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INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- For the record.....page 03
- Remembering 9/11.....page 04
- Coyotes clip Colgate.....page 05

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Heikes enjoys sharing bounty from CSA operation

By David Lias

When R. Sam Heikes had the opportunity to put his agriculture background to good use on family-owned farmland near Vermillion, he decided to take a less-traditional, and, perhaps some would say, riskier route.



So far, the bounty has been plentiful.

Heikes is nearly wrapping up his first year in operating Heikes Family Farm, located just north of the Masaba Manufacturing plant north of Vermillion. You'll find no large tractors or combines, or hundred-acre cornfields on the Heikes farm.

Instead, he has worked this year to plant and till about a seven-acre patch of his CSA, or Community Supported Agriculture operation with the kind of stuff people enjoy at their dinner tables each day.

"As far as I know, I'm the only CSA here in Vermillion," he said. "The interest, the demand for a CSA is very strong in this community. I don't know if it's because of the university, or because of people's political awareness of the quality of food. It's a national trend."

Community Supported Agriculture got its start in the east of South Dakota in more populated areas, Heikes said, as a partnership between farmers, growers and consumers who purchase a share or membership prior to the growing season.

In return for their financial investment in the CSA, local consumers become shareholders in the farm operation, and receive a weekly 10 to 30 pound market basket of fresh food over a growing season that exceeds 20 weeks.

The size of the basket depends on the amount of each shareholder's investment.

"A lot of this stems from more and more concern that people have about the quality of food that they are eating," Heikes said. "They want to know who is growing their food, and how they are growing it. People are concerned about where corporate agriculture is headed and how it pertains to the quality of food that we eat."

The family farm where Heikes grew up, was once a place where livestock was raised. "We fed cattle there for 40 years," he said. "So the soil is very rich there."

The rich soil means Heikes is able to produce better-tasting

Ribs rock

People who visited downtown Vermillion Saturday evening discovered that ribs and rock and roll go quite well together. As people dined on barbecue offered by vendors at the community's annual Ribs, Rods and Rock 'n Roll event, "Mrs. Begley and the Boys" performed in the Ratingen Platz downtown park. Some people couldn't stay seated, and soon the downtown plaza was filled with people dancing to the music.

(Photo by David Lias)

Community gets boost from Tanager Volunteer Day

By Travis Gulbrandson

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While there weren't any classes in session Tuesday, the students at Vermillion High School managed to stay busy.

That's because it was the fifth annual Tanager Volunteer Day, which found the students taking part in a number of projects around the community – everything from painting houses and washing windows to sorting papers and working in classrooms.

"You name it, we're doing it," said Leni Billberg, high school social studies teacher who also serves as one of the event's coordinators. "We've been doing it five years now, and it's really grown. Each year we send about 500 kids out, and we've had nothing but positive results in our community."

The students are broken up into groups of 12-17 – which are overseen by teacher advisors – and sent to various organizations or individuals in the community who need assistance.

Joanne Ustad, career program coordinator for the school district, said the students completed "50 or 60 projects" this year.

Throughout the summer, Billberg contacts organizations who might be interested, while Ustad oversees individual contacts.

"Once the organizations have us, it spreads from there," Billberg said. "We have the senior center that we help every year, but this year we had a sign-up list for seniors who need assistance at their homes. I think we have 35 senior citizens that we're helping in the community this year."

Freshmen Sowmya Ragothaman and Kylee Retzlaff were among those who assisted some of these senior citizens, spending the morning washing windows, carrying boxes, cleaning and weeding.

Both girls said they liked the couple whose home they visited.

"She was a really nice lady and she liked to talk," Retzlaff said. "It was fun."

Ragothaman agreed, adding, "She was sweet."

Before the girls and their group left, the husband insisted they each take a handcarved bowl he had made, somewhere between eight and 12 in all.

"He just laid them out ... and we all took one," Ragothaman said.

Among the groups and organizations the students did projects for Tuesday were Bluff View Cemetery, the United Church of Christ, the Vermillion Arts Council and the local schools.

"Absolutely everybody loves us," Billberg said. "Sometimes the community is afraid of the younger generation because (they want to know) they'll be responsible. But in reality, these kids are happy to be outside the classroom. They have a free day to do some fun stuff."

"It's not always fun to weed and paint, but

you're with your friends, so you make it a game," she said. "It works out really well."

Ragothaman and Retzlaff thought so, too.

"The Tanager Volunteer Day is a really good idea, especially on this type of day," Ragothaman said.

"The weather is nice, it's a great day," Retzlaff added. "I like seeing everybody help."

Ustad said this is her favorite aspect, as well. "I hope that they see the reward of volunteering," she said.

Billberg said it's clear that they have. After the second year of the event, a group of students came together to form a city-wide clean-up day to take place after D-Days.

VHS senior Chris Lubbers has taken part in the volunteer day all four years of his high school career.

"It was kind of weird at first, because we didn't really know what we were doing, but



■ HEIKES, Page 08



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