

Neuharth winner talks about career in the field

By Randy Dockendorf
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Yankton native Josh Hoffner literally faced a life-and-death situation. Hoffner, the Southwest news editor for The Associated Press, needed to make an immediate decision in the moments following the January 2011 shooting of U.S. Rep. Gabby Giffords (D-Ariz.).

A number of sources were reporting Giffords had died in the assassination attempt. However, Hoffner couldn't confirm whether Gifford had died or remained alive. "We didn't report it at the AP, and everyone else was reporting it," the Associated Press' Carson Walker told Thursday's audience at the University of South Dakota.

Hoffner faced growing pressure to put out a story on the congresswoman's status. In the end, he decided against reporting she had died — and made the right call.

"We would rather get it right than get it wrong and have to un-ring the bell," said Walker, now the AP news editor for the Dakotas.

Unfortunately much of the world — including Giffords' husband — believed the congresswoman had died based on the inaccurate reports.

While the errant media corrected their story, the damage had been done, Walker said.

"If you report someone is dead, there's no way to get it back in the tube," he said. "That's where the vetting (of facts) comes in."

Walker's recollection was part of Thursday's panel discussion on the media and politics. The afternoon forum preceded the annual presentation of the Al Neuharth Award for Excellence in Media to Peter Prichard, retired USA TODAY editor and former president of the Newseum.

The Giffords story provides just one example of the increasing pressure on traditional media because of social media and the desire to get a story first,

Walker said. The rise of the "citizen journalist" has created more and faster information, Walker said. However, it has also brought problems with accuracy in the race to be first.

In that regard, journalists are reshaping their role, Walker said. They are not only collecting information but checking the facts put out by bloggers and social media, he said.

"The biggest challenge is to go for the vetting process," he said. "We check it out, and we separate fact from fiction. We don't just pass along what is in the rumor mill."

On the other hand, a number of cable networks are devoting a large share of air time to partisan programming rather than hard news, said Chad Newswander, USD associate professor of political science.

In turn, those networks draw an audience looking for those views, Newswander said. "Basically, you are selling your argument to your own side," he said.

Prichard noted a study showing the impact of those reading and viewing habits.

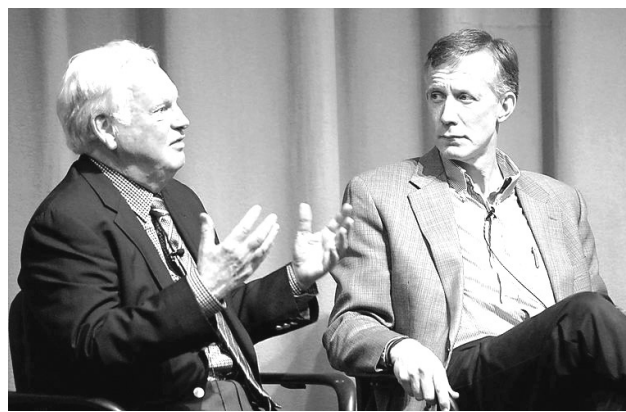
"Only 30 percent (of the public) believe the media reports without bias," he said. "That's a scary situation."

The growing demands on media come at the same time that news operations are cutting staff for financial reasons, said Gene Policinski with the Newseum Institute and First Amendment Center.

The size of news staffs has dropped from 60,000 to 38,000 journalists in recent decades, he said. More work is left on those who remain in the newsrooms, he said.

As a result, the coverage of statehouses and courts has suffered, the panel noted. South Dakota ranks 50th in the nation with two full-time staffers providing statehouse coverage.

The Associated Press recently lost reporter Chet Brokaw to retirement, which meant the loss of 34 years of experience and contacts for the Dakotas,



Peter Prichard (left), the 2014 winner of the Al Neuharth Award for Excellence in Media, responds to a question while The Associated Press' Carson Walker listens during Thursday's panel discussion on the University of South Dakota campus in Vermillion. Prichard is a retired USA TODAY editor and former president of the Newseum.

RANDY DOCKENDORF / PRESS & DAKOTAN

Walker said. The news organization is relying more on cooperative ventures with other sources such as daily newspapers, Walker added.

Thursday's panel discussed the blurred lines between news and entertainment.

When it comes to presidential debates, Thursday's panel questioned whether viewers become too wrapped up in things such as Twitter responses or a candidate's split-screen reaction to an opponent's response to a question.

In that regard, the panel noted that the moderator sometimes garners as much attention as the candidates themselves.

"It would be better if they would leave journalists out of it and let the politicians duke it out," Prichard said.

The USD panel also discussed the impact of rapidly changing technology. They noted the instantaneous reporting of breaking news on social media, providing more competition for traditional media.

In addition, technology has transformed reporting as many consumers click on a mobile device for news, Walker said. Many viewers decide whether to pursue a story by its opening sentence, he said.

"People are still hungry for information," he said. "The trick is to make it interesting."

The Associated Press is also making greater use of photo galleries, Walker said.

"Why write a 500-word story on the buffalo roundup (at Custer State Park) when you can let the pictures tell the story?" he asked.

The nation's audience is also changing, Policinski said. By 2025, the United States will have become a "minority majority" nation, moving from the concept of "diversity" to "inclusiveness," he said.

In response to a question, Walker said blogs can provide additional information and insights.

He added that he reads a wide variety of blogs from all parts of the political spectrum.

Blogs pose a concern mainly if readers rely on only one source or one end of the political spectrum, he added.

In the end, the public needs to be more discriminating in how and where they get their news, Prichard said.

"The key is to be intelligent, well informed and well-rounded news consumers," he said.

Prichard was presented the Neuharth Award in an evening ceremony at the Neuharth Center on the USD campus.

You can follow Randy Dockendorf on Twitter at twitter.com/RDockendorf. Discuss this story at www.yankton.net.

Teen Gazette meeting next Wednesday evening

A few weeks ago *The Plain Talk* announced the intention to start a *Teen Gazette* internal newspaper within these pages.

That plan is still in the works. We have received a small number of inquiries and have heard of students in multiple schools that would potentially be interested in helping kick this project off.

So, this upcoming Wednesday at 6 p.m., *The Plain Talk* will hold a short, informal meeting with parents and their prospective future journalists at *The Plain Talk* located at 201 West Cherry Street.

The project's purpose and plan will be talked about and we will see which skill sets match those students involved. If one can not make the meeting we encourage you to call 605-624-4429 or email alan.dale@plaintalk.net.

Students currently in 10th-12th grades are encouraged to get involved.

- THE PLAIN TALK

Salvation Army donates a valuable helping hand

By Angela Morrow
The Plain Talk

The Vermillion Salvation Army's fiscal year surprised the volunteers when the year ended with fundraising money left over.

The volunteers were notified their fiscal year was coming to a close and they had money left to use, otherwise it would be added to the Salvation Army's general disaster fund.

Most of their money comes from the annual bell ringing fundraiser. Last year they brought in more money than they had in the past.

"Last year's bell ringing, we worked really, really hard and almost doubled what we took in the previous year," Flanigan said. "We also have other donations that come in but not significant like the Christmas bell ringing."

The volunteers wanted to keep the money in the community and made a quick decision to help two local organizations.

"We hated to loose all of that from here because we have a big need here," Pat Flanigan, Salvation Army volunteer said. "We donated \$5000 to the Vermillion Food Pantry and we also donated \$1000 to the Weekend Backpack Program."

The Vermillion Weekend Backpack Program is a non-profit organization that helps Vermillion students that don't have food to eat over the weekend. The Vermillion Welcome Table sponsors the program.

"I'm always surprised at how generous folks are in regard to our program," John Lushbough Vermillion Backpack Program said. "I'm very grateful for all the support we get."

Through the aid of the community they are able to provide snacks and easy-to-prepare food to local students in need. "We will use the money to buy food to distribute in the weekend backpacks each week," Lushbough said. "We spend over \$35,000 annually to buy food for this program."

The Vermillion Food Pantry is a non-profit, community based organization that helps provide food to Clay County residents in need.

"This year, we will provide food assistance to over 5,500 people, of which approximately 1 out of 2 is a child," Jessica McKenzie, Executive Director for the Vermillion Food Pantry said.

Salvation Army volunteer Pat Flanigan also volunteers with the Vermillion Food Pantry. Flanigan checked with them when she realized the Salvation Army had extra money to donate.

"When Pat called to ask if our pantry had a need for some funding this fall, I had no idea that Salvation Army was intending to direct such a wonderful gift toward our food purchases," McKenzie said. "I was elated!"

The timing couldn't have been better. Changing seasons and returning students increase the amount of food needed to help the community.

"It is the perfect time to receive an extra boost," McKenzie said. "With students back on campus and winter coming, the need for our assistance is growing exponentially."

The food pantry is able to put the money to use restocking the cupboards.

"The money will allow us to afford the items that are always in high demand, canned tuna, meats, soups, chili, pasta sauce and pasta, and canned or frozen fruits and vegetables," McKenzie said. "We want to provide items that pack a powerful nutritional punch, so to speak, and Salvation Army is helping us do just that."

For more information on these organizations contact the Salvation Army at (605) 624-3120, the Vermillion Backpack Program at vermillionbackpack.org and the Vermillion Food Pantry at www.vermillionfoodpantry.org.

RENTALS From Page 1A

typically own one or two properties. Once deposits are put down and leases are signed, renters and landlords begin their relationship of working with each other.

Millie Boppert runs the local apartment search website vermillionapartments.com.

"Landlords pay to advertise here. USD students can also post if they are searching for roommates," Boppert said.

The web site was originally the brain child of a business school learning project group. Boppert is in the process of purchasing the site from the University. The site allows students to virtually tour apartments as a more modern version of residence hunting.

"I've been pretty lucky where I've rented in the past, but I have heard stories of landlords not fixing things right away and letting properties become kind of run down," Boppert said. While vermillionapartments.com is not limited to students in search of housing or roommates, they are the biggest clientele group on the website.

Because of Vermillion's history, many student housing options are old properties that have been converted into apartments and are owned privately. Many students feel that this

hinders their experience while at USD.

New facilities such as Coyote Village student housing have changed this dynamic slightly, but upper-classmen students still feel like there are not many options for renting off campus. USD students have pointed fingers at other Universities, suggesting that communities such as Brookings have better environments for renters.

"When our refrigerator died last year, our landlord gave each tenant in our unit a \$100 gift card to Hy-Vee, two bottles of wine, and fixed it right away," said Brookings resident Mikayla Moore. "I don't hear about positive experiences like that from my friends in Vermillion, but Brookings is bigger. I just think there are more options."

Some of the largest complaints among students are delayed repairs and deferred deposit returns. According to the Rental Protection Agency, a private firm that helps both tenants and landlords with legal advice, forms, and complaints, there has only been one recent complaint filed in the Vermillion area. The complaint was directly related to a tenant who had spent months trying to retrieve his security deposit and had yet to successfully do so. The deposit amount was for \$1000.

While renters may complain about landlords and facilities, renting to college students can present its own set of challenges for land-

lords as well.

"Some of the challenges I have experienced in renting to college students over the past 12 years are making them understand that when you sign a lease that is a legal binding document," said Sean Brady, of University Rentals.

Renting to such a young group of people isn't always easy.

"The main issue I see and it seems to be more prevalent as time goes on, is that it seems to me that parents take care of everything for their kids," Brady said.

Often University Rentals gets phone calls from students who struggle with small tasks such as changing a light bulb.

Brady suggested there are steps a potential tenant can take to ensure they have a positive renting experience.

"I think it is important for students to be thorough when looking for a place to live and don't just grab a

house they see because it's in a great place for them and all their friends to rent," Brady said.

Brady said that it's acceptable for prospective renters to ask property owners and managers questions. He said it is also acceptable for landlords to ask tenant applicants to fill out questionnaire and background checks.

"See if the landlord will provide references from previous tenants, if it's a multiple housing unit like an apartment go back later even and knock on some doors and get an idea from people living there what it's like, does the landlord fix things in a timely manner etc.," Brady said.

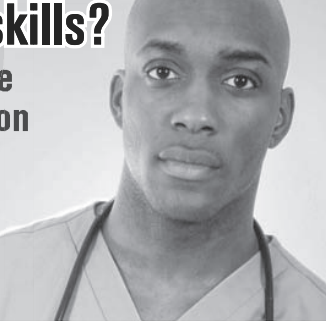
Brady's experience renting to young adults hasn't always been negative.

"I have found most college students are very good tenants and generally pay their rent on time," Brady said.

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CITY OF Vermillion SOUTH DAKOTA REMOVAL OF SNOW AND ICE CITY OF VERMILLION

The City of Vermillion Code Enforcement Department wishes to remind you that sidewalks are to be cleared of snow and ice within **twenty-four (24) hours** after any fall of snow or freezing rain.

If snow and ice is not removed within this period, the City may do so by other means and charge the cost of removal to the property owner.

Please be courteous to others and remove snow and ice promptly.

If you have questions, you may contact the Code Enforcement Office at 677-7089.

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