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PLAIN TALK

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Broken water main at Coyote Village



A student walks past a small generator operating outside of Coyote Village near the building's south doors Tuesday afternoon. Students were able to return to their rooms during the day long enough to retrieve needed items.

(Photo by David Lias)

By David Lias and Travis Gulbrandson
Vermillion Plain Talk

It all started when the fire alarm kept going off in Coyote Village, a residence hall on the University of South Dakota campus, at about 9 p.m. Monday.

Several hours later, on one of the coldest nights Vermillion has experienced this winter, a number of the 500 USD students who reside at in the almost new student housing found themselves scattered – first at several different university locations, and later at a couple Vermillion motels that are

serving as students' temporary homes. They were forced to leave the building after a water pipe burst, forcing university officials to shut off electricity and water utilities to the residence hall.

By mid-Tuesday afternoon, it appeared that those students likely would have to spend at least one more night in their substitute housing.

Below-freezing temperatures may be the cause of the water pipe break. University officials suspect the temps could have caused the pipe to freeze and break, which led to flooding in parts of the main lobby, a hallway, a maintenance room, laundry room and

three residential rooms in the facility. According to the National Weather Service, Vermillion's outdoor temperature was single-digit at about the time the pipe failed.

"It is one of the coldest night we've had in several years," said Tena Haraldson, director of communications and media relations at the university. "That dorm opened in 2010, and it's got to be probably some of the coldest weather we've had since it was brand-new."

Haraldson added that the root cause will not be determined until the incident has been investigated more fully.

The first thought that entered the mind of Jilanne Doom, a junior at the University of South Dakota from Wagner who resides in Coyote Village, was that such a cold night was a bad time to hold a fire drill.

"The fire alarm started going off at about 9 o'clock last night, and we were all kind of confused because they weren't like normal alarms. We were thinking that a fire drill on the coldest night of the year didn't sound like the best idea, so we were just going to stay in our rooms," she said, laughing, during a phone interview Tuesday morning. "People didn't know whether they should leave or not, and finally the

CAs (Community Advisors) came around and had us all go to different buildings, like the wellness center and the fine arts center.

"We were thinking that it would be a couple hours, maybe, and we could get to our rooms," Doom said. "We went to a friend's house, and then we found out at about 1 a.m. that they were housing students at other places."

The first few hours of the evacuation were a confusing time, she said.

"The communication was kind of bad; we really didn't know what was

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Event honors Martin Luther King's legacy



Cindy Gehm and Bruce Gray of the local acoustic group "Good People" provide music during Monday night's observance of Martin Luther King Jr. Day in Vermillion.

(Photo by David Lias)

By David Lias
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What is your dream? Area artists, poets and musicians were asked to answer that question in observance of Martin Luther King Jr. Day on Monday, Jan. 21. In a day-long observance at

the Washington Street Arts Center in Vermillion, local citizens had no problem expressing themselves.

The walls of the center were covered with hand-made works of art created by local artists and schoolchildren in honor of the civil rights leader in an exhibit sponsored by the

Vermillion Area Arts Council and South Dakota Peace & Justice Center "Art of Peace" exhibit.

Monday evening, the interior of the arts center overflowed with music performed by Elaine Peacock, the local acoustic group Good People, made up of musicians Cindy Gehm and Bruce Gray, and the University of South Dakota Chamber Singers.

The night concluded with some members of the audience reading aloud poetry and other works.

"I think this is an historic moment," said Norma Wilson of the Vermillion Area Arts Council shortly before she presented a poetry reading featuring works from her new book, "Under the Rainbow."

"The whole day has been historic because not only are we celebrating the birthday of the great leader, Martin Luther King, Jr., but also because today featured the second inauguration of the first African-American President Obama. It feels so wonderful,"

she said.

Wilson said Obama's inaugural speech focused on important issues, such as climate change.

"The environment is something that we all share, and together, we must all be concerned about it," she said. "That really hit home for me, because I care about the environment so much."

Tom Emanuel helped organize Monday's event.

"I had helped this Art for Peace event last year, and I think this is a really neat opportunity for the community to get involved and engage with Martin Luther King's dream," he said. "A lot of the art here is done by students in local elementary schools and local high schools, and, in fact, we had 100 kids come in on Friday to tour the exhibit."

"This is giving the students an opportunity to have their art displayed for the community, and also gets them to think about the kind of world they

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Speaker stresses inclusion, diversity

By Travis Gulbrandson
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Before a college campus can truly call itself diverse, its students, faculty and administrators must have a conversation with each other regarding their racial, cultural and social differences, along with their similarities.

"That's the nature of higher education – it's about asking questions and trying to find answers. But, if we don't ask the questions we'll never find the answer," said Dr. Alma Clayton-Pedersen, senior scholar with the Association of American Colleges & Universities (AAC&U).

Clayton-Pedersen was the keynote speaker for the University of South Dakota's annual Martin Luther King, Jr., Day of Service events. The speech took place Tuesday night in the Muenster University Center Ballroom.

Among other issues, she discussed the role and importance of the AAC&U's idea of "inclusive excellence" in higher education.

"We define inclusion as the engagement with diversity for learning and knowledge development throughout the educational experience and by all members of the campus community," she said. "It doesn't take many campus leaders long to recognize that they and their institutions are ill-equipped to connect their diversity and educational quality efforts. ..."

"Making academics inclusive seeks to create a reinvented 21st century educational process that has diversity and inclusion at its core," she said.

In the United States, there are a lot of diversity initiatives and outreach programs, but Clayton-Pedersen said they are

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