

Vermillion native quickly lands new job after teacher cuts in Yankton

By Randy Dockendorf
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TYNDALL — Drew Lawrence could have gotten bitter or discouraged after losing his job with the Yankton School District because of budget cuts.

Instead, he got an offer for a new position — within two school days.

Lawrence has been hired by the neighboring Bon Homme school district for the 2011-12 school term. He will teach special education for grades K-5 at the Tyndall attendance center.

The Bon Homme school board officially approved Lawrence's contract at Monday night's meeting, according to board president Ben Hellmann.

Lawrence currently teaches special education at Yankton Middle School. The second-year instructor received a notice of non-renewal of his contract, one of about two dozen Yankton teachers laid off as a budget-cutting move.

"I'm fortunate to get another job. I'm blessed," he said. "I want to emphasize that I'm the exception. I'm very lucky that I got a job so quickly. None of my colleagues in the same situation have found anything yet."

While not happy about receiving his notice of non-renewal, Lawrence said he doesn't harbor ill feelings toward the Yankton district.

"I'm not bitter toward the administration. It wasn't easy for them to tell people (who lost their jobs)," he said. "I wasn't feeling sorry for myself or asking why this happened to me."

Yankton School District patrons are voting May 24 whether to opt out of the state property-tax freeze by \$4.1 million annually for 10 years. School officials have said the cut staff positions could be restored if the opt-out passes.

However, Lawrence said he couldn't take a chance and await the election results.

"You don't know if the opt-out will pass," he said. "Even if it does, it's not a done deal that my old job would open back up."

As a special education teacher, Lawrence thought his position might survive the chopping block.

"I was hoping the cuts wouldn't occur. But once I received word, I immediately

began looking for a job," he said. "You can't wait with that kind of stuff."

Lawrence knew that he faced competition for jobs from two sides — teachers who were laid off or seeking new employment, and recent graduates looking for their first job.

He desired to remain near Yankton and sought positions in the region.

"I'm from Vermillion, and I graduated from Mount Marty College. I love this area and want to stay here," he said. "I'm getting married later this year and need a job. We could move, but some of my colleagues can't look elsewhere. They have families or other ties with the community and school district. They just wait and hope."

Upon receiving the notice of non-renewal, Lawrence applied immediately for jobs in area school districts.

He had previously seen the Bon Homme opening on a teacher placement website. However, he needed to act quickly, as the Bon Homme deadline was the next day.

"I got my application in, just before the deadline," he said. "I submitted my resume to Bon Homme on Friday, and they had interviews the next Monday."

The Bon Homme district received 12 applications and interviewed six, said Superintendent Bryce Knudson.

"I was pleasantly surprised (by) the number of applications we received for this position," he said. "Special education HQ (Highly Qualified) teachers are generally difficult to fill."

After completing the interviews, Knudson and elementary principal Mike Duffek selected Lawrence. He will replace a current staff member transferring to the Bon Homme Colony school.

"Drew stood out from the others and scored highest on our interview scale," Knudson said. "He wants to be an active part of Bon Homme and was excited as he accepted his contract with us."

Lawrence described the job offer as a tremendous weight off his shoulders.

"That was one of the best days of my life," he said. "The relief was indescribable. I was filled with such excitement. I look forward to being at Bon Homme."

The offer was also good news for his



Drew Lawrence, one of the Yankton teachers released because of budget cuts, considers himself fortunate to find another job quickly with the Bon Homme school district. He is shown at Riverside Park coaching the Yankton club baseball team. (RANDY DOCKENDORF/P&D)

fiancé, Sarah Herrboldt, a nurse at Yankton Medical Clinic. "She was as excited as I was to get the job," Lawrence said.

Lawrence remains focused on both his current job and new one.

He pledges to remain committed to his work with the Yankton School District, where he teaches in the sixth grade special education resource room.

"This is my job, and I have to do my best," he said. "Yankton will get 100 percent from me while I am still here."

Lawrence said he also remains loyal to his fellow Yankton teachers.

"We talked about it, and no one else (in the general public) knows what we are going through," he said. "We formed our own support group."

Bon Homme opted out last year for \$400,000 annually for five years, Knudson said.

"With the state cut (in the coming fiscal year), we lose about \$185,000," he said. "We are making do with the opt-out but will be looking at options that least affect students over the next couple of years. Many cuts were previously made with the failure of the first two opt-out attempts in 2001-02."

At Bon Homme, Lawrence will work with about 10 students in K-5 at the Tyndall school. He welcomes the district's four-day week, which alternates a tutoring day and teacher work day on Fridays.

"I also like the situation where I will be in one school the entire time and will have the same kids every day," he said.

He welcomes the opportunity to coach in his new position. Besides teaching, he will coach junior high football and assist with varsity football.

He currently coaches the Yankton

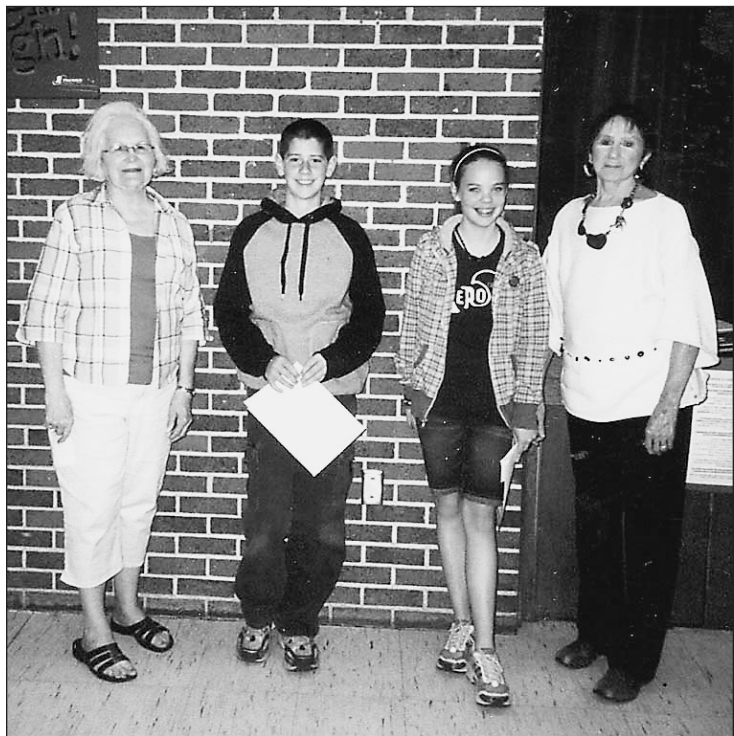
High School baseball team. He anticipates coaching the Grey Sox baseball team this summer for 15- and 16-year-old players.

Lawrence doesn't foresee needing to make any major adjustments to the Bon Homme district. He student taught at Menno, which gave him experience in a smaller school district. He also doesn't see a major change moving from the middle school level at Yankton to the elementary grades at Bon Homme.

Lawrence and his fiancé also see a higher power behind the sudden change in their new life together.

"Both of us are Catholic, and we have a strong faith," he said. "You always hear that one door closes and another opens, that it's God's will. But you don't fully realize the meaning until it happens to you."

THE 'WRITE' STUFF



Pictured are VFW Auxiliary President Donna Schafer, Michael Griffen, Anna Kate Heckemer and VFW Secretary Barbara Kronaizl.

Vermillion students winners in essay contest

The VFW Auxiliary sponsors an essay contest called "Patriots Pen." There is a different subject every year. They are to write a 300 word essay on the current subject, which this year was, "Does Patriotism Still Matter?"

There were five students from the sixth and seventh grades who entered. The local VFW Auxiliary chapter begins the contest. We were able to choose two first place winners. They are Michael Griffen and Anna Kate Heckemer. Their essays were then sent to the District level. Anna Kate won first place and Michael won third place.

Congratulations to all who participated and especially to Michael and Anna Kate. These students wrote very good essays. They were some of the best we have ever had. We hope more will participate in the future. We also want to thank Vermillion Middle School Principal Pat

Anderson and his staff for encouraging students to participate.

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Robert Brockevelt, 46357 Lucas Iverson, 1119 309th Street, Vermillion; Renewal registration during assigned month, \$54.00 plus costs

Monte B. Gulick, 801 West 12th Street, Yankton; Speeding other roadways, \$39.00 plus costs

Patrick Wade Carr, 29723 466th Ave., Beresford; County speeding, \$79.00 plus costs

Michael J. Feilmeier, 87853 Highway 57, Hartington, Neb.; Fail to stop at weigh station, \$104.00 plus costs

Timothy Mirtz, 112 Catalina Ave., Vermillion; Speeding other roadways, \$19.00 plus costs

Darin Joseph Wadley, 916 Valley View Dr., Vermillion; Speeding other roadways, \$19.00 plus costs

Sarah Marie McCann, 424 Lewis Street, Vermillion; Renewal registration during assigned month, \$54.00 plus costs

Nicholas Larson, 512 United, Harrisburg; Seat belt violation, \$25.00

Nashay Alcía Steiner, 444 N. Plum Street, Vermillion; Seat belt violation, \$25.00

Seth Fuhrer, 29738 443rd Ave., Irene; Fail to maintain financial responsibility, dismissed

Mitchell M. Acox Bouie, 901 Rose Street #176, Vermillion; Illegal dumping, \$59.00 plus costs

Rose M. Garhart, 2088 Hilltop Road, Shell Lake, Wis.; Speeding on state highway, \$39.00 plus costs

Thomas Paul Obar, 30590 475th Avenue, Alcester; Renewal registration during assigned month, \$54.00 plus costs; Fail to maintain financial responsibility, dismissed

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