

# CASA Advocates Sworn In

BY ELYSE BRIGHTMAN  
elyse.brightman@plaintalk.net

Last Thursday, a small crowd gathered in the Clay County Courthouse to welcome the county's first Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) volunteers.

"When an abused or neglected child is brought into the court system, either because someone in the community called to file a complaint about a parent, or something along those lines, we have trained CASA advocates who are appointed to represent that child's interest in the court room," said CASA board president Ryan Cwach.

Joanne Tieman and Rhonda Howe stood before a judge to be sworn in as the first two CASA volunteers in Clay County.

"I've always enjoyed working with people and children and so I thought this would be a great opportunity," Howe said.

She learned about CASA while working at Sanford in Sioux Falls and every year they chose a community non-profit to focus on. The year she was in charge of the campaign, they chose CASA.

"I became very interested," Howe said. "At the time I lived here in Vermillion and that was up in Sioux Falls, so it just wasn't working for me, but when I heard that Vermillion was bringing an office to the community I definitely wanted to look into it and do something."

Tieman was made aware of CASA during a fundraiser



ELYSE BRIGHTMAN/FOR THE PLAIN TALK

## Joanne Tieman and Rhonda Howe stand before a judge to be sworn in as the first two CASA volunteers in Clay County.

put on by a sorority at the University of South Dakota.

"One of the sororities on campus actually has CASA as their fundraiser and they put on a style show and I attended that. They had brochures about it and talk about it," Tieman said. "I thought that it sounded like something I'd get a lot out of doing and I could help somebody else."

The Clay County branch will be part of Southeast CASA based out of Yankton. It is part of a national organization that gives children who have been abused or neglected a voice in the courtroom, as well as making sure the children are getting proper care at their home with routine check-ups.

To be chosen as a volunteer, hopefuls are asked

questions about what would make them a good CASA volunteer and go through three different background checks. They then go through 30 hours of training over a weekend from a curriculum set by the national CASA organization.

"We really have to find people who are there for the right reasons and who are going to represent the program well," said Sherri Rodgers-Conti, the program director of Southeast CASA.

Lastly, they are sworn in by a judge.

The volunteers spend significant time with the children they are advocating for and allow those children to have a voice in the court system.

CASA becomes involved once a child is removed from their home and placed

in a foster home. Most of the volunteer cases last around one year.

"Hopefully (I can) be an advocate for them," Howe said. "A voice for them to let something be heard that is kind of hidden and just bring to light what troubles them or what troubles they may be in."

Though based out of Vermillion, CASA is offering its services to children throughout all of Clay County and are estimating a case load of about 10-20 children per year.

"I've been told not to be surprised at anything," Tieman said. "I think we'll probably see some very sad situations. I just hope we can objective and stand up for those children and try to help the situation."

# Schou Driving Fine Arts Department Forward

BY JAMES COOPER  
For The Plain Talk

As the arts tend to suffer nationwide, universities and independent arts entities have to work extra hard in order to keep their programs afloat.

Thankfully, here in Vermillion, the University of South Dakota Fine Arts Department offers a wide variety of top notch opportunities for students, as well as several student and faculty awards, and a drive to move forward.

Of course, in a town like Vermillion, news of success does not simply travel at light speed without some help. Here to spread the word of the hard working fine artists of USD is the Dean, Dr. Larry Schou.



Schou

"As Fine Arts Dean, I oversee six units... the three academic departments; art, music, and theatre, which are housed in the Warren M. Lee Center," Schou explained.

"Then, the three non-academic units; The Black Hills Playhouse in Custer State Park, the University Art Gallery System, and the National Music Museum."

A tall order for, even for someone spending his seventh year as Dean.

Thankfully, there are support staff, in the form of Directors and Academic Chairs that help keep Schou informed and keep these units running smoothly.

Schou added that a large part of what he does as Dean is to encourage all of his contacts and colleagues to "future think" and continue to move forward as the University system continues to grow and change.

"Deans also have to be fundraisers," he said, as he pointed to a large pile of papers and folders on his desk that pertain only to fundraising.

Meeting and greeting donors, reaching out to the community, and visiting with alumni are some of the many things that Schou does.

He admits that while not many people enjoy this type of work, he thinks it is "fun" because he gets to, "get out into the country and talk about [USD fine arts students]."

"I talk about [their] successes as students, faculty successes, awards, competitions, performances, and people writing books, journal articles, and so forth," he said.

This devotion to getting the message of USD's arts out to the greater community shows his dedication to the position of Dean.

In the past year, the USD fine arts department has been gaining much recognition as two fine arts professors, Dr. Tracelyn Gesteland and Dr. Sarah Sik were awarded both of the coveted Belbas-Larson awards for excellence in teaching.

Gesteland and Dr. David Holdhusen, two music faculty were also awarded Endowed Chair positions from community members.

These faculty achievements certainly help to make Dr. Schou's job easier because success is easy to talk about.

One of the only challenges facing the Dean is that of publication. It is often difficult to get the word out about what the department does.

There are five main stage Theatre events a year, more than 100 musical events by the Music department, eight or ten gallery exhibits by the Art department. Anything from student work to visiting artists and faculty are all there for the viewing. To combat these issues, Schou has worked with community partners and the university to create newsletters, websites, and utilize other media to help grow attendance at department events.

As the department moves forward, Dr. Schou hopes to continue to grow and shape it to change with the future of USD.

## Deadline For Century And 125-Year Farms And Ranches Set

HURON – Farms and ranches have long been the foundation of South Dakota history. The South Dakota Farm Bureau along with the South Dakota Department of Agriculture would like to recognize and honor these South Dakota Century Farms and Ranches on September 3, 2015 at the S. D. State Fair.

To qualify for the Century Farm & Ranch award, a family must have retained continuous ownership of at least 80 acres of original farmland for 100 years or more.

If the family ownership of that land has reached the 125-year mark, they may apply to be recognized as a Quasiquintennial Farm or Ranch.

Some form of documentation of the original date of purchase must be included with the application.

Application forms are available online at <http://www.sdfbf.org/public/349/all-about-ag/century-quasiquintennial-farm-ranch-recognition-program> or <http://sdda.sd.gov/office-of-the-secretary/century-farms> or by calling South Dakota Farm Bureau at (605) 353-8052.

The deadline for applying for this recognition is August 13, 2015.

# Clay-Union Foundation Seeks Mentors And Mentees

BY SARAH WETZEL  
For the Plain Talk

Forest E. Witcraft once said, "A hundred years from now it will not matter what my bank account was, the sort of house I lived in, or the kind of car I drove...but the world may be different because I was important in the life of a child."

It was sentiments like these which inspired the formation of the Clay-Union Foundation, a youth mentoring program serving Clay and Union counties.

John Gille founded the program in 1997 after interest in was expressed from teachers.

"A lot of the volunteer programs ask for an hour a week," he said. "We ask for two hours. We ask for quality time with the children. We want them to build a relationship."

According to the foundation's website, mentors are matched to the youth based on the needs of the child as well as interests and abilities of the adult mentor.

Mentors spend quality time with their mentees each week, getting to know them and doing activities.

"We ask the volunteers to

look about a week ahead and see what their schedule looks like so it's flexible based on if the family has something going on or if the adult has meetings or classes or something else going on," Gille said. "I do the initial match-making then it's up to the volunteers and the parents to work out the times whether they want to meet the same time each week or not."

The matchmaking is a serious process.

"We do a full background check on all the volunteers," Gille said. "I interview them first before we even talk about the kids that are available to see what their interests are and try to match them as best as we can."

According to Gille, no youth are currently available for matching, but volunteers are always needed so when children need mentors there are some to choose from.

Referrals and applications of youth participants are also welcome.

"We'd like to get a lot of kids going," Gille said. "Typically we match 13-15 a year. I really believe strongly in the program and I'll put as much into it as I need to make sure it's successful."

Gille's work includes

checking up on the volunteers to see how things are going and giving them tips.

"The first three or four weeks we ask them to just sit with their child and grab a pop or go to the park and get talking and knowing each other, building up the relationship and hopefully feel comfortable with each other and build up that rapport," he said. "If you jump in and just start doing things right away you really don't have any relationship. So we ask our volunteers to talk to the kids and listen to them a lot."

Youth in the program come from a wide variety of families, income levels and interests.

"Lots of children can benefit from just a few hours a week," Gille said. "We don't worry about the family status as much as how much the child can benefit."

According to Gille, the typical match lasts for three years, sometimes longer.

"We've had great success in the program," he said. "We are a year round program, not just a few months so we want long-term commitments."

Volunteering comes at minimal cost according to Gille. Some group activities are even put on periodically

that the program pays for like a pizza party or movie night.

"That's why we'd like to get applications in now so they can get the relationships up and running this summer before we start things in the fall," Gille said.

Funding for the program comes from donations and a few annual fundraisers like a bike ride in August and half-marathon in September.

Gille has seen a lot of success throughout his years with the program.

"One girl came in at age 7 1/2 and left at age 15 1/2," he said. "When she came in she wasn't very talkative. Didn't communicate with her family. Over the course of a year or two she really opened up a lot. When she went to Dakota Valley she became a cheerleader and had a lot of success as an adult. Even after she was 16 she still came up to volunteer."

According to Gille, this girl and her mentor still keep in touch.

For more information on how to volunteer or participate visit [clay-unionfoundation.org](http://clay-unionfoundation.org) or contact John Gille at 605-421-5050.

Volunteers must be 18 years or older with a valid driver's license.

# CFCF Gets A Big Tip

BY SARAH WETZEL  
For the Plain Talk

Anyone who's ever stuck a coin or two in one of those jars labeled "Tips for Charity" usually never sees the result of their generosity.

Wednesday they did as the food team from the Coffee Cup Fuel Stop as a check for \$2300 from donated tips was presented to the staff of the Center For Children and Families (CFCF).

The employees at the fuel stop are enthusiastic about the donation.

"They're really excited to see the end product," said Sarah Diaz, manager at Caribou Coffee. "We don't really think about it during the day because it's always just been that way how we donate the tips. Every day we stow it in the bag. A lot of the people are new and it'll be nice for them to actually see this."

The fuel stop saves their charity tips and donates them every year to a different organization chosen by the team.

"We just look for something local," said Lance Relf, manager at the Coffee Cup. "Last year it was the food pantry."

CFCF wasn't the only beneficiary of the tip donation.

A large part of the donation went full circle benefiting many of the donors

themselves. According to Relf, CFCF actually only received half of the tips received, the other half going to the St. Christopher Truckers Fund.

"It's for truckers who have medical problems to help with their bills and for their families," he said. "A lot of the tips come from them. They stop in and go through and get coffee and pizza."

Sarah Sherlock, director at CFCF said the money

will be used to help finish two previously unfinished rooms which will increase the ability of the center to care for more of Vermillion's children.

"One will be a preschool room and one will probably be a toddler room," she said. "We're licensed for 80 once those rooms get done. It really makes a big difference."

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