

Miller's Time As Governor Recalled

BY BOB MERCER
State Capitol Bureau

PIERRE – The proverbial old crowd, many now long retired, somberly gathered Monday afternoon for the memorial service honoring the life of former Gov. Walter Dale Miller.

The ceremony came on what would have been his ninetieth birthday. But he had died last week, on Sept. 28, while in Dallas, Texas, during a trip to visit the library of former President George W. Bush.

More than 200 people filled the rows of chairs in the rotunda and halfway down the east and west wings of the Capitol's second floor. More people watched from the third and fourth floor overlooks.

In the very front, facing the assembled, sat two rows of dignitaries who held special connections to the former governor. Among them was former First Lady Linda Mickelson Graham.

Side by side she and Miller led the escort behind the casket of the late Gov. George S. Mickelson down the front steps of the Capitol on that April afternoon 23 years ago.

Miller was lieutenant governor for Mickelson from 1987 until the unimaginable news arrived on the afternoon of April 19, 1993.

The state airplane, having lost a propeller blade because of a flaw that the Federal Aviation Association didn't warn pilots about, couldn't stay aloft in the low sky on the return trip from Cincinnati, Ohio.

As the state pilots Ron Becker and David Hansen fought to make a landing, the turboprop crashed into a silo. All eight men including Mickelson died.

Suddenly Miller was South Dakota's governor.

The New Underwood rancher, businessman and long-time Republican figure had to step up for 20 months and 19 days to lead South Dakota during one of the hardest episodes in the state's history.

At Monday's service, state Rep. G. Mark Mickelson answered the question many people have wondered for more than 25 years: What led his father to select Miller as his running mate in 1986?

Miller had spent the previous 20 years in the state House of Representa-



PHOTO: PATRICK CALLAHAN, LIFEWRX MEDIA

On Monday, October 5, the State of South Dakota honored former Governor Walter Dale Miller at the Capitol Building.

tives. Mickelson, a Brookings lawyer, was House speaker for the 1979-1980 term. Miller as speaker pro tem was in line for the next term to follow Mickelson in the top spot.

Mark Mickelson recalled his father sometimes stopping with the family at the Miller ranch. Watching the men together, he said he could tell his father felt that Miller "had all the attributes of a good partner."

No one on Monday mentioned the 1994 primary election that ended Miller's hope of winning a term as governor of his own. Only Gov. Dennis Daugaard made a slight reference, using the word "squabbles."

Both Miller and former Gov. Bill Janklow sought the Republican nomination in the June 1994 primary. Janklow won.

Miller spent the next seven months trying to hold together state government's budget. The South Dakota Supreme Court shut down video lottery from August until voters could decide that November whether to legalize it in the state constitution.

Daugaard noted that Miller was South Dakota's first full-time lieutenant governor.

"The state Capitol became Walt's second home year-round," Daugaard said. "He was the right man at the right

time, the steady seasoned cowboy."

State Attorney General Marty Jackley described Miller as the "cowboy governor" and "Meade County's favorite son." As a legislator Miller technically represented Meade County because that's where the ranch was, rather than Pennington County where New Underwood is; the Jackley family roots are in Meade County too.

Jackley repeatedly praised Miller for his loyalty.

Steve Kirby of Sioux Falls, who served as lieutenant governor for Miller, told the story of how he came to get that appointment. Kirby said he called the governor's office in the days after the plane crash and volunteered to help in any way he could.

Days later, on May 12, 1993, the Kirbys found a message on their telephone answering machine. "Seven words," Kirby said: "Steve – Walt Miller – Please call me – Thanks." Kirby said he joked to his family that the governor was calling to ask him to be his No. 2.

Turned out, he was.

The laughs came Monday afternoon with Frank Brost's turn at the microphone. He had been Mickelson's chief of staff, but they had just parted ways. The plane crash changed those plans.

Miller told Brost that Miller needed him, according to Brost.

"I said, I'll stay as long as you want," Brost recalled.

Brost, his voice still carrying that same raw prairie gravel of a sheepherder's son who took a strange turn into the halls of state government, acknowledged the politics of Mickelson, who wasn't averse to seeking a sales-tax increase, didn't always match the politics of Miller, whom Brost said had a "conservative approach."

Brost said Mickelson and Miller were a great team.

"He was a great leader," Brost said about Miller's time as governor. "He said about as few words as possible, but when he talked, people listened."

A motorcade was arranged to accompany Miller's body to Rapid City on Monday after the service and a reception.

The funeral was held Wednesday in Rapid City with burial at the Viewfield cemetery near the Miller ranch north of New Underwood.

LiveVermillion.com Website Connects All Aspects Of Vermillion Life

BY SARAH WETZEL
For the Plain Talk

The Vermillion Chamber and Development Company, in a continuing effort to make Vermillion living more convenient, have developed LiveVermillion.com, a website that acts as a one-stop information hub for those looking to find information on events, housing, tourism, or just the area in general.

"This is a website that the chamber put together to try and put everything into one location," said Tim Bellis, VCDC Tourism & Marketing Coordinator. "Anything anyone would want to know about Vermillion they could go to livevermillion.com and when you do so it takes you to a home page that has direct links to the chamber, to the city, to USD, to visitor info and tourism, to economic development and the community calendar, all in one spot."

Whether the site's visitors are newcomers to town looking for history and information on the location and economic indicators or a bored local looking for entertainment, ideal information should be found at this one site.

"You can go right to the community calendar and see what's been listed by any kind of organization who wanted to post," Bellis said. "So we put that all in one location, makes it very easy."

The links should all be current, each being updated by their specific parties.



"Each of these individual websites are controlled by themselves," Bellis said. "The Clay County people take care of theirs, the city takes care of theirs, etc. Even ours is in need of updating constantly. As soon as we get through some of these activities that have been running summer through Octoberfest, we'll be able to come in and do some housekeeping ourselves and get it cleaned up a little bit more and make further improvements."

Community members themselves are invited to share event information on the site through the community calendar.

"If you went into the community calendar and had an event that you want posted, there is a place that you can contact and it has a form that you fill out," Bellis said. "We update that daily and put it into the calendar whether it's a school event, a sporting event or a cultural event so we can color code those things and make it even simpler to read."

So far the site is working and people are starting to take notice.

"The community calen-

dar is full and very active," Bellis said. "People from all different organizations are starting to realize this is a fantastic connection to the community. To give an example there is a community education group for continuing ed. They have people from all walks of life in Vermillion. Everything from the library to the historical society to parks and rec to you name it. The don't necessarily have a conduit where they can get their information out and share it with people that are looking around for what's going on. So collectively they can post their things with us in the meanwhile and we can provide the link that connects all of them together so it shows everything under that umbrella of community groups for community education."

There is no cost to post on the community calendar according to Bellis.

Though the website itself is not new, improvements are still coming.

"It's always a work in progress," Bellis said. "It's never going to be perfect. We're always going to have glitches or things we need to continually improve upon to make it that much better and easier. In fact one of the things we're working with our website manager to put in a search bar so you get to that calendar or the home page and are still kind of lost so you can just type in the search item and it would

pull up all the search things. What we're hoping is to be able to link everyone and everything."

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