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PLAIN TALK

Serving our readers since 1884.

Volume 126, Issue 35

USPS 657-720



Friday,
September 2, 2011
75¢

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www.plaintalk.net

Soldier remembered for courage

By Randy Dockendorf

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Even in her grief, Christine Bestgen was reminded of the reason that her son, Spc. Dennis G. Jensen, laid down his life over two weeks ago in Afghanistan.

Jensen, a South Dakota National Guard (SDNG) member, volunteered to deploy with another unit that was short of personnel. The 2009 Vermillion High School graduate was making his first deployment to Afghanistan when he was killed in a bridge construction accident.

Besides his mother, Jensen is survived by his father, Glenn Jensen of Yankton, and sister, Melissa Jensen of Minneapolis, MN.

Bestgen was making the trek across the state, from her home in Lead, for the arrival of Jensen's body for Thursday's funeral in Yankton. She stopped for a short break at Wall Drug.

"I was wandering aimlessly at Wall Drug. I didn't want to spend any money on souvenirs," she said. "Then, I saw these keychains with Dennis' Oct. 9 birthday on them."

Bestgen was stunned at the unexpected message on the reverse side.

"I turned (the keychain) over, and it said, 'Oct. 9, democratic elections held in Afghanistan for the first time, 2004,'" she said.

Jensen had made the ultimate sacrifice for

freedom. His courage was mentioned several times during Thursday's funeral at the United Church of Christ - Congregational.

Jensen, 21, of Sioux Falls, was serving with the 200th Engineer Company. He died Aug. 16 from injuries suffered while working with bridge materials near Camp Leatherneck in Helmand province in southern Afghanistan.

Jensen enlisted into the Guard in 2008 as a member of the 211th Engineer Company of Madison and DeSmet where he served as a combat engineer. He volunteered to deploy with the 200th in May as a bridge crew member in support of Operation Enduring Freedom.

Prior to Thursday's service, the Patriot Guard Riders stood in support at the family's invitation, and a row of flags lined the sidewalk.

Bestgen greeted people at the church entrance, thanking them for their support. Jensen's flag-draped coffin stood in the entryway, which contained posters with a collage of photos from his life.

During the service, SDNG Adj. Gen. Tim Reisch spoke of Jensen's adherence to the seven Army values. Jensen showed "selfless service" and "remarkable personal courage," Reisch said.

"Those who joined since 9/11 know there is a good chance they are going to combat," the



Spc. Dennis Jensen, 21, who died Aug. 16 in a noncombat-related accident in Afghanistan, was honored Thursday, Aug. 25 during a memorial service at the United Church of Christ in Yankton. Jensen's flag-draped casket was escorted outside the church after the service, with (from left) Sen. John Thune, Lt. Gov. Matt Michels, First Lady Linda Daugaard, Gov. Dennis Daugaard, Rep. Kristi Noem and the Rev. Dave Gunderson looking on. The flag was then folded and presented to Jensen's family.

(Kelly Hertz/P&D)

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Ribs, Rods & Rock 'n Roll to gear up Sept. 9

By David Lias

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There are literally dozens of reasons to be excited about the upcoming Ribs, Rods & Rock 'n Roll event coming up in Vermillion this weekend.

The music. The car show. The smell and taste of finely barbecued ribs.

This year, pigskins along with barbecued pork will be added to the two-day celebration. On Saturday afternoon, people who visit Vermillion will be encouraged to also take in the home-opener Coyote football game at 4 p.m. in the DakotaDome, and then return to downtown Vermillion after the gridiron contest for a concert by Kory and the Fireflies.

The annual event will kick off Friday, Sept. 9 in downtown Vermillion with live music, food and beer. The Rib Fest food court and beer garden in the downtown business district will open at 5 p.m. and stay open until 1 a.m. Saturday.

Also getting the festivities off to a grand start Friday at 5 p.m. will be performances by the Old Funk Riot Band. At 7 p.m., the Autumn Road Band is scheduled to perform, and at 9 p.m., Main Avenue Warehouse, an eight-piece band



Last year's Ribs, Rods & Rock 'n Roll event in Vermillion filled the city's Main Street with hundreds of visitors each day interested in taking in the car show, the musical concerts, and the delicious barbecued ribs. Downtown will soon be the center of activity once again when this year's event kicks off Sept. 9.

(File photo)

with horns, will fill downtown Vermillion with music.

Other attractions that will be available at 5 p.m. that evening include a CorTrust Family Fun Area that will include sidewalk vendors.

Saturday's activities begin with the

Eagle Rider Charity Poker Run breakfast at 9:30 a.m.

Registration for the Classic Car and Cycle Show and Shine will be held from 9 a.m. to noon. The CorTrust Family Fun

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Barth meets with Vermillion residents

By Travis Gulbrandson

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Minnehaha County Commissioner Jeff Barth stopped in Vermillion last week – one of the final in his ongoing tour promoting his candidacy to unseat U.S. Rep. Kristi Noem (D-SD) next year.

Barth, 59, met with locals on Friday, Aug. 26, at the Vermillion Public Library, where he said the job of an elected official is not to represent the taxpayer exclusively.

"My job is to take care of the people, some of whom can't vote, some of whom do pay taxes, some of whom don't pay taxes," he said. "My job is to take care of all those people. ..."

"As a muddy boots on the ground county commissioner, I think I'm precisely the contrast to this Tea Party princess that we've currently got ... representing her faction of the Republican Party in Washington, DC," he said.

A retired 31-year employee of

Qwest (formerly Northwestern Bell and U.S. West) – where he worked as a union official and then manager – Barth announced his candidacy Tuesday, Aug. 23.



JEFF BARTH

Chief among his criticisms was the Tea Party, which he said represents the wealthy to the disadvantage of the common people.

"Their efforts to destabilize our president have effectively destabilized our world economy and our country," Barth said. "In their efforts to win the class warfare of taking money from Social Security, Medicaid and Medicare and give additional

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New book features Jerry Wilson's collection of short stories

By Travis Gulbrandson

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Oklahoma native Jerry Wilson has done many things. He has worked as a professor, a journalist and as managing editor of South Dakota Magazine.

He has published more than 100 journal articles and magazine stories, as well as two books, "American Artery: A Pan American Journey" and "Waiting for Coyote's Call: An Eco-memoir from the Missouri River Bluff"

But at the beginning of July, he published his first collection of short stories, "Blackjacks & Blue Devils," the contents of which he has kicked around for nearly 20 years in some cases.

"I've had a number of stories

published separately in magazines, and I was looking over how many I had, and I thought, 'I've had plenty of stories with a kind of Western theme that I could put together a collection,'" he said.

Published by Mongrel Empire Press of Oklahoma, the book consists of 14 stories featuring characters and situations drawn in part from his own experience.

"I think that every fiction writer I know, their stories have some sort of kernel of reality from their experience or observation, a character they knew, a place they've been, something they witnessed, a story they heard," Wilson said. "That's true of all of these, except for a couple – one began as a dream and another was

purely imagined. But almost all of them have some sort of germ or seed in experience."

Taking a real experience and turning it into fiction is a process of evolution, he said.

"There's something you start kicking around in your mind, and you start imagining what if, and it takes seed and starts growing," he said. "Eventually you get something that you think is a workable work of fiction. ..."

"One of the things that I like to do as a fiction writer is to alter a character," he said. "If I start with a real person, I might alter significant details of their life, partly just because the way things really happen don't necessarily make the best story, and also, I think that as a fiction writer you need to kind of break

out of what really happened and let the story evolve. That often means letting a character be transformed in small ways or larger ways."

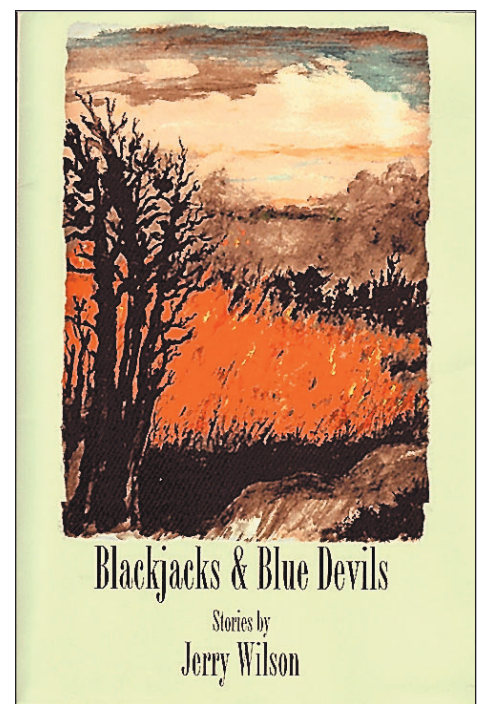
For Wilson, writing is essentially a process of portraying things with honesty.

His first book, "American Artery," chronicles his journey down the 5,000-mile Pan American Highway from Canada to Panama, for which he interviewed more than 100 people.

"Coyote's Call" discusses he and his family's experiences attempting to live on the Missouri River Bluff in an environmentally-conscious way.

"Most of my writing life has been an attempt to understand reality as I perceive it and to

■ BOOK, Page 12



Jerry Wilson's first collection of short stories, "Blackjacks & Blue Devils," consists of 14 stories featuring characters and situations drawn in part from his own experience. Copies of "Blackjacks & Blue Devils" are available through a variety of options, including Zandbroz Variety in Sioux Falls, online booksellers such as www.barnesandnoble.com, and Wilson himself. Wilson also will appear at a reading with Chuck Nauman at the Washington Street Arts Center at 7 p.m. on Sept. 24.



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