here and there.

"I plan to be in this summer's production of Mary Poppins," Severson said. "I try to think of ways

to make Vermillion a better place by working on business ideas or picking up litter."

One of Severson's antiques he picked up locally was even seen on the television show, American Pickers.

There were only two signs from the old Meckling Lutheran Church, the one broadcasted on the show, and the one Severson now owns.

"I also dabble in antique collecting," Severson said. "I really like advertising signs. One of my signs was seen on American Pickers, there were only two."

Like many of the people who encompass the meaning of being the Heartbeat of Vermillion, part of Severson's love for the community comes from how the mini metropolis shaped him into a young adult.

"I think growing up in

Vermillion made me a diverse human being," Severson said. "Vermillion is really diverse. I've met so many people who've been here throughout the years and it really shaped who I am."

Severson understands that Vermillion is a special community to many people. Residents from near and far come and go as part of our economy or our academic institutions.

"Vermillion is a perfect, quintessential community that has hope and prosperity," Severson said. "It's a great community for everyone."

As Vermillion continues to grow, Severson will continue stand at forefront as an advocate for the town.

"I like to hope for the best for Vermillion," Severson said. "I think Vermillion is a great place to raise a family, or go to school, or retire. It's great."



This squirrel and an unseen friend really enjoy the goodies from Nick Severson's garden. Here this fella takes in some corn on a feeder Severson set up for local critters. The squirrel declined to comment for the story.

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Additionally, the small size of the school allows for more community interaction.

"The small size of the school provides us the ability to be flexible and attentive to our students' needs," said McInerney. "Faculty are accessible and available to students, a majority employing an open door policy."

Over the course of its' 114-year history, the school has brought many South Dakota leaders to Vermillion. Over 70 percent of the state bar is made up of USD Law graduates.

The Law School has produced many general practitioners, governors, and even South Dakota Supreme Court Justices.

"It can be presumed that many of these individuals have a fond place in their heart for Vermillion," said McInerney. "Some have even earned their undergraduate degrees here as well and called it home for many years. As a small town with a unique character all its own, Vermillion makes an impression on each student which visits it."

Students who leave Vermillion and South Dakota bring the culture of Vermillion with them. Many students will return to Vermillion for special events such as D-Days.

There are many fun activities to participate in both on and off-campus.

One way that USD Law interacts with and impacts the community is through its' school events.

"Most events at USD Law are open to the public," said McInerney. "We welcome our community to participate in these events."

In February a documentary called The Newburgh Sting will be shown on campus in honor of Black History month. In March, Judge Curtis Collier, Senior United States District Judge for the Eastern District of Tennessee, will present the

Lecture.

Most graduates of the school remain in South Dakota. This directly influences Vermillion and its' neighboring cities.

"I would estimate that 50-60 percent of grads remain in SD while another 30-35 percent remain in the region (IA, MN, NE, ND, CO)," said McInerney. "Depending on the year, anywhere from 10-25% branch out nationally. We have USD Law graduates from Maine to Hawaii."

According to top-law-schools.com, USD Law has a very low attrition rate.

The school offers many joint-degree Master's

want to branch out and explore other options. There are many unique academic programs within the Law School as well.

Because Indian law is such an important part of South Dakota, the Law School focuses heavily on this area of law. To prepare for practice in this field, students enroll in classes such as Federal Indian Law,

Indian Criminal Jurisdiction, Indian Civil Jurisdiction, Indian Gaming and Economic Development, Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and Native American Natural Resources Law.

Students intending to practice law in South Dakota generally take the Indian Law course, as there is an Indian Law question

on the state bar exam.

Students involved in Elder Law can help assist people age 55 and older by participating in the Elder Law Forum and classes.

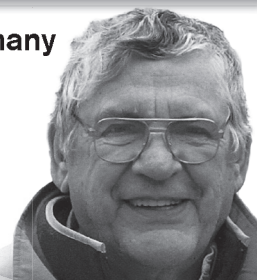
McInerney enjoys interacting with both current and prospective students.

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