

VIEWPOINTS

Say Thank You To First Responders

BY SHAUNA MARLETTE

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If you follow the *Plain Talk* on Facebook, you know that there have been several fires in the area in the last few days and weeks and that I have been very impressed with Vermillion's fire department and Emergency Medical Services divisions.

I have seen the men and women of the crews battling several field fires in high wind situations, combine fires, a structure fire in town, all with great courage and skill.

The Vermillion Fire Department has been providing fire protection since 1892 and EMS since 1971.

According to their website there are three engine companies, one ladder company, one heavy rescue company and three ambulances in service every day to serve the citizens and visitors to the Vermillion and surrounding communities. The department is staffed with highly trained Volunteer Firefighters, Part-time EMS Staff and Career Officers.

There are more than 50 volunteer firemen and women and 26 dedicated members of the EMS Division ready to serve.

Utilizing paid on call staffing two of the three Ambulances are staffed 24 hour a day, every day.

When trying to find a description of what it is like to be a volunteer fireman I found the following poem by Daniel S. Driscoll, it sums it up better than I could.

A Fireman's Life

BY DANIEL S. DRISCOLL

*A fireman's life is one big surprise,
Usually he laughs, sometimes he cries.
There's always stress, toil and strife,
Hoping he's good enough to save just one life.
His wife understands, when he misses dinner,
If he runs out of church, don't think he's a sinner.
Answering a call, is tops on his list,
Regretting each one he's ever missed.
He tries and tries, but can't make us see,
The happiest men, still work for free.
Jumping from bed, fighting the cold,
Knowing what to do, without being told.
He rushes to the station, jumps on a truck.
Depending on skill, never on luck.
Putting his life on the line, for an unknown friend,
Hoping and praying, it won't be the end.
"The Bravest Men in the World", the title is fitting,
They all do their best, never come close to quitting.
Next time you see them, all their lights blinking,
Take just a minute, to think what they're thinking.
It's a hard job, so show them you care,
And help them out, with a little prayer.*

COURTESY OF THE FIREFLYER.COM

So, I for one will be saying a thank you and a prayer to all of them for the work they are doing for the community.

Meningitis Immunizations Save Lives

BY JOANIE HOLM, CNP

South Dakota mourned the death last month of a college student who was diagnosed after his death with bacterial meningitis. I didn't personally know this young man and can only imagine the grief his family and friends are experiencing.

Working in pediatrics and working with colleagues in family practice, we take the science of immunizations very seriously. There's no doubt about it, immunizations save lives. There are wide ranges of immunizations that are recommended for everyone, starting at the age of 2 months. The primary immunizations are required before children start school. The meningitis vaccine was originally recommended for young people as they entered college or the military. More recently, this vaccine is recommended at age 11 with a booster at age 17 to 18.

Meningitis is a bacterial disease and is spread from person to person. The bacteria are spread by exchanging respiratory and throat secretions like saliva or spit during coughing or kissing or lengthy contact, especially if living in the same household. Fortunately, these bacteria are not as contagious as germs that cause the common cold or the flu. The bacteria are not spread by casual contact or by simply breathing the air where a person with meningitis has been.

Although the symptoms and presentation will vary slightly from person to person, most persons who acquire meningitis will develop a sudden headache, light sensitivity, and a stiff neck. Other symptoms to watch for include severe aches or pain in the muscles, joints, chest or abdomen. In the late stages, a dark purple rash may appear.

Meningitis is a serious disease and can be fatal.

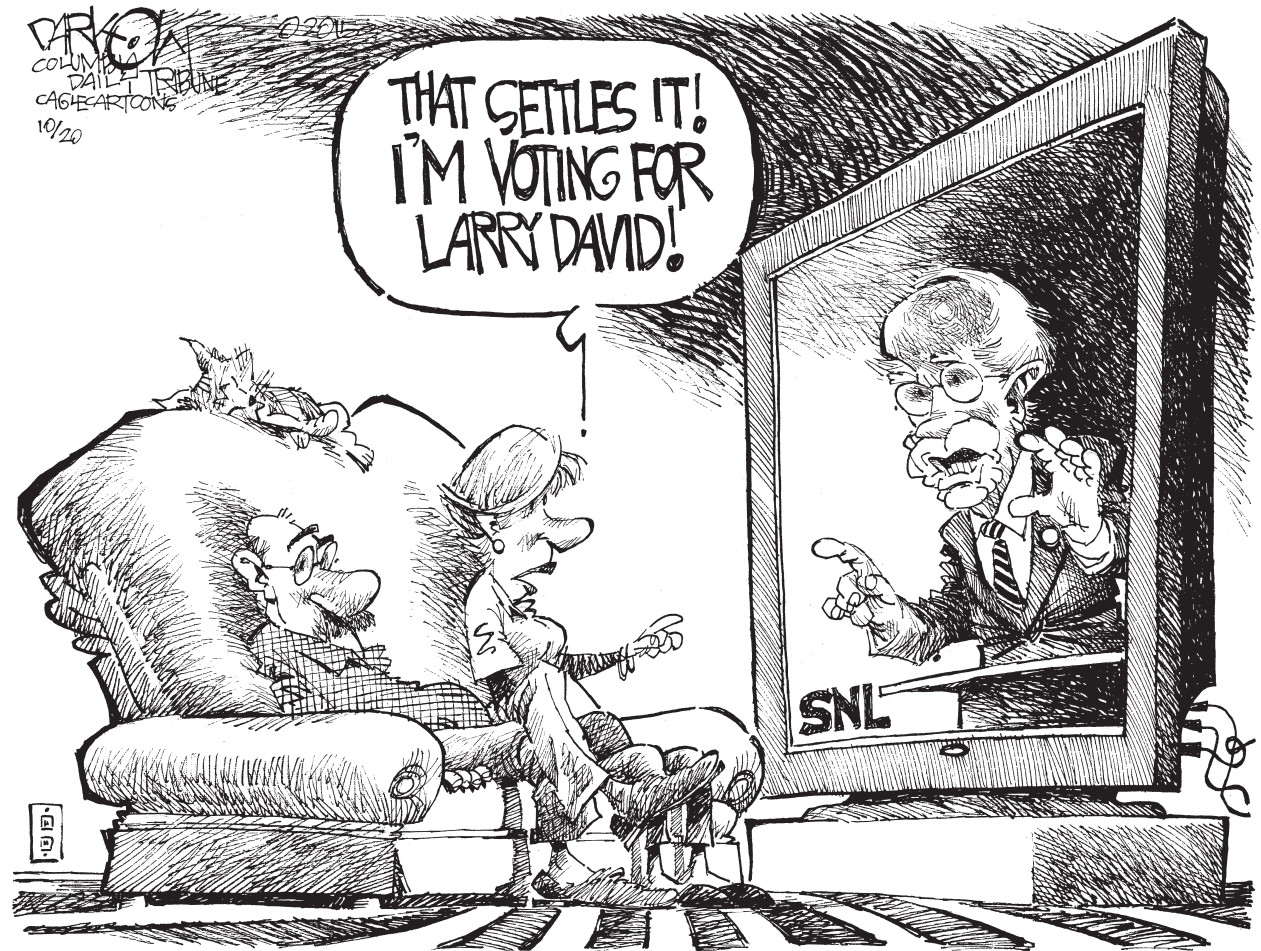
If you have an adolescent child, grandchild or friend, encourage them to get a meningitis vaccine. A simple injections and a booster shot may save a life and a lot of heart ache for a loving family.

To hear more from Dr. Holm, visit his website, www.Prairie-Doc.org. On Call with the Prairie Doc is produced by the Healing Words Foundation in association with the South Dakota State University journalism department and airs Thursdays on South Dakota Public Broadcasting Television at 7 p.m. CT, 6 p.m. MT, and streams live at www.PrairieDoc.org.

REFLECTIONS

National 4-H Week was October 4-10, 2015. I am in my eleventh and last year of 4-H. Now that I am in college, all of the community service and Youth-In-Action events that I have done over the years in 4-H taught me a lot that I can use now. A little more than a month into classes and I've already had to do public speaking in speech class, take a quiz

on animal by-products, and sew a pair of jeans and a lanyard (more boys should do Fashion Revue!) I haven't had to use the cooking that I learned in Special Foods yet, but I'm sure I'll use that sometime in the next few years. All in all, 4-H has prepared me well for life in general!

ERIKA FALLAN
VERMILLION

If My Travel Journal Could Talk

BY PAULA DAMON'S

"Somebody said it looked like the moon. But the moon looks like a golf course compared to this." – President Jimmy Carter's response to the devastation of Mount Saint Helen's eruption

Now a memento turned bookmark, this neon green wristband, with "Mount Saint Helen's National Volcanic Monument" printed on it, was handed to me by a U.S. Forest Service employee. I had paid the eight-dollar admittance fee to see this tourist attraction in Washington State.

The number printed on it reads 3,567,802. Suppose that indicates I was the 3,567,802nd visitor, since droves of sightseers frequent this spot every year.

Closed in winter, the highway leading to the mountain is long and winding. The fact that the road actually ends at the monument seems symbolic.

Upon arrival, I wasn't sure what I'd find.

Craning my neck and straining my eyes, I searched for elk, toads, birds, anything. There were no discernible sights or sounds of wildlife that I could see, except for a few bumble bees hovering over a scattering of wildflowers. The tranquility made them easy to spot.

It's been 35 years since Mount Saint Helen's erupted on a clear blue Sunday morning, May 18, 1980. Blasted a

12-mile-high column of steam into the atmosphere, producing a smoky plume that eventually traveled clear around the world.

I was a young mother at that time and remember seeing that massive sooty dust cloud taking its good old time passing over us here in the Upper Midwest.

Awestruck by news reports back then, I felt my life was incidental, rightfully so, given what victims caught in the cross hairs of such devastation had endured.

Then and now, the whole idea of a volcano erupting on the U.S. mainland was and is surreal. Never believed I'd stand in its shadow, a mere few miles out. Yet, there I was.

Listening intently to our tour guide, I learned that day turned to night, as the eruption sent a super hot stone-filled wind down the mountain. It created the largest landslide in recorded history. Ever.

What commenced was a rumbling river of searing pumice, rock and ice, traveling at a very high speed, leaving a path of matchstick debris.

Crushed beyond recognition were 230-square-miles of forestland, simultaneously obliterated and buried in a coffin 600 feet under earthen carnage.

The eruption filled riverbeds with ash remains, creating a barren and ghostly plain.

As far away as Vancouver, Washington, streets, sidewalks, roofs and

ventilation systems were clogged with a thick coat of volcanic residue.

High rise office workers and apartment dwellers spectated helplessly in Portland, Oregon, as though watching a giant movie screen, right before their eyes.

Fifty-seven people died in the volcano's wake.

Buried alive. Didn't have a chance.

Today, Mount Saint Helen's remains an active volcano. Aftermath of the blast is evidenced in the painfully slow emergence of trees and other vegetation now barely making their mark in an entirely new ecosystem.

I was struck by the pervasive eeriness and ominous beauty of the landscape, still grieving.

Virgin territory for miles, slowly recreating itself since the mountain blew more than three decades ago.

My wristband souvenir reminds me of all these things and the power nature ultimately has over us.

SOURCE: <http://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/mountsthelens/home/?cid=stelprdb5199437>

Paula Bosco Damon is a national award-winning writer whose columns appear weekly in regional newspapers in the Upper Midwest. The author conducts readings of her works and writing workshops for beginning writers. For more information, email boscodamon.paula@gmail.com.

THINKING ABOUT HEALTH

Seniors Face Higher Medicare Premiums, Deductibles Next Year

BY TRUDY LIEBERMAN

Rural Health News Service

The last couple of weeks have brought unexpected and unwelcome news to millions of seniors and disabled people on Medicare. Their already high out-of-pocket costs are going to get higher. For some, premiums for Medicare Part B coverage that pays for doctor and outpatient services will go up as much as 52 percent. For everyone Part D premiums, which cover drug benefits, will increase an average of 13 percent, and everyone will see their annual Part B deductible rise from \$147 to \$223.

These are not trivial amounts considering that half of all people on Medicare are living on annual incomes of \$24,150 or less. In 2010 about 7 million people covered by the program lacked supplemental insurance such as Medigap policies, which cover what Medicare doesn't. By 2013 the number of people without the additional coverage had more than doubled, most likely because they couldn't afford to buy it.

What's going on here? Weren't Medicare's costs supposed to go down thanks to the Affordable Care Act?

These increases have nothing to do with Obamacare and everything to

do with the laws governing Medicare and Social Security. Each year the Secretary of Health and Human Services examines the spending for Part B services which actually has risen this past year. By law premiums paid by everyone on Medicare must cover 25 percent of the program's cost. (General tax revenues cover 75 percent.) And each year the Social Security Administration determines the cost-of-living increases (COLA) for seniors based on the Consumer Price Index. There will be no increase for the coming year.

All this means about 30 percent of beneficiaries will see increases for Part B. Most people have their premiums deducted from their Social Security checks, but the law prohibits any Part B premium increase that would result in a reduction in their Social Security benefits. Without a COLA increase, a higher premium means a smaller Social Security check.

Because Medicare premiums must cover 25 percent of Part B costs, the government has to find the money somewhere. So four groups of people will have to shoulder the added financial burden.

They include those who begin receiving Medicare benefits in 2016, those over age 65 who are on Medicare but who have not taken their Social Security benefits yet; wealthier beneficiaries

(individuals with incomes above \$85,000 and couples with \$170,000) and low-income people eligible for both Medicare and Medicaid. State Medicaid programs pay those increases and they, too, are grumbling.

Increases in Part D premiums stem from higher costs for both brand and generic prescriptions and particularly for specialty drugs like Sovaldi to treat hepatitis C.

Will Congress fix these inequities and find other funds to protect everyone from these increases? "It's very hard to predict what Congress will do," says Tricia Newman, senior vice president at the Kaiser Family Foundation. Newman points out this year's higher premiums and deductibles may be temporary and are expected to come down in 2017.

The other day I explained all this on a New York City radio show along with Joe Baker who heads the Medicare Rights Center, which helps beneficiaries from all over the country understand their options. Callers on fixed incomes and tight budgets drove home the point: The increases will pinch. One woman told of a \$300 rent increase she had to absorb along with higher prices for food and medicines.

Another said her husband had cancer, and the family had been socked with high medical costs. She said they

had to pay a \$3,000 deductible before insurance kicked in. Most likely she meant the requirement to pay \$3,000 out of pocket before her Medicare Advantage plan pays benefits. That's a common out-of-pocket limit for these types of plans. Even if she didn't label the source of the problem correctly, she knew the family budget was in trouble.

That led to a discussion of the how the COLA adjustment is calculated and whether it is fair to seniors because they spend money on a different market basket of goods than younger Americans do. They spend more on healthcare, for example, and less on gasoline, which is heavily factored into the cost-of-living calculations. But despite years of talk and experiments with a more accurate cost of living index for seniors, the government has yet to implement one.

Years ago healthcare expert Marilyn Moon, who served as a public trustee of the Social Security and Medicare Trust Funds, urged Americans to save their money because they were going to need it for medical care when they got older. This year's situation shows how right she was.

How much do you pay for healthcare even with Medicare? Write to Trudy at trudy.lieberman@gmail.com.

Vermillion

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