

The Art of Success Series:

Original content since 1884...The Plain Talk moves forward

By Sarah Wetzel
For the Plain Talk

As the world rings in 2015, Vermillion Plain Talk has just finished celebrating over a century of providing Clay County with local news coverage.

"We have been the newspaper of choice for Vermillion area readers and have been honored to serve the area now for the past 130 years," said Gary Wood, publisher and local owner of The Plain Talk.

According to Wood, The Plain Talk got its start in December of 1884 by 18-year-old Thomas H. Ayres.

"[Ayres] began publishing the Vermillion Plain Talk, in direct competition with the Dakota Republican making it a potent Democratic Party voice in local and regional political affairs," Wood said. "When The Plain Talk first started publishing in 1884 many newspapers were affiliated with either the Republican or Democratic party but the newspaper no longer has any political affiliation with any party."

"The Plain Talk has been the only newspaper of Clay County since July 1947 when the Dakota Republican was purchased and merged with The Plain Talk," Wood continued. "The Plain Talk is proud to continue service as the legal newspaper of Clay County and the city of Vermillion."

Wood himself has been part of The Plain Talk staff and has served as publisher since September of 2003. According to him, 'local' is the name of the game.

"I have enjoyed the opportunity to bring local ownership back to The Plain Talk and Broadcaster having purchased the business back from corporate ownership in March 2008," Wood said. "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



The Plain Talk and Broadcaster Press, located at 201 W. Cherry, has been a long standing business in Vermillion and doesn't plan to go away any time soon after over a century in business.

ALAN DALE / THE PLAIN TALK

happened but you didn't read about it."

Bill Willwroth, 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, Willwroth 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

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DAKOTA SENIOR MEALS

Served at The Main Street Center & Town Square, "Meals on Wheels"

Please call before 9:00am to schedule or cancel a meal at 624-7868.

Menus listed below are January 7 - January 13. Menus are subject to change without notice. All menus are served with whole grain bread and 1% milk unless otherwise noted

Wednesday - Taco Salad, Meat/Beans/Cheese/ Lettuce/Tomato,

Tortilla Chips, Fruit
Thursday - Tuna Melt with Cheese & Tomatoes, 1/2 c Green Beans, Fruit

Friday - 1c Navy Bean Soup with Celery/Onion & Cheese, 1/2 c Baby Carrots, 1/2 c Mandarin Oranges, Banana

Monday - 3oz Meatloaf, 1/2 c Baked Potato, 1/2 c Lima Beans, 1/2 c Pineapple

Tuesday - BBQ Ribs, 1/2 c Potato Wedge, 1 Serving 7 Layer Salad, 1/2 c Seasoned Spinach, 1/2 c Mandarin Oranges

Menus listed below are for January 7 - January 13. Menus are subject to change without notice.

Vermillion Elementary & Middle School - Breakfast

Available everyday: Breakfast entrée or choice of cereals with toast. Fruit or Fruit Juice, Milk choices
Wednesday - Ultimate Breakfast Round, Fresh Apple Slices, Juice Choices, Milk Choices

Thursday - Breakfast Pizza, Applesauce, Juice Choices, Milk Choices
Friday - Fresh Baked Cinnamon Roll, Sliced Peaches, Juice Choices, Milk Choices

Monday - Breakfast Sliders, Diced Pears, Juice Choices, Milk Choices
Tuesday - Breakfast Biscuit Sandwich made with a Fresh Baked Biscuit, Mixed Fruit, Juice Choices, Milk Choices

Vermillion Elementary Schools - Lunch
Wednesday - A. Sloppy Joe, B. Pizza Hut Pizza (Jolley), Cheese Pizza (Austin), BBQ Beans
Thursday - A. Chicken Ranch Pasta, Breadstick, B. Mini Corn Dogs, Green

Beans, Fresh Baked Sugar Cookie
Friday - A. Baked Breaded Beef Patty, B. Baked Chicken Nuggets, Mashed Potatoes & Gravy

Monday - A. Cheeseburger, B. Home-style Chicken Stew over a Fresh Baked Biscuit, Mixed Vegetables
Tuesday - A. Grilled Chicken Sandwich, B. Hot Dog, Baked French Fries, Fresh Baked Chocolate Chip Cookie

Vermillion High & Middle School - Lunch
Wednesday - A. Sloppy Joe, B. Pizza Hut Pizza (Jolley), Cheese Pizza (Austin), BBQ Beans

Thursday - A. Chicken Ranch Pasta, Breadstick, B. Mini Corn Dogs, Green Beans, Fresh Baked Sugar Cookie
Friday - A. Baked Breaded Beef Patty, B. Baked Chicken Nuggets, Mashed Potatoes & Gravy

Monday - A. Cheeseburger, B. Home-style Chicken Stew over a Fresh Baked Biscuit, Mixed Vegetables
Tuesday - A. Grilled Chicken Sandwich, B. Hot Dog, Baked French Fries, Fresh Baked Chocolate Chip

Cookie
Elk Point Breakfast and Lunch

Wednesday Bkfs. Breakfast Burrito & Fruit - Lunch: Chicken & Noodles or Beans & Wieners, Hash Browns, Broccoli with Cheese Sauce, Peas
Thursday - Bkfs. Biscuits & Gravy & Fruit - Lunch: Crispos or Tavern, Chips & Salsa, Carrots, Orange Slices

Friday - Bkfs. Yogurt with Granola & Fruit - Lunch: Pizza or Spaghetti with Meat Sauce, Corn, Breadsticks

Monday - Bkfs. Eggs & Toast & Fruit - Lunch: Breaded Chicken Sandwich or Tater Tot Casserole, Tater Tots, Strawberry Yogurt Cake
Tuesday - Bkfs. Breakfast Pizza & Fruit - Lunch: Chicken Nuggets or French Dip, Potato Wedges, Mandarin Oranges, Corn

Irene-Wakonda School - Breakfast
Available every day: Breakfast entrée or choice of cereals w/toast, Fruit, Milk Choices
Wednesday - Cheesy Eggs with Toast (Elementary), Breakfast Pizza (HS & MS), Fruit, Milk Choices
Thursday - French Toast Sticks (Elementary), Sausage Pancake Stick (HS & MS), Fruit, Milk Choices

Friday - N/A
Monday - Breakfast Sliders (Elementary), Pancakes with Sausage (HS & MS), Fruit, Milk Choices
Tuesday - Cinnamon Roll, Fruit, Milk Choices
Irene-Wakonda Elementary School - Lunch
Wednesday - A. Super Mexi Tots, B. Chicken Nuggets, Bread, Carrots
Thursday - A. Cowboy Cavatini with Bread, B. Chicken Wrap, Corn
Friday - N/A
Monday - A. Hot Ham & Cheese, B. Taco Fiesta, Peas
Tuesday - A. Chili with Corn Chips, B. Breaded Chicken Fingers, Cinnamon Roll, Corn
Irene-Wakonda High & Middle School - Lunch
Wednesday - A. Super Mexi Tots, Bread, B. Chicken Nuggets, Bread, C. Italian Sub, Carrots
Thursday - A. Cowboy Cavatini with Bread, B. Chicken Wrap, C. Turkey & Cheese Sub, Corn
Friday - N/A
Monday - A. Hot Ham & Cheese, B. Taco Fiesta, C. Ham & Cheese Sub, Peas
Tuesday - A. Chili with Corn Chips, B. Breaded Chicken Fingers, C. Cold Cut Sub, Cinnamon Roll, Corn

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Those registering February 1, 2015 and after will be assessed a late penalty.

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