

VFD Presents At State Fire Training

BY SARAH WETZEL
For the Plain Talk

The Vermillion Fire Department is doing its part to make the world a safer place, not just in Vermillion but in other communities as well.

"Every year the state has a fire school that hosts different classes for firefighters throughout the state," explained Chief Shannon Draper of the Vermillion Fire Department. "I believe this year was 400-500 people that attended."

The training took place in Pierre and included dozens of classes for firefighters to learn and improve their skills.

"They inquired about having myself teach one of the classes I teach internationally about firefighter survival and training, things like that," Draper said. "Captain Matt Taggart from here, he helped teach the class. It was two days and we had 40 students."

Draper and Taggart brought the Vermillion Fire Department's props to give the participants hands-on practice.

"The class was really geared towards rescuing yourself as a firefighter when you're in trouble," Draper said. "So we talked about how not to get in trouble, how to recognize hazards and dangers. We have all the safety gear to save other people but we can still get in trouble ourselves."

According to the U.S. Fire Administration, there have been 46 reported firefighter deaths in 2015. In 2014 the death toll was 64.

Though this is an improvement from previous years, Draper isn't satisfied.

"A lot of them are preventable," he said. "I get really frustrated reading the death reports because they are preventable, a lot of them."

As far as local fires go, Draper said Vermillion has been lucky though firefighter deaths do happen regionally.

"We haven't had any real injuries here locally," he said. "Our crews really train a lot. We had the fatality in Brandon last year. A firefighter died there. Then we had another one in Sioux City last year."

So far, Draper hasn't found himself in the situation of being in a life-threatening position himself and having to utilize this training but that doesn't stop his passion for the topic.

"There have been situations where I've had to really get my composure and think about what's happening so that I didn't get into further trouble," he said. "I have been on fire scenes where firefighters have gotten in trouble and it's a really scary thing."

Another scary and sobering aspect of the training Draper provided in Pierre is that behind most life-saving techniques lies



COURTESY PHOTO

Vermillion Fire Department Chief Shannon Draper and Captain Matt Taggart recently taught a Firefighter Safety class at the state Fire School in Pierre, using props to teach techniques like the Denver Drill and how to get through entanglement.

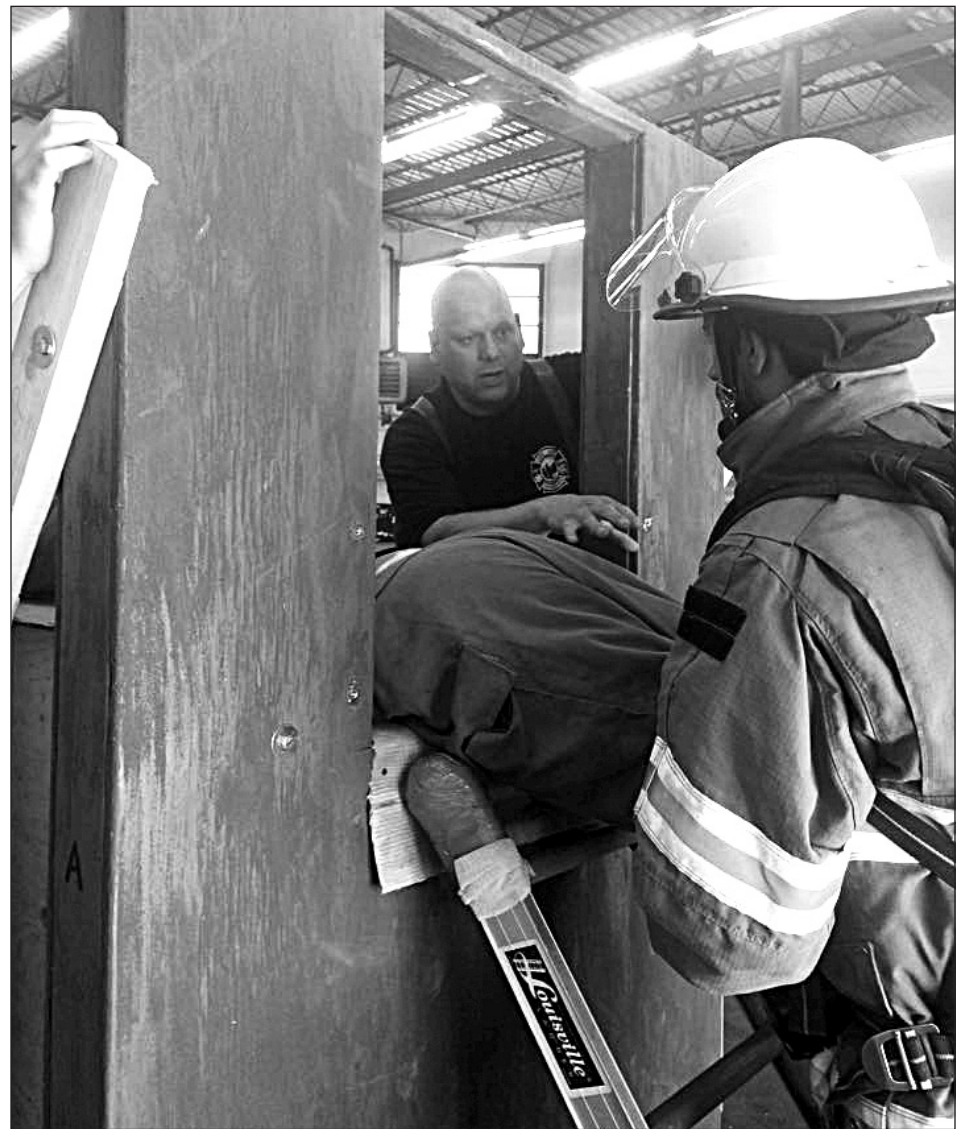
a tragedy.

"One of the hands-on activities was called the Denver Drill," Draper said. "It comes from a firefighter's fatality in Denver, Colorado where they could not rescue this firefighter. Because of different circumstances, they could not maneuver him out this window. After the tragedy they studied why they couldn't do it and how they could have gotten him out and developed this technique that we now teach so we won't repeat the tragic loss that happened here. The other drills are the same thing. They come from tragedies around the country."

Through training and other preparation, Draper hopes that firefighters around the state and country will continue to lessen the number of firefighter deaths.

"It's kind of one of my pet peeves where we are professionals and we have to perform at that level," he said. "We have to give our all, 100 percent. If not either we are going to find ourselves in trouble or we're not going to be able to help the public when they're in trouble. This is one of the elements of that where we have to, as firefighters, fully understand our jobs and be prepared. That means training, reading these fatality reports, learning from past mistakes nationwide so we don't repeat them."

Draper said he hoped participants in his class took what they learned back to their own departments and inspired their fellow



firemen. A few had already contacted him and asked for the presentation material he used.

"I hope that the people that attended the class that they kind of get a spark inside of them that hopefully resonated something with them that they take back to their departments that they stand up and say we have to do better," he said. "We have to be prepared because when someone calls 911 it may be the only time they ever call 911 but to them their world is falling apart and they're calling us. We have to be 100 percent. There are no excuses."

The state training was exclusive to firefighters but Draper did have a few tips to give to civilians witnessing a fire and wishing to help: don't.

"Between the toxic smoke and the heat, you're only maybe two breaths and someone can go unconscious," he said. "It's something that I wouldn't want anyone to

try without the training and the equipment to try and go into that hazardous environment.

According to Draper if you find yourself in a fire and smoke-filled house, try and find an area with less smoke, put towels against the door to keep out the smoke and break out a window so the emergency personnel can find you.

Bystanders, though, should be just that.

"I know everyone wants to help and that's great but without the training and equipment they could get themselves in a lot of trouble," Draper said. "It's not like the movies where there's no smoke and they run through. I wish it was that easy."

Draper continues to take his and his crew's job seriously.

"In our field when we fail at our job people die," he said. "They lose everything they ever owned. There's no excuse for anything less than excellence."

Taking Time To Care

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For those who are looking to make a difference in someone's day including their own, the Sanford Care Center next to Sanford Hospital in Vermillion offers many opportunities to do just that.

"There are some real bonds that get made," said Julie Rolfes, activities director for the center. "For the residents here, especially those who don't get a lot of company, to know there's somebody out in the community that cares enough about them to come, even if it's just to sit and shoot the breeze for 10 minutes, it increases their self-worth. Even for the ones that have dementia so badly that five minutes later they're not going to remember you were just in their room visiting them, for those 10 minutes you were in there, they felt loved and important. It definitely benefits both ends."

The volunteer opportunities are in two main areas; with the residents of the Care Center or with Ari Albright with the Sanford

Arts program, according to Rolfes.

Depending on the level of involvement the volunteer wishes to pursue, the process of becoming a volunteer varies.

"If it's somebody who would want to do only a couple of times a year or every three or four months, those people I probably wouldn't even officially have them sign up as a volunteer," Rolfes said. "But if it's somebody who wants to come in regularly, like maybe they're going to help out with Bingo every Monday night, then I would have them go through the process."

A process that is not very involved according to Rolfes, it simply includes a few forms and a current TB test which can be done free of charge at Sanford Medical Clinic.

"Then those who are interested more in the arts program I would send them to Ari," Rolfes said. "She would have an orientation-type period that she would do a little training with them because some of her volunteers she can kind of turn them loose to facilitate

a little art group on their own. It's probably more of an extensive orientation with Ari's art stuff."

The Sanford Art program in general deals with preparing for, and doing art projects, as well as a few things in the hospital with the patients.

There is plenty to do with Rolfes at the Care Center for those wishing to volunteer there.

"We're getting more and more residents that either because of visual impairments, hearing impairments or hand-eye coordination, need a lot of assistance with Bingo," she said. "That's probably one of our biggest volunteer needs. We do Bingo four nights a week. It's a big deal around here."

Those volunteering with Care Center events need not be nervous about knowing how to go about it according to Rolfes.

"Most of our events you will be with a Care Center staff member or myself unless it is something where you're willing to come in and do your own thing," she said. "But even then we would help you those first couple of times until you



COURTESY PHOTO

Volunteer opportunities at every level are available at the Sanford Care Center.

were comfortable with how you go about doing it."

Though there are specific needs such as the Bingo nights and other Care Center events, Rolfes said she is always open to new ideas and custom volunteer opportunities unique to the individual wishing to help.

"Whenever I meet with someone one-on-one who wants to volunteer I always try to have them think outside the box a bit," she said. "I ask them things like,

"What do you have that you're passionate about or that's an interest of yours that you could possibly turn into something that you could do here with the residents? Do you do ceramics or like to read or have a collection of antiques that you'd like to bring in or you would want to start a little card club? Things like that."

Performers always have a place according to Rolfes.

"If there's somebody that loves to sing and play the guitar I would encourage them to come in on, for example, Thursday afternoons at 4:30 and sit in the fireplace area and sing and play their guitar while the residents wait for supper," she said. "If it's something

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Poet

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and the way it is learned. I use these word portrayals to show how words were mis-transmitted from my non-English speaking mother in a way that became very real to me and took on their own symbolic weight."

Roripaugh's first event as the official South Dakota poet laureate is the South Dakota Festival of Books at

Deadwood and Rapid City in September, where she will be on a panel with the former state poet laureate and the poet laureate finalists.

Roripaugh's primary duty as the state's poet laureate is to foster the poetry community. Her plans include traveling throughout the state to give poetry readings, head writing workshops and officiate literary events.

"I think of the Japanese poet Basho, who traveled throughout Japan and collaborated on poems wherever he went," Roripaugh said.

"I like to think of that as a model for my time as South Dakota poet laureate."

"I'm looking forward to meeting people and getting a sense of all the different poetry communities in the state and getting to work with them," she added.

Asian-American poets have been a huge influence on Roripaugh, mainly due to their familiarity.

"When I first began writing, I wasn't accustomed to seeing myself represented in literature," she said. "So

being able to read from these authors, particularly poets, gave me a sense that my experiences were representable."

Roripaugh hopes to give this same sense of inspiration to poets throughout the state.

"I am really honored, thrilled and excited by the opportunities of being the South Dakota poet laureate," she said.

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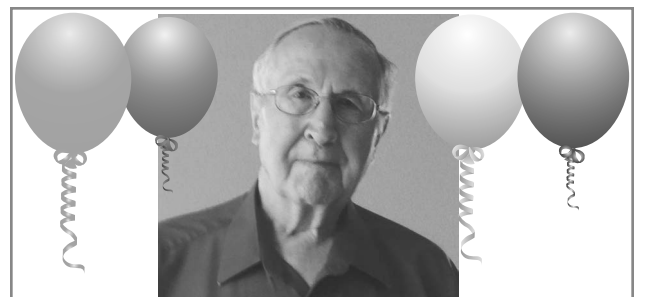
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Family and friends are invited to an 80th Birthday Open House celebrating Gary Groves on Saturday, July 18th at the Yankton Elks Lodge (504 W. 27th) from 2:00-4:00 p.m. 215 Catalina, Vermillion, SD 57069
No gifts requested. Cards may be sent to:

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Thank You

Thank you to my family, friends and classmates for the birthday cards, phone calls and well wishes for my 70th birthday. It was a special day which I will remember forever.

God bless you all.

Judy A (Harnois) Nedved