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DANCING FOR DIVERSITY



SARAH WETZEL/ FOR THE PLAIN TALK

Diwali, a festival originating in India is celebrated by Hindu and Jain people the world over including the 20-30 students of Indian origin currently attending USD and various faculty members, was celebrated on the campus of USD on Monday. Pictured: guest dancers from the Sioux Falls Indian Community perform a Garba Dance.

Diwali Honors Diversity At USD

BY SARAH WETZEL
For the Plain Talk

After weeks of planning and work, the University of South Dakota's Center for Diversity and Community presented its first ever Diwali celebration last Friday at the Muenster University Center.

Diwali, a festival originating in India is celebrated by Hindu and Jain people the world over including the 20-30 students of Indian origin currently attending USD and various faculty members.

"A lot of effort has gone into planning this event," said Dean Venky Venkatachalam of the Beacom School of Business. "USD is a great institution that welcomes scholars and students from around the world to experience the world-class teaching and research and learning that this institution offers."

For this particular celebration USD students and members of the Indian community in Sioux Falls performed both traditional and contemporary Indian dance as well as giving presentations on the holiday and how it differs from region to region.

Guests also enjoyed Indian food and art displays. "This is the festival of lights that symbolizes the victory of goodness over badness," said Naveen Rokkam, USD student and event coordinator. "This is the first ever of its kind at USD. We think programming like this is essential for international students to help themselves feel at home. Imagine yourself at Christmas thousands of miles away and you imagine your family making bread and other fun things. That's exactly the same thing we have when festivals are passing by. So CDC has come up with programming saying you guys deserve more, you guys deserve to be celebrated."

"It is a part of what we do in the Center for Diversity and Community," said CDC director Lamont Sellers. "We exist to provide a place where our students and faculty and staff can collectively learn about, support and celebrate the rich cultural and social diversity we have here on our campus."

Being from India himself, Rokkam shared some of his first experiences in the United States.

"When I first came to the United States my first culture shock was people started eating dinner at five then they would go to bed," he said. "In India everybody had dinner at 9:30 or 10. In India 5:00 is a time when you go out with friends and eat some junk food on the roads."

Rokkam along with the other speakers shared appreciation for all the work that went into bringing this piece of Indian culture to USD.

"This is an integral project with the university, the students and the community," Rokkam said. "It's not one piece, it's everything put together and that's what makes it the grand celebration."

According to Sellers, Rokkam and his wife Kalyana Mondreti were a big reason themselves for the success of the event whose attendees filled the MUC's ballroom.

"This past summer as I began contemplating the fall

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Vermillion Now!2 Campaign Surpasses Goal, Raises \$1.6 Million For Community Development

BY RANDY DOCKENDORF
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The Vermillion Now! 2 campaign for economic development has surpassed its \$1.6 million goal in pledges, an official announced Wednesday.

"We've received \$1.1 million in cash and \$528,000 in in-kind contributions," said Nate Welch, executive director of the Vermillion Chamber and Development Company (VCDC).

Welch gave his report during the VCDC luncheon at the Bluffs clubhouse. Vermillion Now! 2, a five-year initiative, has wrapped up a year-long fundraising campaign.

The \$1.6 million represents a major commitment toward Vermillion's future, Welch said. More importantly, the donors are honoring their pledges, he said.

"We've received \$410,000 in cash so far, which represents over 93 percent of the amount we would expect to receive at this time," he said. "People are holding true to their word and commitment."

Of the \$410,000 in cash col-

lected so far, the VCDC has invested \$331,500, Welch said. The VCDC has invested the entire \$37,000 of in-kind pledges.

The influx of cash and in-kind contributions benefits Vermillion Now! 2 in two ways, Welch said in an interview following the luncheon. The VCDC not only has gained new resources but also knows the campaign is moving forward as planned, he said.

"Sometimes, things change over time and people aren't able to give like they thought. You might see giving come out to 85 percent of the amount pledged," he said. "But with this (high percentage), we're able to constantly grow and go after our initiatives."

The funds allow the VCDC to pursue a number of projects, he added. The \$1.6 million goes to the following initiatives:

- \$350,000 for developing Bliss Pointe, providing up to 114 home sites for affordable housing.
- "Bliss Pointe has shown great



RANDY DOCKENDORF/P&D

The Vermillion Now! 2 campaign for economic development has surpassed its \$1.6 million goal in pledges, an official announced Wednesday, represents a major commitment toward Vermillion's future

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Eagle Creek Lawsuit Details Discussed

BY RANDY DOCKENDORF
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The Vermillion Chamber and Development Company is progressing in its lawsuit against a business that didn't occupy a VCDC building as planned, according to the organization's legal counsel.

VCDC attorney Melissa Jelen responded to an audience question at Wednesday's luncheon for the Vermillion Now! 2 campaign.

The VCDC has filed suit against the Eagle Creek software business. The VCDC alleges Eagle Creek didn't follow its commitment to locate in Vermillion at a facility provided for the business. Eagle Creek disputes the allegation.

The building in the middle of the dispute is located across from Wal-Mart in the northwest part of Vermillion.

At Wednesday's luncheon, Jelen said she realized the VCDC audience wanted more information on details surrounding the lawsuit and its progress. However, she said neither she nor the VCDC officials could speak freely on many issues while the lawsuit remains in the courts.

"We're not allowed to do so at this time," she said.



MELISSA JELEN

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VSD Holds Strategic Planning Session

BY SARAH WETZEL
For the Plain Talk

Various representatives met at Red's Steakhouse Tuesday to engage in an innovative thinking session to assist in the Vermillion School District's goals over the next few years.

The question to be answered over the course of the day was: What is the Vermillion School District to be doing differently in one to three years to build upon its successes, leverage its opportunities, and overcome challenges?

The goals were to have at the end of the day, "several issues of significant input, a translation of those issues into 'action categories', a start at steps to take to address action categories and the initial effort to do something to achieve the steps to take."

"This is an opportunity to bring a wide range of representation from school

and community together to discuss issues and assist in setting a renewed course for the school district," said Superintendent Mark Froke. "For the last few weeks we've been running a survey online for people to respond and we took those survey responses and categorized them into areas that we could work with in a general perspective. We used those survey responses as sort of a theme for the day and as our issues came up throughout the course of the day then those issues were coupled with survey responses. We feel we have a strong sense of where parents and community members are as well as school personnel."

Attendees at the meeting included a combination of teachers, school board members, administrators, parents and business representation as well as booster club representation to further the goal of widespread



SARAH WETZEL/FOR THE PLAIN TALK

Representatives from both school and community organizations as well as parent groups came together for a Strategic Planning Meeting Monday to help guide the school district in its goals for the next few years.

representation.

According to the leadership, it was of the utmost importance to know what is important to parents, stakeholders and survey respondents in order to

prioritize administrative and policy efforts, develop a 'report card' on activities to pair with the more routine academic standards reporting requirements.

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