

# A DAY in the LIFE OF...

## A Drive-Thru Worker in Vermillion

By Sarah Wetzel  
For the Plain Talk

How many times have you pulled up to a drive-thru, shouted your order at a metal box, picked up your food at the window, driven off and never gave a second thought to the person handing you the food?

As far as careers go, drive-thru workers are frequently seen as the bottom of the food chain, pun intended.

According to James Clarke, a Junior Marketing major at USD working at the Dairy Queen Grill and Chill on Cherry St., people should think twice before criticizing the drive-thru worker.

"It's a job that a lot of people think is really easy," Clarke said. "At one point in time, I've taken money, taken orders and added orders all at the same time. I have to multi task throwing three or four things in the air at a time then I'm getting a question from somebody else. You've got to juggle everything. At times it's a very stressful job and people don't understand it. You mess up one thing and that sets people off. I really wish everyone would work fast food just for a couple of months just to see how hard it is."

When confronting an angry customer, Clarke says all he can do sometimes is just bite his tongue and move on.

Despite the challenges, Clarke said he enjoys the job and it keeps him on his toes.

Employees behind the counter at Dairy Queen work as a team, each at different stations but helping others out as needed. Clarke himself will

go from taking orders at the front to plugging in orders for drive thru, to assembling the food, to helping hand things out the window to a waiting customer.

Though workers can sometimes predict rushes that come after big events, for the most part you can never tell when a crowd chooses to patronize your fast-food restaurant.

"I've seen it go from maybe two or three people walk in then all of a sudden the lobby's full," Clarke said. "We don't really know the signs behind it but it seems like when one person comes in everyone wants to come in."

How often the rushes come depends on the day and time of year.

"Winter is a little bit slower," Clarke said. "There might be a lunch rush, there might not. The one day it snowed pretty heavily there weren't any rushes the whole day. In the summer we're really popular."

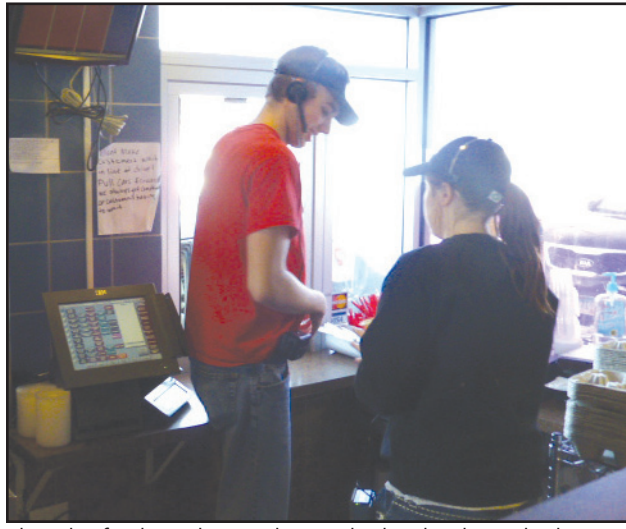
Employees at DQ learn to make use of the downtime in-between rushes as well.

"We're always restocking cups, sundaes, candies," Clarke said. "If you look at our menu, there's a lot of stuff so we're always restocking, sweeping, wiping the blizzard machine down, mopping, wiping down tables, taking out the trashes, cleaning the trays. There's quite a bit to keep us busy."

When a car does pull up to the order board, the fun begins.

First challenge: Learning the ropes

"By the time [a worker] get to the drive thru they should have everything down except the timing," Clarke said. "It steps it up



The job of a drive-thru worker is a lot harder than it looks. Just ask these employees of Vermillion's Dairy Queen.

SARAH WETZEL / FOR THE PLAIN TALK

quite a bit. For all our orders we try to get it out in three minutes 30 seconds. That's what we're shooting for for drive-thru. It's supposed to be fast."

According to Clarke, workers don't usually start at drive-thru until they have worked behind the counter for awhile.

"A couple of months in you put on one of the headset packs and you listen in," Clarke said. "A lot of the questions are the same that you get at the counter and at drive thru. People want to know the ingredients and this and that. So you just have to get all that down."

Second challenge: listening carefully.

According to Clarke, the most common reason for annoyed customers is the order-taker not hearing them.

This is not always the order-takers fault as the car window might not be open wide enough, the customer might be soft-spoken or simply not speaking directly into the microphone.

"Sometimes we ask them a few times to speak up and

they'll drive off because they're mad that we can't hear them," Clarke said. "The best we can do is ask them to pull up to the window and we just get the order there. It takes a little bit longer but at least we get the food right. They're pretty understanding for the most part especially elderly people who in turn have a hard time hearing the order-taker over the speaker."

Third challenge: operating the machinery/technology

Who knew that the order in which you name your desired items makes a difference to the order taker?

"When people start to order, probably at least a quarter of the time people won't say what sizes they want," Clarke said. "They'll say I want four or five blizzards and they'll list them all off and if we don't know what size. It's harder on us because we have to put in the size before we select what kind. For newer employees it's a lot harder because their memory skills aren't up there yet. Whereas

there's a handful of us who can go back through and punch it in because we know where all the buttons are and everything."

Order-takers learn to navigate a touch screen resembling a large bingo board with food sizes, categories, extra options and a digital register.

It's hard to learn and easy to forget, according to Clarke.

"A lot of doing drive-thru is experience," he said. "You can be on there for three months and you can know what you're doing but if you get taken off for a month and go back you might struggle a little bit to have the confidence to actually do it again."

Working drive-thru has the same challenges as working behind the counter.

Employees work to get orders correct, get everything the customer wants, answer all their questions politely and have the right amount of customer service in one order without taking away from another.

Despite all precautions, someone will inevitably be offended.

"A lot of people get irritated with people at drive-thru," Clarke said. "I think it's the fact that you can't see them. A lot of the people aren't confrontational face-to-face at the counter. It's easier to yell at a voice box than it is to a person."

Sometimes angry customers make for a funny story to bring home.

"The funniest story I've heard, there was some lady who came through the drive thru and she ordered a #8," Clarke said. "For us it would be the Iron Grill turkey sandwich. So they

read the order back and she says, no it's supposed to be two tacos. We said we don't have tacos here and she said, 'This is Taco Johns, you guys have tacos.' She yelled at them and drove away."

Clarke said DQ has had it's share of walk-thrus and even trot-thrus.

"We've had horses come through the drive thru," he said. "I wasn't here for that. It doesn't set off the order board because it's a magnetic sensor."

So that's how DQ knows your car is waiting to order.

The sensor can be fooled though, according to Clarke.

"There was a slow night and a pop can rolled across our sensor and set it off," he said. "I never thought that was possible. So we answered it and looked out and there was no car there, just a pop can rolling by. It was a little weird."

Angry customers and ghost-orders aside, there are some fulfilling moments as a drive-thru worker as well.

"A lady and her son came through the drive thru one day probably a couple years back," Clarke said. "We were busy but we still treated them nice. When they got to the window they said they travel the country a lot and go through a lot of drive thrus where the order-takers are angry at them and they said they were shocked at how nice we sounded and how courteous we were."

Clarke was surprised with a \$5 tip.

"I think a lot of the customer anger stems from when they come to a drive-thru and the workers are unhappy," he said.

Doesn't seem to be a problem at DQ.

## Vermillion Public School Foundation Back in Action

By Sarah Wetzel  
For the Plain Talk

The Vermillion Public Schools Foundation (VPSF) is back in action after a serious upgrade.

Lisa Bye represented the foundation's board at the last school board meeting to reintroduce the organization.

"Since last summer the foundation has reorganized. We have new members with new energy and new ideas," Bye said.

Bye also extended an invitation for cooperation. The goal, according to Bye, is to coordinate with other groups to decide which activities to pursue in what order.

They will then work with others to make their priorities successful.

"They're excited, they're dedicated and I'm just so pleased of the work they did," said Dennis Acra, who has coached the VPSF in their reorganization.

Though the foundation has been in existence ten years, the members saw a need for a redo.

"It had done the same thing for ten years," Acra said. "There were members who wanted to move it to a new level but many of them

were new and hadn't worked together."

Bye described the organization more as a mixture of many organizations.

"We're basically an umbrella organization that provides funds for different areas," Bye said. "The Siegrist money goes through us, the Kaberle money goes through us. So we're a little bit of a clearinghouse."

Bye told the school board that a fundraising luncheon will be held in May of this year where they will receive more information.

"Really what we're hoping is that we can set up some way for us to exchange information so we're comfortable where you are and we're filling in where we can and we're not duplicating efforts," she said. "We want to make sure that we're holding hands through this whole process so that we're not off doing something that isn't necessarily needed or wanted by the schools."

Acra said he was very impressed while working with the VPSF.

"It was a great experience working with those folks," he said.

"They're so committed."

Acra himself has a background in business development planning and has worked with nonprofit orgs his whole adult life, making him an ideal coach.

Acra said he taught the members strategic thinking that has proved through studies to propel an organization towards success.

"I really accelerated the program of getting a strategic plan done for them in four meetings," he said. "The first one was a meeting of everybody and I got them thinking about the future and what their measurements were and how they would define success. In other meetings they worked on a mission, a vision and values. Once you start thinking about the future and what defines success then you can do a mission and vision statement."

In choosing a new mission and vision, the VPSF focused heavily on the pre-existing belief statements of the Vermillion School District.

"What we did is ask the school system what their mission and values were," Acra said. "The superintendent brought out

their mission statement. This is posted in every school building. This would pull me in if my kids were young. This is a school district I would want to invest in."

The vision and mission of the school district is as follows:

"Creating a successful community of engaged learners through innovative and customized education."

"To empower all students to maximize their success in our global community."

Other beliefs published by the district include the idea that all children can learn and succeed, a positive and supportive atmosphere should be maintained, and individual differences of students should be respected and even encouraged.

The beliefs sheet also makes mention of the district being adaptive for an ever-changing world.

This proved to be a key point in the VPSF's new vision:

"To coordinate collaborative efforts to fund ever-changing priorities of the educational experience."

One thing they will do to achieve this, Bye said, is

focus on the teachers.

"Our goal is to be a partner with the school board so we can understand where you are financially so that we can do our best to fundraise and to allow our teachers to have whatever they need and want," she said. "Teachers generally go into teaching with a big idea and that they're going to change the world. We want them thinking that way. We want them to be enthusiastic. When you hear 'no' so often as a teacher you forget some of your dreams."

According to Bye, the VPSF is really hoping to help fund some programming that might have been previously cut due to lack of funding.

"The school district board needs to do the work it's elected to do like personnel issues, budget cutbacks and disciplinary issues," Bye said. "There's no time to fundraise. This group can do the work in collaboration with the district and they meet the same goals. If we can get the foundation to be recognized more broadly with the community as a worthy recipient of charitable gifts then that can expand the work of the school district

quickly."

According to Acra, there are definite benefits of working through a foundation.

"A foundation can act as a coordinating body," he said. "If money comes through the foundation, it gives credit to the whole community because when they go for a grant or to do a major program, if they can count all the gifts that have been given to the schools program in one place, it really looks like this community is organized, it has a plan, and it's broadly appealing to families and parents and the community as a whole."

Thus, Acra said, even though there are multiple fundraising organizations geared towards the school, the VPSF is in collaboration not competition with them. They all have the same goal anyway.

"If the school district has a vision, the foundation should try to promote that," Acra said.

Part of the reason for the existence of the VPSF includes challenges the school system face in this area.

For an extended version of this story visit [www.plaintalk.net](http://www.plaintalk.net)

### VCDC

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Essentially, the counterclaim against the VCDC is based on a hypothetical scenario that they have not stated to be true one way or another nor taken a stance on.

They also claimed that GOED was fraudulent in its incentive promises and that the VCDC may have also been misled, but if they hadn't been, then they too would be culpable for breaking the contract with Eagle Creek.

Yet, Eagle Creek has not filed suit against GOED nor have they listed with the court what incentives allegedly weren't met.

Additionally, there has

been no explanation to why Eagle Creek would counterclaim the VCDC for incentives not met, when most of the literature of the counter claim clearly states their issue is with how GOED has handled the alleged executions of the incentives promised and not the VCDC.

Originally the VCDC sued Eagle Creek for a breach of contract in excess of over \$150,000 of unpaid monies stipulated in a contract between the two entities that was supposed to go into action last summer.

However, the software company was sued by the VCDC when the claim stated Eagle Creek currently owes \$153,640.45 in past rent and other expenses, excluding August rent for the property located at 1012

Princeton St., which the company did pay according to the county paperwork.

The Princeton edifice and all other expenses cost \$4.2M with 90 percent or

more connected to the VCDC from bank financed monies and investment dollars from Vermillion NOW! and Dakota Resources.

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