

We applaud efforts to ease local hunger

Usually, when leaders of communities talk to citizens about the reasons for making an effort to diversify their cities' economies, they'll usually talk about more employment opportunities, and how more employment opportunities mean more jobs, which attract more people, which gives a boost to the community's economy and it's general well-being and quality of life.

The usual economic development pitch – that standard speech we've grown used to hearing from governors, mayors and other officials – usually dwells on purely economic trends, such as the importance of expanding the tax base, or simply offering more job opportunities.

What usually is lacking in those speeches is a consequence that has remained hidden for quite some time, probably because it is very difficult to talk about.

It's easy for a layman to figure out that a lack of economic development or diversity in a community likely will mean that said community will struggle to be prosperous.

What's more difficult to realize is that if you live in such a community, there's a good chance that a good number of your fellow citizens are also living in poverty.

Yes. Poverty. It certainly exists in South Dakota; we all know that. It's a systemic problem that's persisted for years on the Indian reservations in our state.

While our focus has largely been on the struggles in places where poverty is so highly evident, it's been rather easy to miss the fact that poverty also exists all around us. It's here in Clay County, and it's here in Vermillion. At rates that are disturbingly high.

We applaud Steve Howe, the executive director of the Vermillion Chamber of Commerce and Development Company, for not being shy about talking about local poverty while discussing the challenges our county and community faces. As he noted in a story printed elsewhere in this edition of the Plain Talk, it is problem that has no easy, quick solution.

We can't help but believe, however, that his candor about this issue, combined with his drive to push the community forward, made it just a bit easier for Vermillion Now! to be such a success.

Vermillion Now!, in turn, provided the resources for Howe and other local citizens to continue to aggressively seek new opportunities for Vermillion citizens. Our economy is slowly

becoming more diverse. We've attracted two new employers this past year, and at the same time, an existing industry has completed an addition to its manufacturing plant.



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The Vermillion School District and local industry also teamed up this earlier this year to offer welding classes as the demand for welders continues to grow here.

We also are reminded this week that we must remain looking forward.

The accomplishments in Vermillion this past year certainly deserve praise. But there's still work to be done, as that pesky poverty rate still remains high.

The number of children who qualified for free or reduced school lunches in the Vermillion School District this last year was high enough for the community to qualify for a federal program that will offer free meals to all children this summer (see related story). Again, we credit the Vermillion School District for taking the initiative to apply for this program, and provide a site for the meals to be served.

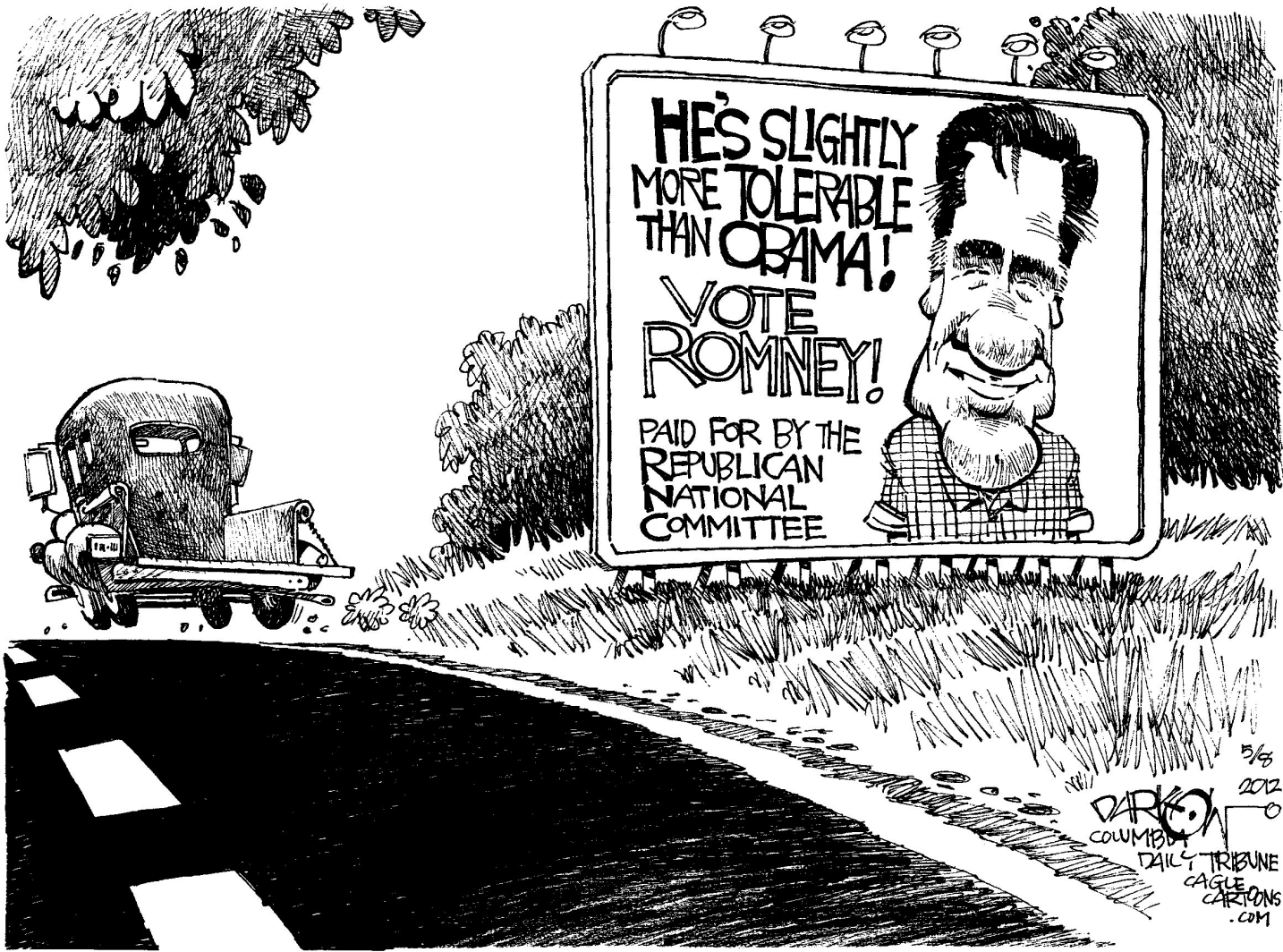
We also have nothing but praise for John Lushbough, one of the driving forces behind Vermillion's Weekend Backpack Program which strives to make sure children are provided food during days when school lunches aren't being served, or for Mary Berglin and the countless hours she serves at the Vermillion Food Pantry, or the numerous volunteers who are generous with their time and resources to make sure that programs like The Welcome Table exist to ease the strain poverty would otherwise bring to many people here.

The relationship between a diverse economy and the level of hunger in a community such as Vermillion may be difficult to fathom. And we know there's no easy fix. Economic diversity, Howe told us, is going to take time.

We're encouraged, however, by one of his other statements. "We are doing our best," he said.

We can't ask for more than that .

VIEWPOINTS



They are royalty among us

There is at least one in every community. Individuals whose reputations have been molded by true grit, gentle spirit or endearing difference.

They are royalty among us, distinguished by living their lives methodically as commoners, entertainers, coaches and leaders. No matter their status, we laud and honor them.

They are local aristocracy whose rank swells, not so much by wealth in currency but rather wealth in aura and occasional oddity.

Their kingly and queenly attire, customary clothing of their own order, is an outward sign manifested by an inward spirit.

One such nobleman was Old Man Chris who long ago strolled the streets of Waverly, Iowa. A tall lanky gent, Chris always wore the same outfit – a dingy jacket buttoned up regardless of the heat. Even his collar was buttoned, and that jacket's wear and tear hues coordinated with his distressed work pants.

Daily, as if on schedule, Chris plodded along in heavy steel-toed leather work boots at a relatively slow clip. Stony-faced, he traversed side roads to and from his little timber house on the outskirts of town. If it weren't for the spark in his eyes, one would say Chris' slow measured gate was funeral.

I don't recall speaking to Chris, but, nevertheless, I counted on seeing him, and when I did, the world seemed like a sovereign place.

In Sioux City, Iowa, a character named Gerald Goulette had the nick name "Al Jolson." A street performer of the highest caliber, who

sang, tap-danced and played a ukulele for more than 60 years. Al Jolson hopped from corner-to-corner, bar-to-bar, performing for anyone would stop, look, listen or buy him a drink.

Often decked out garishly in customary red, white and blue attire, he was never spotted without his ukulele tucked under his arm. Al's perpetual grin made his bushy salt and pepper mustache appear longer than it really was.

Goulette died April 2, 2012, at the age of 84. That day a legend was lost.

Beloved football coach Walt Fiegle of East High School was without a doubt aristocracy. Known for his slogan, "Tough times don't last; tough people do," Coach Fiegle instilled in his players and students respect for self and others and perseverance in life. Fiegle, who passed away Nov. 12, 2003, coached East to 128 victories, 22 playoff appearances and the Class 4A state title in 1984.

There are regal women in our midst, too. Take for example the Garden Lady of our neighborhood known for her green thumb, which was more like an emerald magic wand that grew lush flourishing majesty.

Never knowing her real name, I crowned her "The Garden Lady." Elevating her to

queenship, I beheld her giant moon flowers overtaking the curb, her meandering trumpet vines crawling along the trellis, her massive feathery peonies bowing to all who passed and her fragrant Russian sage tickling my nostrils.

The Garden Lady is gone now. Moved away. Rumor has it she got a divorce. Her flowers have disappeared with her, succumbing to her absence.

Betty Strong, a skillful and tireless community leader whose passion for improving the lives of all people, particularly children would be difficult to match. Betty's legacy as a community leader encourages, inspires and challenges others to do more. Her name lives on in the The Betty Strong Encounter Center next to Sioux City's Lewis & Clark Interpretive Center.

The rank of royalty reigns supreme. Its membership swells among us: educators, health care workers, scientists, builders, receptionists, plumbers, electricians, artists, clergy, counselors, neighbors and even complete strangers.



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Guest Commentary:

7.6 million reasons to keep high school sports

By Bob Gardner

I'm not quite sure what qualifies a former college basketball coach to assess the state of high school sports, but last week in USA Today's online edition, the following headline caught my attention: "Former college coach proposes ending high school sports." Wow!

This article, which originally was published in the Reno (Nevada) Gazette-Journal, contained thoughts and ideas of Len Stevens, a former college basketball coach and current executive director of the Reno-Sparks Chamber of Commerce. Mr. Stevens suggests we should "kick it (high school sports) to the curb" and go the way of the European model focusing solely on club sports.

The author of the article, Dan Hinxman, suggests that Mr. Stevens' thoughts might be preposterous, ludicrous and, perhaps, downright offensive to some individuals. Mr. Hinxman is correct. As the head of an organization that provides leadership to 51 state high school associations, 19,000 high schools and more than 7.6 million student-athletes involved in high school sports, I am pleased to report that funeral arrangements have been cancelled.

What Mr. Stevens probably doesn't know is that many of those countries employing the "European model" would trade their model in an instant for the education-based philosophy of high school sports in the United States. After listening to my report at the 9th International Session for Educators at the International Olympic Academy in Greece last summer, representatives from many nations marveled that our programs receive little or no government support in our schools, and the universal wish of the delegates from other nations was that their programs could be more like ours.

Mr. Stevens suggests that since club sports have been growing in the United States we should end high school sports and go exclusively with club sports, which "would answer a lot of problems and put the high school focus back where it belongs – on education."

What Mr. Stevens doesn't account for is that if sports were removed from American high schools, the focus would not be on education. The focus would be on trying to locate students who abruptly left school – dropouts – when sports were taken away.

And, by the way, the

education component is the singular unique component of the U.S. model. Student-athletes learn much more than how to set a screen in basketball or cover the first-base bag in baseball. While the number of teacher-coaches has dwindled, most schools that employ out-of-school coaches require those individuals to complete an education course, such as the NFHS Fundamentals of Coaching course.

On the other hand, club sports lack an educational component. These programs exist solely for the purpose of improving one's athletic skills and, through that process, hopefully landing a college scholarship. The team concept rarely exists and there is no overall philosophy to help prepare students for life after school, which is a major goal of education-based sports within the schools.

Mr. Stevens also noted that no one attends games any more. Really? A survey conducted by the NFHS last year indicated that more than 510 million people attended high school sporting events during the 2009-10 school year. On Friday nights in the fall, there are 7,000 high school games being played every week. On winter nights – two to

three times a week – there are about 18,000 girls and boys basketball games being played. More than 7.6 million high school students compete in high school sports, and those numbers have risen for 22 consecutive years.

How many of those 7.6 million kids would still be around if the only option was to join a club team? The clubs only want the very best athletes, and fees can range from \$5,000 to \$10,000 a year to be involved with a year-round travel team.

A large majority of high school students who are involved in sports are there to have fun, to be with their friends, to compete and learn and to be a part of a team. Kids have a need to be needed and to be a part of something positive, to be involved with their peers and coaches who care. Many students involved in sports do not have a support system at home – their high school teammates and coaches are their lifeblood. This concept simply does not exist through club sports.

At our recent National Athletic Directors Conference in Indianapolis, several high school athletic directors talked about their days as high school athletes and the importance of these

programs.

Monica Maxwell, a middle school athletic director from Indianapolis, said, "I knew I wanted to get out of my neighborhood. If it wasn't going to be through athletics, it was going to be through the military . . . I think that story – my story – is a story of many athletes. They know that their ticket out of their neighborhoods is going to be athletics."

Lanness Robinson, an athletic director from Tampa, Florida, said, "If I didn't maintain a 3.5 grade-point average, my mom wouldn't let me play sports. That's the only reason I tried because otherwise I didn't care. I believe that athletics is the greatest dropout prevention program that we have . . . I think the three most identifiable people on the school campus . . . are the head football coach, the principal and the quarterback. What does that say about school? I've read stories where schools have actually made the decision to cut programs and I think in most cases, they reinstate athletic programs because they found that it doesn't work."

John Evers, a retired athletic director from Indiana, said "When good things happen – if a team is making a great playoff

run – the community comes together. That's not something you often get outside of athletics. I've never seen a town rally around a chemistry class, but I have seen them rally around a team of kids doing something special."

Becky Oakes, director of sports at the NFHS, said in a recent issue of High School Today, "Students enjoy the school-community identity that comes with playing in high school. In general, high school coaches will treat each student as part of the team and the community; this is the selling point that high schools have far over any club team."

Certainly, there are challenges in many states, mainly due to funding issues. But even in those situations when funds become tight, more often than not the community responds because it sees the value of these programs for young people. With all due respect to Mr. Stevens, there are 7.6 million reasons we're going to keep sports within our schools.

About the Author: Bob Gardner is executive director of the Indianapolis-based National Federation of State High School Associations, the national leadership organization for high school athletic and activity programs.

Vermillion

Since 1884 • Official County, City and School District Newspaper

201 W. Cherry, Vermillion, SD 57069 • Publication No. USPS 657-720
Publisher: Gary Wood • Editor: David Lias



PLAIN TALK

Published weekly by YANKTON MEDIA, Inc. • Periodicals postage paid at Vermillion, SD 57069.
Subscription rates for the Plain Talk by mail are \$27.56 a year in the city of Vermillion. Subscriptions in Clay, Turner, Union and Yankton counties are \$41.34 per year. Elsewhere in South Dakota, subscriptions are \$44.52, and out-of-state subscriptions are \$42.
POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Plain Talk, 201 West Cherry Street, Vermillion, SD 57069.

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