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The Sound of USD



Members of The Sound of USD marching band play their hearts out at their "year-end spectacular" concert Monday night at Aalfs Auditorium on the University of South Dakota campus. (Photo By Travis Gulbrandson)

Frank Warren shares secrets at PostSecret event in Vermillion

By Travis Gulbrandson
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Everybody has a secret. Frank Warren found this out when he started PostSecret, a project that allows strangers to anonymously design a postcard that tells a secret about themselves, which Warren then posts on his Web site, PostSecret.com. In eight years, Warren has received a half million postcards, and his Web site averages 7 million visitors per month. "We all have secrets, and every day I think we make a choice about what we do with our secrets, whether we box them up and bury them inside of us and forget about them, or bring them out into the light and share them with the people we trust," he said. Warren discussed his project on a visit to the University of South Dakota on Wednesday, Nov. 14. During the program, he discussed how PostSecret began, showed some of his



Frank Warren, founder of PostSecret, appeared in Aalfs Auditorium last week for a presentation in which he discussed the beginnings of his project, showed some of his favorite postcards and gave the audience a chance to share some of their own secrets. (Photo by Travis Gulbrandson)

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USD Researches PTSD Affecting Vets

BY RANDY DOCKENDORF
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For many combat veterans, the battle doesn't end when they return home. They find themselves torn between the war they left behind — or can't leave behind — and trying to deal with family, jobs and other issues on the homefront. And often, no one else seems to understand them or their situation. Now, University of South Dakota researchers at Vermillion are seeking new insights into the complex issues surrounding Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Drs. Jeffrey Simons and Raluca Gaher of the USD psychology department are part of the multidisciplinary study. The project is made possible by a \$1.7 million grant from the National Institutes of Health (NIH). The grant will cover equipment, salaries and reimbursement for participants. The study focuses on Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) veterans, Simons said. The ultimate goal of the researchers is to improve care for the country's newest generation of veterans. "It's a rolling experiment over four years. We are following a particular subject for 18 months," he said. "By time we are done, we will have followed 250 people over the four-year period." The research is being conducted with partners at the Veterans Affairs (VA) Medical Center in Sioux Falls and the Veteran Health Care System in Bay Pines, Fla. Simons and Gaher are also working with a behavioral geneticist at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, an electrochemical engineering firm in Boston and a leading expert in longitudinal modeling at the University of California-Davis. The researchers are studying the link




Two men discuss issues during the eighth veterans' supper in Vermillion. The community program, held last week at the Eagles Club, provided veterans and current military members with camaraderie as well as a meal. (Photo by Randy Dockendorf/P&D)

between traumatic stress and health, Simons said. "The subjects give us a saliva sample for the genetics study, which is related to specific neurotransmitters in the brain," he said. "It's not like there's a gene for PTSD. It's more related to reactivity and control. We are looking at self-regulation and emotions." The researchers are also studying a veteran's surroundings. They are examining social, psychological and environmental factors. In turn, those factors contribute to individual differences in resilience and vulnerability. "Some of what we do tries to look at what

extent someone is isolated or in supportive — and non-supportive — relationships," Simons said. The project uses advanced data collection, including real-time monitoring of veterans' behavior with palmtop computers. "We get assessments of their behavior on a day-to-day basis," he said. "We understand the factors that contribute to their patterns of good days and bad days. We understand the factors that lead to positive growth over time." Using the palmtop computers, the veterans answer specific questions on a variety of

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