# Writers Group Expressing Themselves Through The Written Word

**BY SARAH WETZEL** For the Plain Talk

Those searching for ways to express themselves while discovering a new talent and fostering self-improvement should try writing according to Vermillion Community Writers Group leader and graduate student Leslie Claussen.

The group meets at the Vermillion Public Library every first and third Monday at 6

Claussen has worked for quite some time to get this group together designed to be a writing workshop, sharing time and socialization all rolled into one.

"I spent awhile, I would say almost a year, trying to get people to meet first at the writing center on the university campus," she said. "Then I changed it to a community group and that seems to draw more people."

The small group currently has three to four regular attendees along with other visi-

tors periodically of all ages.
"Larry just turned 81," Claussen said of one of the regulars. "We've also had high schoolers. The average age is probably mid to late 20's but anyone can come."

The meetings start with an exercise. "Usually we do a prompt based off of a word or prompt-generated sentence that I bring with me," Claussen said. "A prompt is either a word or sentence that helps generate story ideas and you go off that and write some kind of story or poem or essay or whatever you want to write. We read that as a group and then if anyone has brought material of their own to share we encourage them to read that. You can bring handouts if you want or just read it on your own. Then we kind of chat about writing and different aspects of it."

Claussen saw the benefits of a writers



SARAH WETZEL/FOR THE PLAIN TALK Writers and potential writers meet the first and third Monday of each month at the Vermillion Public Library to both work on their writing and socialize.

group like this before she moved to Vermillion which is what drove her to develop a group here.

"I had a writers group before in Sioux City and I wanted to try to bring people like that together since I moved here," she said. "We're under the Vermillion Literary Project and there was a writers group under the VLP and it kind of died a couple of years back. I tried to resurrect it for about a year and then made it a community group and that's when it got noticed."

Those who do not consider themselves good writers should not let that keep them from trying according to Claussen.

"I would say some of the greatest writers I can think of thought they were crap so even people we consider good have self-doubt so self-doubt shouldn't be something that holds yourself back," she said. "Get yourself here and if you want to you can read something, you can listen to other people if you don't want to read that time. We try to be easy. If

you want harsh criticism, constructive stuff, we'll say things but if you want to just share poetry that you wrote that you think is not great we'll tell you you're on the right track and some things that might make you better. You can kind of judge if a writer is hesitant to share their work and we try to be accommodating and sensitive to that.

So what qualifies as good writing? "That is a question that is still up for debate," Claussen said. "I'm a graduate student in the English department and we are still asking that question academically. There's no standard definition for good writing."

The fact that no one knows exactly what qualifies as 'good writing' is another reason to go ahead and try it according to Claussen. Meetings like this are actually vital to get-

ting on the right writing path. Writing is very solitary so any chance to get out and socialize with people and say 'hey this is what i'm struggling with' it's very therapeutic in a way," Claussen said. "It helps if i'm having writer's block getting over it. It gets me excited about writing and sharing it with other people. That's the trick about writing. We want to be solitary in our writing but you have to have something to write about. You have to go out and experience things and bring them back to your

As far as how to start, Claussen said any-

thing goes. "Write what you know," she said. "For example Larry is writing his life story. That is totally a valid thing to write about. Maybe you did something cool or interesting or you had a weird experience or something no one else has done. You could bring that to the table as something interesting.'

Another important thing to consider is not to hold yourself to a particular form that doesn't flow for you.

"Write how you talk," Claussen said. "I worked at the writing center and that's something I would explain to understand your literary voice you have to understand how

you communicate." This seems to go against the format taught in public schools these days which Claussen said is not helpful especially if you are writing

for personal fulfillment. You do kind of have to unthink how you were taught and raised to do things just because that is not going to be an interesting piece of work," she said. "It's going to be boring and by the numbers."

Reasons why specific writing formats are taught in schools is simply that it is easier to teach and to grade.

"Not everyone is going to go off and be writers so it's not like they're aiming at those people," Claussen said. "I enjoyed and didn't enjoy my school years but then I found people that were like minded, either from my old writer's group or the English Department. You have to seek out people that want to be artistic and literary for yourself and don't think you're alone because there's a lot of people trying to create."

Though Claussen has not been published herself she has had plenty of fun on the path she hopes will one day lead to publication.

I wrote this weird thing that I presented at the last Milton conference and it was about a futuristic world where people are divided into normal and mentally ill," she said. "It was about these teenagers that were basically living in this psych ward in the future and weird things happening. It was a short story but I could always go back and expand it. That was something I really enjoyed."

For more information on the group visit the Vermillion Community Writers' Group facebook page or contact the Vermillion Public Library at (605) 677-7060.

### **CHAMBER CHAT**

#### **CHAMBER BUSINESS ANNOUNCEMENTS**

•A Holiday Gift from the Chamber Members to the Community: The VCDC is conducting a Vermillion Bucks sale. We are offering \$15,000 in Vermillion Bucks available for purchase in \$100 bundles of \$20 denominations at the discounted rate of \$85 per bundle. This equates to an immediate discount of 15% off on all products and services in Vermillion when using the Vermillion Bucks. They can be purchased at the VCDC office at 1012 Princeton Street. Limited to 3 bundles per family. Enjoy discount shopping and Happy Holidays from the Vermillion Area Chamber Members!

•W. H. Over Museum in Vermillion has established GEOCACHING CEN-TRAL (a one-stop location to learn all about geocaching...and how to participate in this GPS/cultural phenomena). This new project will provide family friendly entertainment for everyone that wants to experience the fun of geocaching. Education about geocache, lists of regional coordinate locations, new cache sites added, historical and cultural lists, how-to-guidance and even loaner GPS units are being created now. Future geocache events are also being planned and considered for inclusion at the Museum.

#### THURSDAY & FRIDAY, NOV. 26-27

•The VCDC office will be closed Thurs. & Fri., Nov. 26-27 for the Thanksgiving holiday

### TUESDAY, DEC. 1

David Owen, President of the SD Chamber of Commerce, will give a Pre-Legislative Session update at the Rotary Club meeting at the Al Neuharth Media Center, 555 Dakota St., on Tues., Dec. 1 at noon. Everyone is welcome, lunch is \$6.50. Non-Rotary members please call the VCDC to register 605-624-5571. Sponsored by the VCDC Legislative Affairs Committee.

#### FRIDAY, DEC. 4 & SATURDAY, DEC. 5

•"Light Up Vermillion": The Special Events Committee for the Vermillion Area Chamber and Development Company (VCDC) is sponsoring the 7th Annual "Parade of Lights" in Down-

town Vermillion on Fri., Dec. 4 at 6:30 pm. Vermillion area merchants, businesses, schools and organizations are encouraged to put together a float or entry for the parade.

 Children 11 and under are encouraged to enter a coloring contest for a chance to have "Lunch with Santa", sponsored by HyVee, on Sat., Dec. 5 at HyVee and to meet him before Christmas. Coloring pages will be available at the public schools, HyVee and the VCDC office at 116 Market St. The coloring entries must be received by November 23. Also on Sat., Dec. 5, from 12:30 to 2:30, bring the children for FREE pictures with Santa at HyVee by Peterman Photography. For more information please call the VCDC office at 605-624-5571.

### THIS WEEKS HAPPENINGS

•Hundreds of hats and scarves have been spotted in cities that are going to experience freezing temps this year. Do you have a few scarves that you don't use anymore? Vermillion has started hanging scarves, hats or mittens in Prentis Park on the corner of Plum & Main (across from Sanford) for those people that may need extra warmth this winter. The message attached to one of the scarves says: "I am not lost! If you are stuck out in the cold, please take this to keep warm!" Please put a nice note on your scarf to give away. Let's see if we can fill the trees. Please be respectful of the

•The Vermillion After Prom Committee is currently taking orders for Texas Roadhouse buns and butter. Buns are \$4.00/dozen and come frozen. The flavored butter is an 8oz container for \$2.00. We will have two pick up times the week prior to Thanksgiving. You may contact Sheri Ouellette at saouellette@msn.com with any questions.

 Veteran's Holiday Relief Drive:
 hosted in partnership with SD American Legion Auxiliary & Autumn Simunek, Miss South Dakota to benefit homeless & at-risk Veterans & Military Families. Contribute "Buddy

-Home-warming welcome recipe: assemble a laundry basket/waste basket filled with paper towels, laundry detergent, household cleaners, rubber gloves light bulbs, dust pan w/hand brush, flashlight/batteries, shower curtain w/rings, bath towel set, bathroom tissue, dishes, eating utensils, dish

soap, dish towel set-frosted with clear wrap/bow & greeting tag

-Substitute or single household & essential items welcome: bed sheets, pillows, blankets, sleeping bags, small appliances, alarm clock, hygiene products, warm apparel & socks, shopping gift cards

-Monetary Donations: checks payable & mailed to: American Legion Auxiliary Unit 1, Attn: Vets Relief Drive, c/o Marie Anne Ben, 16 E. Bloomingdale St., Vermillion, SD 57069. For more information: autumn.simunek@misssd. org; 605-890-3093. Vermillion drop-off locations: Broadcaster/Plain Talk, 201 W. Cherry St.; Main Street Center, 320 W. Main St.

#### FRIDAY, NOV. 20

•Tech Hour: one-on-one sessions with Vermillion Public Library Tech Assistant to answer tech questions, Fri., Nov.20, 10:30 am-12 pm. Call 677-7060 to register or stop by Circulation Desk to set up an appointment.

•USD Swim/Dive vs St. Cloud State,

Fri., Nov. 20, 4:00 pm at DakotaDome
•Vermillion High School Fall Show,
Fri. & Sat., Nov. 20-21 @ 7:00 pm

•NMM Live! Zorongo Flamenco Dance Theatre, Fri., Nov. 20 noon and 7 pm at National Music Museum, corner of Clark & Yale St. Free admission to noon mini concert; evening concert general admission: \$7. Seniors, youth admission, \$4. Free to USD students and to NMM members-with-benefits. Dancer Deborah Elias of Minnesotabased Zorongo Flamenco will show how flamenco dance is a percussion instrument. She will be accompanied by traditional Spanish flamenco guitar

by traditional Spanish flamenco guitar and cante jondo singing.

\*USD Theatre presents Mel Brooks'
"Young Frankenstein", Fri. & Sat., Nov. 20, 21 & Wed.-Sat., Dec. 2-5 @ 7:30 pm and Sun., Nov. 22 and Dec. 6 @ 2:00 pm in Knutson Theatre, Warren M. Lee Center for Fine Arts. Visit www.usd.edu/theatre for reservations & more information.

### **SATURDAY, NOV. 21**

•Overeaters Anonymous: Sat., Nov. 21 @ 9:00 am. Location: Newman Center-USD Campus, 320 E. Cherry across from the MUC at the corner of Page 4. Charry St. (West Peer stright Rose & Cherry St. (West Door-straight through double glass doors on left & first door on left; North Door-down hall to left & first door on left). Description:

Overeaters Anonymous is a 12 step program for people with eating disor-

ders & struggles

NMM at the Movies: "Muscle Shoals" Sat., Nov. 21, 10:00 am at Coyote Twin Theatre, 10 E. Main, downtown Vermillion. Admission Fee: General public, \$5. Admission for USD students and NMM members-with-benefits compliments of the National Music Museum. Visit: nmmusd.org for more information. Wake up with coffee, tea and pastry before show, \$5.00.

•2nd Annual Vermillion Armory Holi-

day Kick-Off Vendor/Craft Show, Sat., Nov. 21, 10 am-3 pm, 603 Princeton Ave. Over 30 local vendors & crafters. Free admission. All proceeds from raf-fle will be donated to Theta Omega Chapter of ESA to assist with gifts for

•Art Storytime (4 yrs. & up) at Vermillion Public Library, Sat., Nov.21, 10:15 am. Registration required; call 677-7060.

 Movement Storytime-birth-3 yrs. Vermillion Public Library, Sat., Nov. 21, 11:15 am. Registration required; call

•Moving Martilee Mae Carnival Benefit, Sat., Nov. 21, 12:00 4:00 pm

at Clay County 4-H/Extension Bldg., 515 High St. Event Website: www.face-book.com/events/968994853161894/. Please join us as we raise funds to purchase a wheelchair van for Martilee Mae, 13-year-old daughter of Phil and Vanessa Covington. Martilee has Rett Syndrome, a debilitating neuro-logical (movement) disorder that predominantly affects females. Although she is nonverbal, her smile and the sparkle in her eyes speak volumes. She has very little purposeful hand use, suffers from seizures, and has scoliosis. Martilee now weighs over 70 lbs. Vanessa and Phil are still lifting her in & out of their van and then lifting her chair into the back of the van. She has outgrown her car seat, and Vanessa has injured her shoulder. A wheelchair van is needed by this wonderful family, and we hope the community will rally

ariu we hope the community will rany around them to help make it happen! •Musical variety show at Gayville Hall in Gayville, SD featuring "Waylon, Willie & the Boys," Sat., Nov. 21, 8 pm. Call 605-267-2859 for ticket informa-

#### **NEXT WEEKS HAPPENINGS** SUNDAY, NOV. 22

•THE SOUND of USD'S YEAR-

END SPECTACULAR! Join USD's marching band, THE SOUND OF USD, as they celebrate the end of another exciting season of football, music and friendship, Sun., Nov. 22 @ 2:30 pm, Aalfs Auditorium, Slagle Hall. The public is invited to this event at no charge.

•Senior Flute Recital featuring Sarah Schmidt, Sun., Nov. 22, 7:30 pm, Colton Recital Hall, Warren M. Lee Center for Fine Arts

#### MONDAY, NOV. 23

•Girls Basketball Practice begins,

Mon., Nov. 23

•USD Swim/Dive vs North
Dakota, Mon., Nov. 23, 11 am at Dako-

aDome
•Art Storytime (4 yrs. & up) at Vermillion Public Library, Mon., Nov. 23, 5:30 pm. Registration required; call 677-7060.

•Welcome Table serves a free meal on Mondays at the First United Methodist Church, 16 N. Dakota St. Public is invited to enjoy fellowship & food prepared & served by volunteer groups, Mon., Nov. 23, 5:30-7:00 pm. Groups interested in volunteering to serve at the Welcome Table can contact John Lushbough at 605-670-0958 or email: jlushbough@gmail.com. For more information, visit: www.welcome-

table.org
•Tech Hour at Vermillion Public Li-

brary, Mon., Nov. 23, 6:30-8:00 pm. Call 677-7060 for more information

•Al-anon meeting at St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Mon., Nov. 23 @ 7:30 pm. For more information, call 624-9764

•Movement Storytime for birth-3 yrs. at Vermillion Public Library, Tues., Nov. 24, 11 am. Registration required; call 677-7060.

•Code Club for elementary students (K-5), Tues., Nov. 24, 3:30-5 pm at Vermillion Public Library. Snacks in-Sewing Coop at Vermillion Public

Library, Tues., Nov. 24, 7:00 pm

### WEDNESDAY, NOV. 25

•Thanksgiving vacation: No classes at Vermillion Public Schools & USD, Wed.-Fri., Nov. 25-27

## Plan

### From Page 1A

"We wanted to get a widespread perspective on issues so we could set a course for the next one to three years," Froke said. "Once every three years we'll come together and establish a plan.'

Holding this strategic planning meeting is a sign of progress according to

"The plan that we worked on previously had gained some age as well as we've addressed a number of issues on the previous plan," he said. "So it was time to start over again and address some new problems and issues and set a renewed course for the

district.' According to Froke though many ideas and issues were brought up, four main issues received the most attention.

'The main thing that surfaced dealt with establishing a long range facilities plan, facility renovation/ replacement plan," he said. "That does not mean that we're looking at replacing any building in the near future but we want to establish a plan where we can look into the future and determine where our district assets should be focused. We're not going

to be replacing buildings anytime soon but given the age of a couple of our facilities there's a feeling that we need to start looking into the future and giving a longrange look at what we want to do with our buildings."

Another issue dealt with early releases in order to give teachers time to collaborate and work on curriculum issues.

We will be discussing that more thoroughly in the near term but people will hear more about that as time goes but that seems

to be of real interest to the teachers," Froke said. "Also there was an issue of the possible need for a social worker to work in the community.'

Program reinstatement was another preparatory issue discussed. "Over the past ten

years or so due to budget restraints, state aid cuts, we've had to make program cuts in the district," Froke said. "There's an interest in taking a look at some of those programs again and establishing a plan of

reinstatement if funding were to ever become available where that could take

According to Froke and Matthew Fairholm who directed the meeting, the purpose of the meeting was not to come to any solution per se, this being more of a goal-setting session.

"We will be taking a look at Dr. Fairholm's report as a school," Froke said. "As a school leadership team and the school improvement team we will work at trying to address those issues that

came up and eventually these issues will be brought to the school board for their consideration.

The only real deadline set for a goal was to form a Long-Term Facilities Planning committee by January and have set ideas for early releases around the same time.

"We want to take a look at the early release time as far as establish a plan to present to the school board after the beginning of the next semester," Froke said. "Ultimately this planning

session was designed to address student needs and that was the overriding focus. Also to reflect the interests of the community. Sitting down like this is very important and setting some goals and establishing a general plan to move the district forward."

Though the survey has concluded, anyone who has additional comments or thoughts on school district issues may contact a school board member or local school administration.



November 20th-25th Buy ANY Appliance\* And Receive \$100 Off \$499 or More on Slumberland Furniture\* Plus Receive FREE Delivery On Both (up to \$69.99 Value)

Only at Yankton Slumberland, 920 Broadway Ave.



\*\*Slumberland exclusions include Posturepedic Hybrid and Optimum Stearns & Foster, Tempur-Pedic, HOT BUYS, as items, special purchases, and room packages. Not valid on prior purchases, gift cards, taxes, and delivery/warranty charges. May not be combined with other discounts or special promotions. One offer per household.

920 Broadway, Yankton, SD · 665-3719 · M-F 9-8, Sat. 9-5, Sun. 12-5

