

Spotlight On

UNIVERSITY OF
SOUTH DAKOTA

Wagner loves to assist USD students as they tackle math problems

By Travis Gulbrandson
travis.gulbrandson@plaintalk.net

Clare Wagner, instructor for the Department of Mathematical Sciences as USD, is this year's recipient of the Outstanding Instructor Award, which is presented by the College of Arts & Sciences.

"It feels wonderful," Wagner said of receiving the award. "It's a hard job sometimes to teach math to students who struggle and don't like the subject, so receiving the award was a really wonderful recognition."

Now in her 22nd year as an instructor at USD, Wagner did not initially intend to become a teacher.

"I actually started out in the medical profession," she said. "I worked for six years in Sioux Falls for a group of surgeons. I was a medical assistant for Surgical Associates, and I didn't know that math was going to be in the cards for me."

It became apparent to Wagner that math was "in the cards" when she began

volunteering for her church's youth group. "Sometimes students would be working on homework before youth group meetings would get underway," she said. "A couple students would work on math, and I would take a look at it and say, 'I really like that stuff. Can I help you?' Before I knew it, I was tutoring some students on trigonometry, geometry and algebra."

"I decided, 'This is fun.' It was fun helping students understand the math ideas," she said.

She earned a B.A. in mathematics education from USD, after which point she taught eighth grade math in Vermillion for three years.

"Then I went on to finish my master's degree at the university. A job opened up in the math department, and I've been here ever since," she said.

Wagner has since taught such courses as College Algebra, Calculus I and Quantitative Literacy – a course she also developed, making it the first one in the state.

She also has developed



an online version of Calculus I that has been taught during the summer – this summer will feature an online Quantitative Literacy course – and has been instrumental in implementing and coordinating the Math Emporium approach for teaching College Algebra at USD.

Wagner said she enjoyed math very much when she was a student herself.

"I had some wonderful teachers in public school growing up," she said. "My dad was a stubborn German patriarch kind of guy, but we had one thing in common: We both loved math. He actually was showing me as a little girl a way to do subtraction that they would do in Germany that his dad taught him. I now know that it's known as Austrian subtraction, and I was hooked from that moment."

Growing up near Groton, SD, Wagner said, "We were poor. We didn't have much money growing up. I lived on a farm where we didn't even have running water. We had an outhouse."

"There was one stable thing in my life, and that was school," she said. "I knew that going to school, I had teachers who cared about me and helped me, and I liked the stability of math."

Wagner said her favorite part of being an instructor is when students visit with her during her office hours.

"That's when I actually get to work with them face to face, and help them and guide them as they do math," she said. "When I'm teaching in a classroom, I am dealing with a whole group of students. The best part is when I sit next to a student and guide them as they do a problem. It's that personal aspect that's a lot of fun for me."

The Outstanding Instructor Award is given annually to a faculty member in the College of Arts & Sciences who demonstrates outstanding classroom teaching and mentoring of students. The winner receives a cash prize, which is made possible through an annual give of the Johnson family.

NALC food drive May 11

On Saturday, May 11, the largest annual one-day effort to combat hunger will once again take place in Vermillion. That is the day of the 21st annual National Association of Letter Carriers Food Drive.

This food drive is conducted with the help of not only the letter carriers but also the rural carriers, who cover the country side including the Burbank and Meckling areas, as well as all the other postal employees. Volunteers from the Vermillion Food Pantry will also be lending a hand to help collect as many food items as possible.

The concept is simple and donating is as easy as taking a can or two of non-perishable items and placing them by your mailbox on Saturday, May 11. When you get your regular delivery of mail, your donation will be

collected and taken to the Vermillion Food Pantry, which is operated out of Trinity Lutheran Church.

Items that can be donated include canned and boxed non-perishable foods. If you wish to donate a bag full of food items, just place it near your mailbox. If you are not able to participate on May 11, you are encouraged to donate early, simply leave a note with the items so that the postal employees know that this is a food pantry donation.

Please be generous; donate a can or two (or whatever you are able) to the Food Drive on May 11.

The goal of the Vermillion Postal Food Drive is to collect 5,000 pounds of food items and this can only be done with the support of the entire community.



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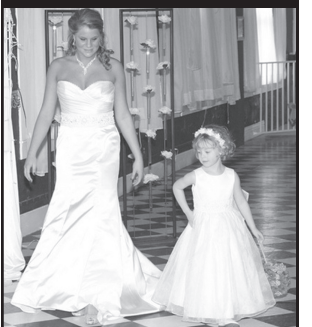
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