

# Meet Your City Council Members: Clarene Meins

By Sarah Wetzel  
For the Plain Talk

Lifetime resident Clarene Meins has always been an active part of the community, most recently as a business owner and member of the Vermillion City Council.

Meins wanted to be involved in the council long before she was voted in.

According to Meins, city council members work

together, attending meetings and serving on committees.

"We don't take it lighthearted," Meins said. "We try to make the best decisions that eight council people can. We have a great mayor who works with us on that."

Meins is now on her second term, having served on the council for six years.

"You have to take out a petition of signatures and

then it gets voted on at election time," she said. "There are four wards and my daughter and I are both northeast ward because that's where we live."

Holly Meins, Meins' daughter is also currently serving on the council. According to Meins, relatives can be hired on because it is an elective office.

"It comes open every four years," Meins said.

"Mine will expire in two. At my age it would be debatable if I would go up for it again. I should be retired."

Though retirement is on the radar for Meins, she says wants to stay actively involved as long as possible.

"It's quite enjoyable for the most part and I'm community involved because I've always owned businesses in Vermillion," she said. "I've always lived here and loved the

community and hopefully I can be of some help in how it's operating."

According to Meins, city council members are not simply volunteers, this being actual employment.

"We get some compensation," she said. "A little less than what the county pays its commissioners but that's not what we're doing it for necessarily."

So what do they do it for?

"It's a good community," Meins said. "I've lived here all my life and I've seen a lot of changes from now compared to when I was sixteen which was 53 years ago."

Some changes, Meins said she would like to see reversed.

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

## ■ SUCCESS From Page 1A

"I now serve as publisher and local owner of the business."

Alan Dale came to Vermillion after working two years in Butte, Montana and a handful of other places over a combined 18 years. He has been the general manager/managing editor and a reporter for The Plain Talk and Broadcaster Press for over five months and the experience has been nothing short of pleasing.

"It has truly been a great five months so far," Dale said. "I came in knowing the challenges we faced and attacked them with a lot of time and energy. What made it a lot easier to acclimate to covering news and sports in Vermillion were the people themselves. They recognized immediately the desire we had to actually cover a number of stories on a weekly basis. It didn't take them long to realize we meant business and quickly the phone calls, the emails, the side conversations flowed as people were coming forward knowing we would cover the story and if we didn't we'd at least take a look at it."

Though The Plain Talk is often associated with the Broadcaster, Wood points out that they are separate publications

"The Broadcaster was started in 1934 and has published every week for the past 80 years," Wood said. "We continue to serve local advertisers with the best opportunity to get their message to customers and help them build their business."

According to Wood, what keeps the paper going is support from loyal readers, advertisers and staff.

Gloria Christopherson, owner of Nook N' Cranny on Main St. is one of The Plain Talk's long-time subscribers, having read the paper for decades.

"It's gone through several different changes," Christopherson observed. "I would say right now it's more like it was from my recollection back then."

According to Christopherson, The Plain Talk has had its ups and downs.

"It went through some changes that were not good," she said. "There was nothing covered. Things that were going on in the community that people want to know about and school things, none of them were carried. It was just like that's a whole other part of life. It happened but you didn't read about it."

Bill Willroth, a former editor of the paper, also noted some former problems.

"I think that for a long time they had this half page picture on the cover that didn't mean anything to anyone but the person whose picture they were taking and maybe two people at USD, you know some speaker," he said. "And you'd look through the paper and when I was editing the paper I could find fifteen stories within the paper that I would have put on the front page of the local newspaper."

Luckily for The Plain Talk, those problems are in the past.

"Since I arrived we have seen a rise in subscriptions, a huge rise in our online presence, and our mobile app subscribers are creeping higher and higher and could reach 1,000 pretty soon," Dale said. "Most of those mobile app readers? Young people. So we are doing something right. But that's also because I think we do a good job reporting. We don't shy away from the tough topics, try to offer a 50-50 cover to all stories because all stories have two sides, and we don't use our newspaper as a platform for an in-house agenda. We are supposed to cover the news, not make the news. If you are good at what you do, you can write a basic news coverage story and knock it out of the park."

Readers have noticed the change.

"I think it's gotten considerably better," Christopherson said. "I think it's more personal to the community."

Being personal and relevant to the Vermillion community is what makes The Plain Talk unique according to Wood.

"[The Plain Talk has] 100 percent original and local content with local bylines and the local news you can use in your everyday life," Wood said.

Dale's philosophy is 'all local, all the time' unless a

breaking national news story or a slow holiday spell allows for some interesting outside the area content. Otherwise it's 24-7 Vermillion at The Plain Talk.

"If we get breaking news we try to get something up online ASAP to let people know what's going on," Dale said. "Do we want to do even better? Heck, yes. We have a marvelous collection of part time writers who have come along in huge steps and we have arguably one of the best young photographers in the country. So we will continue to grow, but we are off to a good start. Also, in a market this size, where a local newspaper is usually the only source of information for those types of towns you have to be 100 percent married to the community you are covering. That means cover-to-cover, be it 12, 16, 20, 24 pages, your publication should be 100 percent dedicated to your town."

"Your advertising should be about promoting business among your readership area. You must protect the interest of your advertisers and your local businesses. If you are working in a town like Vermillion your entire paper should be almost always about Vermillion except for those very rare occasions something national or regional of major interest breaks."

Even in a smaller community, Willroth points out, there is plenty of news to use.

"There's always something going on in the community that the local people like to see," he said. Dale agrees. "Everyone has a story," he said. "I have enjoyed working here because there is a lot of news here. Yes, it's a town of 10 or 20,000 people depending on the time of year, but the people here are very interesting, busy, and complex. That offers a lot of news coverage opportunities. That's been the best part...Vermillion is such a fascinating place that if we aren't covering the news in mass then we are doing something wrong."

Even when the community has seen something for a while, does not make it unworthy of news as The Plain Talk has shown in its recent 'Art of Success' series featuring

local businesses which have been around for a while.

"I've enjoyed the different articles and the backgrounds," Christopherson said. "Even though you know these people for all these years, it's kind of interesting to find out some of the facts of their business."

The Plain Talk also provides a taste of home to some who reside far beyond the Clay County line.

"I've got lots of friends who live in LA and all over the place and they still get The Plain Talk," Christopherson said. "They have a subscription and it comes to them in the mail. I'll talk to them on the phone and they'll comment on something that's in the paper. It's their way of keeping in touch with their home and where they grew up."

According to Christopherson, this is one reason it is important to keep news coverage local in a paper such as The Plain Talk.

"I think it's really important that it's a community newspaper and needs to cover community things," she said. "I think it's doing more of that now than it has in the past. I think the sports things, those are touched upon. The dance recitals, the show choir, things at the high school and junior high, those things are covered. Like events that are going on in the community. Those things need to be covered and they have been. I think it's on the right track."

Willroth agrees with these sentiments.

"Prior to your present editor I wouldn't say The Plain Talk stood a chance because of the way it was laid out," he said. "It looks more like a newspaper should now. It's laid out better, there are more pictures, there are more local stories and the writing is good."

According to Willroth, some changes made for the good of a paper are not always smiled upon.

Willroth spoke of a time he removed an award-winning editor from The Plain Talk staff.

"I fired him because I could never find him when I wanted him," he said. "The day I fired him I found him down at a restaurant where Burger King is now playing a

pinball machine in his pajamas. That did it. I got ripped open by national papers from firing this award-winning editor who really wasn't worth a hoot."

Working in the news industry certainly brings challenges, as Willroth pointed out.

"The city manager hated me," he said. "My theory is 50 percent of the people love you at all times and 50 percent of the people hate you at all times, and 25 percent jump weekly."

Another resident, Cathy Beard, does not subscribe but still finds time to peruse The Plain Talk at the library.

"In previous years, they used to print things that I thought for a small community were important to know like the real estate transactions," she said. "I know people who are searching for houses feel that seems to be public information that should be printed in the paper that no longer is."

As Beard pointed out, the work of a journalist such as The Plain Talk writers involves getting out and about a bit.

"I think a journalist needs to go down to the courthouse and find out facts that are public knowledge but you have to do a little footwork to find but it's open to the public that a reader like myself is not going to go do that," she said. "I'd like a paper to provide that for me."

According to Wood, this is exactly the kind of opinion The Plain Talk is committed to taking into account.

"As we continue to provide all local stories focused on what our readers want we will add staff to support this expansion," Wood said. "We are committed to serving this great town and will continue to help with the development of opportunities to make Vermillion a better place to live."

"We are just a small fraction of the history of this newspaper, but we do hope to keep adding more to it," Dale said. "We believe some of the issues we have produced and some ideas we have

presented are as special to The Plain Talk's history as any. That being said, the first thing is we really want to keep developing the "Teen Gazette", which has shown great promise. If we can get that to become a bi-weekly, four-pager, with ads specific to the section where we can pay the kids a bit, that would be ideal.

"We hope to develop more series that people seem to enjoy and also explore some heavier, maybe not so pleasant subjects. I feel we could do even more with our sports reporting. I hope once we get a complete staff together I can really get a bit more crazy in that department."

Dale also wants to emphasize that a successful paper comes from teamwork with the readers, the advertisers, and especially the sources. To make that work, trust between his staff and public is the No. 1 component.

"A lot of reporters take the credit for their stories," Dale said. "See, we never forget how those stories came about - the sources. The subjects we interview and the ones who make themselves available to us are so vital to this process and I won't forget it...ever. What people don't realize is that those sources talk to us because they've learned to trust us. You can't abuse that trust and you must always give those sources a chance to rethink a comment before you run and try to make a name for yourself at the expense of someone who felt comfortable enough to be themselves for that brief moment in your presence. Never take that for granted."

**NOTE:** We could not interview all of our readers for this article, but that does not mean we do not want to hear your suggestions on how The Plain Talk can better serve this community.

We invite anyone who wishes to give input to write a letter to the editor at [Alan.Dale@plaintalk.net](mailto:Alan.Dale@plaintalk.net) or visit [The Plain Talk office at 201 W. Cherry Street. More information can be found at www.plaintalk.net](http://The Plain Talk office at 201 W. Cherry Street. More information can be found at www.plaintalk.net).

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## ■ WHEEL From Page 1A

the agenda of that meeting 24 hours in advance on the door and on the county website and those minutes were indeed posted on the county's website.

Larry Brady and Jerry Wilson were two of three community members who spoke in favor of the wheel tax.

"I know a windshield for my car is \$1,700," Brady said. "So I guess I'd much rather pay a wheel tax than pay \$1,700. I support a wheel tax in Clay County."

"We are all in this together and we as a county if we want to move forward we have to use the tools we have," Wilson said. "The state legislature has given the county an option for a wheel tax and almost every county in this region has passed it and doesn't seem to be so controversial there."

"I can't comprehend why we'd make an issue of this when we need to fulfill the need we have. I

want to support you and the action you are taking to go forward with this ordinance."

Powell asked Hasse if he had any solutions other than a wheel tax to raise funds to fix the roads. Hasse suggested property taxes could aid in this, but Powell refuted that by asking rhetorically if the vehicles that cause the wear and tear on the roads shouldn't be what pays for the upkeep.

Mockler added that these road conditions and the need to fix them is a byproduct of many years of allowing the issue to become a bigger one.

"This isn't a new problem," Mockler said adding that the road issues have been a long-term dilemma that needs to be addressed now.

The hopes of the commissioners is that a wheel tax would help increase funding to deal with the issues of road repair over many stretches of the 250 miles of road the county is responsible for.

The Saginaw Road has been discussed at length as one of the bigger issues

needing to be addressed. Passick believes there are more worries out there than just the one road in question.

"Saginaw does get mentioned frequently because of the higher population down in that area," Passick said. "There are at least another five or six that are in serious

trouble."

The next county commissioners' meeting is set for Tuesday beginning at 9 a.m. at the Clay County Courthouse.

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