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**FREEDOM FORUM**  
AL NEUHARTH MEDIA CENTER

People who gathered Friday morning in AalFs Auditorium on the USD campus to celebrate the life of newspaper legend and 1950 USD alumnus Al Neuharth were greeted, at the program's opening, by a video message from Neuharth himself. He posthumously addressed audience members with a video segment taped before his death.

(Photo by David Lias)

## Celebrated spirit

### SD native Al Neuharth remembered at USD

By Travis Gulbrandson

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Al Neuharth is remembered around the world as a legend in the field of journalism for his founding of the *USA Today* among other achievements.

Those who gathered to celebrate his life on Friday, May 17, were reminded of something Neuharth always remembered throughout his life and career – his roots in South Dakota.

Colleagues, friends and acquaintances gathered at AalFs Auditorium on the University of South Dakota campus to pay tribute to the Eureka native, who died April 19 at his home in Florida.

"I did OK as a newspaper guy in Miami, and then nationwide after that, but I never lost my love for the sacred soil of South Dakota," Neuharth himself said via a pre-recorded video message.

Those who knew and worked with him confirm this.

Jack Marsh, president of the Al Neuharth Media Center, described Neuharth as being "South Dakota through and through."

"His first directive to me as a new employee was to create reasons for him and his young family to leave Florida and visit South Dakota for what he called 'reality checks,'" Marsh said.

Neuharth often returned to the state a half-dozen times each year, often bringing along family members.

"In South Dakota, we were familiar with a relaxed and unpretentious Al Neuharth," Marsh said. "He always insisted on taking the wheel, pumping his own gas and setting his own pace. When he wasn't in a hurry, he got off the Interstate and took the back roads. As he

surveyed the vast, open landscapes and the spectacular prairie sky, he regaled the children and other passengers with stories about growing up in the '30s, '40s and early '50s. ...

"It's like a breath of fresh air here," Al once told a television audience. "South Dakotans are the real thing. They can tell when the emperor has no clothes on. South Dakotans behave with each other, know each other and care for each other."

Sen. John Thune agreed, adding, "Al was from a different generation than I was, but I think he never forgot where he was from ... and that matters. And, it always came across."

"With Al, what you saw was what you got," Thune said. "He was authentic to the core. There was nothing phony about him, and I always appreciated that."

USD president James Abbott said Neuharth's visits to USD – often over Dakota Days – served as "a subtle and constant reminder to our students that they, too, could dream dreams and make them come true."

Born in Eureka in 1924, Neuharth's family moved to Alpena after the death of his father in 1926.

Like many of his generation, Neuharth served during World War II, enlisting in the Army and serving both in Europe and the Pacific.

"I always believed that a lot of his determination, his grit, was shaped by (the war)," said former NBC news anchor and USD alum Tom Brokaw said in a video statement.

Neuharth was among the many

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## Author's visit sparked by 'electronic friendship' with student blogger

By Travis Gulbrandson

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The Internet has made personal correspondence easier than ever, either between relatives, friends or coworkers. One such friendship resulted in a writer of young adult fiction visiting local schools and the city library last week.

Thanks in large part to the efforts of local 14-year-old Maddie Meylor, author Susan Dennard came to Vermillion Tuesday, May 14, to speak at the middle and high school, and to appear at "Deadly Day at the Library," an author talk and book-signing.

The day's events came as the result of the e-mail friendship between Meylor and Dennard, author of a YA gothic mystery called "Something Strange and Deadly."

"I review books on my blog, and there were some conventions I had wanted to go to, but I had schedule conflicts, so I was unable to," Meylor said. "My mother and I approached the library just to see if they would be interested in ever having an author come."

"It just kind of went on from there. I contacted an agent, worked with her. We really had no idea how it worked at all, so it was a learning process for sure. It was a good experience. I learned a lot through organizing it," she said.

"She did a good job," Dennard said. "Most people don't go to the agent, which is the right thing to do. Most people are just like, 'Hey, can you come see me?' ...

"I was impressed, honestly, because I already kind of knew

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## Miles tells grads to prep for highs, lows

By Travis Gulbrandson

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Olympic pole-vaulter Derek Miles had some words of advice for the Vermillion High School class of 2013 – learn to navigate the highs and lows of your life, revel in your victories and keep perspective.

Miles made his remarks as featured speaker in the graduation ceremony that was held in the DakotaDome Saturday afternoon.

An assistant coach for the USD Track and Field Team, Miles competed at the Olympics in 2004 and 2008, and has been ranked in the top 10 pole-vaulters in the nation for 10 years, with four years at the number-one spot.

Miles recalled competing at the World Athletics Final in 2003.

"They invited the top eight polers in the world, and I was lucky enough to make the cut," he said. "It's a prestigious meet. They hold it in Monaco, which is kind of the ritziest of all the places in the world."

Also at the meet was a German named Tim Lobinger.

"He had a terrible season all year," Miles said. "He never really jumped very high. He just managed

to make ... the top eight."

At the event itself, competitors have only three chances to clear the bar, so they have to make them count.

"(Lobinger) comes down there, and in his first shot he actually makes the bar, but his hand hits the bar on the way around, and that's a no-no," Miles said. "You can't upset the bar."

Lobinger was upset, Miles remembered.

"I watched him sit down, and he kind of put his hands over his head and collected himself a little bit," Miles said.

Then Lobinger stood up and tried again. He cleared the bar, and won the event.

"What he proceeded to do then was (to take) his pants down and run the entire curve of the track all the way down the backstretch with his butt hanging out," Miles said.

Miles said he learned two things from this experience.

"In life you're going to have these highs and lows, and sometimes within a very short period of time," he said.

"(Lobinger) was able to negotiate

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The Vermillion High School class of 2013 files into the DakotaDome at the start of the graduation ceremony Saturday.

(Travis Gulbrandson/Vermillion Plain Talk)



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