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The stage of the Vermillion High School Performing Arts Center is filled with young people as they rehearse a song from the Broadway musical "Annie," which will be offered by the Vermillion Community Theatre this weekend.

(Photo by David Lias)

Life-defining tradition of community theatre remains strong

By David Lias

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Buffie Main sat in the dimly lit seating area of the Vermillion High School Performing Arts Center Thursday evening, July 5, watching 11-year-old Briseis Schnack perfect her lines and her singing as Annie for the upcoming production of the Broadway musical of the same name.

The memories came flooding back, Buffie said. "I'm trying not to mouth the lines as they are being spoken," she said, as the actors took a short break.

Twenty-nine years ago this summer, as a 10-year-old, Buffie herself appeared on stage in a Vermillion community production of "Annie."

The 1983 performance was held in the Warren M. Lee Fine Arts Center on the University of South Dakota campus.

"I am back in town visiting, and my mom mentioned that the VCT is doing "Annie," and Jen (Dickenson) is directing, and I used to direct Jen a bit," Buffie said. "I thought it would be fun to come enjoy a rehearsal."

Buffie, daughter of Frank and Mary Main, is a Vermillion native, and a 1991 graduate of Vermillion High School. She left the community after high school to continue her education. She returned to Vermillion in 2001 to work on her master's degree at the University of South Dakota.

"When I was here, I directed Jen in

some community theatre," she said. "I directed 'Christmas Carol' and 'Godspell,' and I think Jen was in both of those."

Today, Buffie is putting her graduate degree in public administration to good use, serving as a health care administrator in Boise, ID. She also serves as an artistic director for a theatre company in Boise.

At about the time that Buffie graduated from VHS, community theatre began a decline in Vermillion. It returned to its robust self approximately 10 years ago, thanks to a dedicated group of volunteers who have made sure the show always goes on here.

"I think it's fantastic," she said.

Buffie believes she was 4 or 5 years old when she received her first taste of Vermillion community theatre, appearing in "The King and I."

"The first play that I ever saw was 'Oliver,' which was presented by that same (local) group," she said. "There was a big cast ... really intergenerational. After my mom and dad took me to 'Oliver,' they would not have been able to keep me away (from participating). I was drawn to it, and have been my entire life. I've been mesmerized by the theatre."

"I joke with people that I was raised in a church basement, and backstage," Buffie said. "The arts are so important, because they gave me the facilitation

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Buffie Main, who played Annie 29 years ago, took advantage of the opportunity to watch the troupe of young actors and actresses, including Vermillion's "latest" Annie, Briseis Schnack, rehearse for this weekend's production of the Broadway musical.

(Photo by David Lias)

Varilek says he is a viable alternative to Noem

By David Lias

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Matt Varilek's has had little time to catch his breath since his election win in the state's primary election last month.

Varilek, the Democratic nominee in the for the U.S. House of Representative race that will be decided in November, remains on the go in campaign mode.

"I'm working hard to continue introducing myself to voters across the state. It was great to win our primary, and the course in the campaigning for that, we traveled extensively, and tried to meet as many people face-to-face as we could," he said during a recent stop in Vermillion. "I think here in South Dakota, we expect to know our candidates and our leaders on a face-to-face basis."

While introducing himself to as many South Dakota voters as possible, Varilek is offering himself as a viable alternative to his opponent, incumbent Rep. Kristi Noem, a Republican.

"As I travel, I hear so much frustration with the lack of leadership from her, the 'my way or the highway' attitude, the priorities that are reflected in her voting record - defending millionaires and big oil companies at the expense of middle class folks, and now, most recently the questions about her attendance and participation at committee meetings," he said.

Varilek said he shares voters' frustrations.

"I think we've got to do better. I've said from the beginning that I want to be a voice for middle class people. I grew up in a lower income situation, and had to work hard just to climb the ladder to make it to the middle class," he said. "The issues that regular folks face are ones that are familiar to me, too, and I think we deserve a hard-working member of Congress who works just as hard as folks do here in South Dakota."

Varilek was born in Yankton, and spent his early childhood in Tabor.

"I attended kindergarten through high school in Yankton. My parents were



Matt Varilek, Democratic candidate for the U.S. House, chats with a woman at the Farmers Market in Vermillion during a recent campaign stop in the community.

(Photo by David Lias)

divorced when I was pretty young, and I grew up mainly in my mom's household. We didn't have too much money ... and I was someone who received, for example, reduced school lunches while I was in school, and that made me sensitive to what it's like when you're in that situation, he said.

Varilek was able to receive his higher education because of the availability of Stafford loans and Pell grants. Private scholarships made it possible for him to attend graduate school.

"I've worked hard my whole life to get where I am now, but also got a few helping hands along the way. When we look at

tackling our budget situation, which we must do, I think we need to get serious about the deficit but not in a way that puts all the burden on middle class people and those trying to get into the middle class," he said. "I think we need to give every kid the same opportunities that I've had."

Varilek attended Carleton College in Minnesota, and attended graduate school at the University of Glasgow, in Scotland, thanks to a Rotary scholarship. He earned a second master's degree at Cambridge, England. His wife is a USD grad.

Varilek joined Sen. Tom Daschle's staff in

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City pledges \$35,000 toward housing study

By Travis Gulbrandson

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The Vermillion City Council pledged \$35,000 toward the completion of a housing study at its regular meeting last week.

The Workforce Housing Analysis will be completed by Community Housing Laboratory (CHLab) of New Mexico at the cost of \$30,000, plus an estimated \$5,000 in reimbursable expenses.

The amount will be taken from the city's "Bed, Booze and Board" fund.

VCDC Executive Director Steve Howe told council members that while community members have been very responsive to rental properties such as apartments, there continues to be a need for single-family housing.

"We're not seeing any signs that the ... housing shortages are being resolved," Howe said. "It's been recently exacerbated by some good news - the job growth that we've had - which has made us more dependent on a commuter workforce, as workers are not finding places in Vermillion to live."

Howe said there were only three new housing permits last year, and so far "just a couple" of new houses are being built

this year.

According to the proposal submitted to the council members, CHLab will assess existing and future housing needs in terms of availability and affordability, as well as the ability of the community to meet potential growth.

"They're going to do interviews with the (residents), the city, the county, the employers and so forth to try and get a sense of what really is the demand out there," Howe said.

Earlier this year the VCDC conducted its own survey of the commuter population to better understand why they chose not to live in Vermillion.

That information was then given to the Advisory Governance Council of Vermillion Now! and used for the preparation of their own five-year community advancement plan.

The main objective outlined was to increase the amount of housing units by 260, at the rate of 52 per year. Other objectives included adding 430 new jobs, creating new and enhancing existing amenities, and to create a marketing plan to recruit new residents to the region.

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