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# PLAIN TALK

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Volume 127, Issue 38  
USPS 657-720  
8 38894 00003 1

Friday,  
September 21, 2012  
**75¢**

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## Pilot killed in ultralight plane crash



A small plane circles around the area where Lowell Rahn was killed in the crash of his ultralight plane in a cornfield near the Vermillion airport Friday afternoon.

(Photo by David Lias)

**By David Lias**  
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Bill Brown, who lives near the corner of 12th and Broadway streets below the bluff in lower Vermillion, is used to watching planes take off from Harold Davidson Field, the municipal airport located south of the city.

He knew by the sound coming from the sky Friday afternoon that an ultralight aircraft he had been watching was in trouble.

The aircraft crashed in the middle of a cornfield located west of the city airport, killing its pilot, Lowell Rahn, 75, of Newcastle, NE.

"Standing here in my driveway, looking across the Vermillion River, I could see it," Brown said late Friday afternoon. "It was sideways, with the wing straight up in the air, and the engine was full throttle, and I could see it going down."

"I knew something was wrong, and I heard it hit the ground across the river," he said.

Brown hopped onto his four-wheeler and drove to the scene.

"I got within 10 to 15 feet of it (the plane), and I was scared to get any closer," he said. "The cornfield was all on fire when I got there, and everything was totally engulfed."

Brown said he called out into the field, but received no reply. "I was hollering over there, hoping that somebody would holler back. I didn't know if they may have had a parachute on or not,

but I didn't hear anybody holler back."

Brown also joined a chorus of concerned citizens who dialed the Clay Area Emergency Services Communications Center in Vermillion to report the crash and fire.

Calls began to be received at about 4:15 p.m. Friday, according to a press release from Vermillion Police Chief Matt Betzen.

A news release issued by the Clay County Sheriff's Department Sept. 15 noted that "Preliminary information received indicates Mr. Rahn had taken off from the Vermillion airport but was possibly returning to the airport, based on witness statements, when the aircraft crashed into an unharvested cornfield near the airport."

Betzen said personnel from the offices of the Clay County Sheriff, Vermillion Fire Department, the city police department, the South Dakota Highway Patrol and the South Dakota Department of Criminal Investigation responded immediately to the crash area.

Fire units extinguished the fire, which burned approximately two acres of corn, and found Rahn, the plane's only occupant, deceased in the wreckage.

The crash area was secured by the officers of the county sheriff's department. Officials of the Federal Aviation Administration are investigating the cause of the accident.

### Jacobson: Solutions needed for global warming trends

**By Travis Gulbrandson**  
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More study is required to determine the exact nature of climate change, but solutions must be found to stem current warming trends, a recent visitor to the University of South Dakota said.

Dr. George Jacobson discussed these issues in his presentation, "Long-Term Climate Change Provides a Surprising Key to Understanding Our Environment," which he gave in Farber Hall on Sept. 6.

Jacobson is professor emeritus of biology, ecology and climate change at the University of Maine, as well as past director of the Climate Change Institute.

"Studying climate in any one place doesn't really satisfy our need to understand the Earth's system," he said. "I think it's obvious, but if we're going to understand how the Earth's climate system functions, and how the oceans, atmosphere and biological systems are all active in the timing of the changes ... we can't just have data from Maine or South Dakota."

For this reason, researchers collect sediment, ice and fossils from across the globe, each sample offering impact evidence from the past that allows for a more complete story.

"Our fundamental challenge is to understand the natural variability in the Earth's system – what kind of changes are happening in the Earth's climate, and what are the mechanisms of those changes?" Jacobson said.

This variability is a fundamental aspect of research, he said.

"Often we interpret what's happening in today's world with the changing chemistry of the atmosphere as a result of human activities, when we don't know what the natural variabilities could be," he said.

Jacobson pointed out that the Earth has gone through very warm periods which saw a much high rate of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere.

These periods ebbed, but now the trend seems to be returning. Jacobson said this is illustrated by the fact that the Arctic Ocean is freer of ice than is has been in "probably the last 10,000 years."

Not only is there less ice, the ice that remains is not as thick, which affects the climate.

"There no longer is a mechanism for producing the deep cold passes that come sliding down into northern Canada (and into the United States)," Jacobson said. "Even though the ice may develop in the ocean late in the winter ... the ability of that area to produce these deep cold masses is drastically different."

He added that most of the arctic ice is only one meter thick, and nearly 80 percent of it is one year old.

"It's shocking how small an amount of ice there is and how fresh that ice is," he said.

As a result, Maine and other states are more likely to be 5-10 degrees warmer in all seasons, Jacobson said.

With the warmer temperatures, there is more concern for drought, as well as how various animal species and their migratory patterns are affected, he said.

### City council reviews transportation plan

**By Travis Gulbrandson**  
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The Vermillion City Council received the citywide transportation plan at its regular meeting Monday night.

City Engineer José Dominguez said the recommendations of the Vermillion Area Multimodal Transportation Plan are split into two categories: Items that would have to be done within 10 years, and items that would be done after 10 years.

The major improvements would take place along Highway 50, he said.

"These would include either widening the highway or signaling some of the intersections," Dominguez said.

Other proposed improvement areas are within the city limits, he said.

"They mainly include extensions on roadways – Clark Street, for example, from Norbeck all the way to Crawford,"

Dominguez said.

These improvements would be made mainly as growth requires, he said.

In April 2011 the City of Vermillion was selected to receive financial assistance through the state for the completion of the study, which was meant to replace a study that was completed in 2004.

Input was gathered at a series of meetings with area residents, businesses, USD, the hospital, the city, the state and county among other entities, Dominguez said.

The cost of the study to the city will be 20 percent, not to exceed \$25,000, and will be reimbursed by the Department of Transportation, he said.

Funding is included in the 2012 budget to fund the city share.

Dominguez said the council's acceptance of the study does not bind them to any particular action it describes.

Also at Monday's meeting, City Manager John Prescott said that due to continued public interest, the conceptual plans for Prentis Pool's expansion are now on display in the lobby of City Hall for anyone who wants to view them.

A suggestion box in which people can submit their comments or suggestions is there, as well, he said.

Prescott also announced that Stanford Street now is open to north-south traffic.

"The contractor still has some work to do with some utility concerns that he has to address, and once we get those concerns addressed they can go back to put in the connections at, for example, Westend Drive and Clark, so that we have full access to that street," he said.

All Vermillion City Council meetings are available to view online at <http://www.ustream.tv/channel/vermillioncc>.

### Homecoming 2012



Congratulations to Brooke Schwasinger and William Card who were crowned Vermillion High School's queen and king at coronation ceremonies held Thursday night, Sept. 13, in the high school auditorium. This summer's drought and a county-wide burn ban changed some of the traditions of this year's ceremony. The burning of the "V" and the fireworks display, usually held on school grounds, had to be canceled. A pep rally was held inside the gymnasium, and the "V" still glowed indoors – thanks to holiday lighting.



(Photos by David Lias)