

# Socialization, service welcome

By Sarah Wetzel  
For the Plain Talk

Heads turned as two small cakes made their way through the room to a resounding rendition of 'Happy Birthday.' The treats come to rest in front of smiling faces before the candles were extinguished.

Stories, friendly banter and even poetry were shared throughout the evening along with a delicious meal.

The event was not a family birthday party, but a weekly gathering known as the Vermillion Welcome Table.

What is its purpose? "To provide an inviting place where everyone can come together to share food, fellowship, service, and a sense of community," it reads on the organization's website.

The Welcome Table takes place every Monday from 5:30 - 7 p.m. at the First United Methodist Church on 16 N. Dakota Street.

The meal is free and open to anyone, penny-pincher or not.

"We don't consider ourselves a soup kitchen," said John Lushbough, a leader of the organization. "We just wanted to have a meal where people feel welcome to come for any reason."

Lushbough wanted to make it clear that despite its location, the welcome table is not a religious event.

"When people come to a church people are a little suspicious like you're going to have to perform something," he said. "I wanted to make sure we welcome anybody."

Lushbough added that the Welcome Table organization is separate from the church it is held at, though it is how it got started.

Lushbough said that a new pastor had arrived with some new ideas on service.

"He challenged me to get this thing started," Lushbough said. "We got a group of people together from churches and the community. We met for six months trying to get organized."

The first meal was served in June of 2001.

"We started with 35 people the first night, 17 serving and 17 guests," Lushbough said. "It grew from there."

And grow it did. On Sept. 8, almost 100 people had been served after the first half-hour.

One of those in attendance was Peggy Coke, a Nebraska resident who comes to enjoy the meal but also catch up with friends.

"People used to get to know each other faster because they didn't see each other as often," she said.

Coke was one of the lucky recipients of birthday wishes last Monday. She wasn't the only one out to make friends.

"I actually met a lot of new people even though I only did two tables," said 14-year-old Dakota Conyers. Conyers is one of the people that likes coming for the company and also the service.

According to Lushbough, service is really the central aspect of the program.

Various civic, church, youth and student groups sign up to prepare the meal each week, providing both the food and most of the volunteers.

"We have one fraternity at the university that has served for 24 straight semesters," Lushbough said. "Over the years there's been an increased emphasis on service for USD students."

On Sept. 8, the USD Pre-Physician's Assistant program was signed up to serve. Stephanie Ruden is a member of the program.

She greeted people coming in and kept track of how many were served.



John Lushbough stands in front of the weekly menu at the Vermillion Welcome Table Monday. Sarah Wetzel / For the Plain Talk

According to Ruden, talking to so many people is very enjoyable.

"Hearing everyone's stories is pretty cool," she said.

According to the Welcome Table website, meals cost around \$2.50 and are served to an average of 150 people.

The Welcome Table organization provides a kitchen and opportunity to serve along with extra help if it's needed.

"I'll help them get started," Lushbough said. "Some of the food I can get really inexpensive." Lushbough added that the night's out-of-pocket expense was only \$75.

But getting an inexpensive meal isn't the best part of the program according to Lushbough.

"One of the most satisfying things to me is over the years I've had students who just started coming here then all of a sudden they just become a part of it, here every week," he said. "It's gratifying when that happens and it keeps repeating itself."

Lushbough mentioned someone else who volunteered solid for three years and went on to run the weekend backpack program in Sioux Falls.

The Vermillion Welcome Table also runs a weekend backpack program.

"We fill up food packages for school kids for the weekend," Lushbough said. It is designed so children who rely on school lunches can be sure to have food when school is out.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, for 2008-2012 the people living below poverty level in Clay county was 25.3%. There is certainly a need for programs such as the weekend backpack.

"If you look at the child poverty rate, it's worse in Clay County than in any of the surrounding counties," he said.

"One in six kids falls into the category of food insecure, which means there is a significant part of the year where you don't know where the next meal is coming from."

Lushbough added he would like the backpack program to grow enough to provide more for these children including breakfast and other meals during the summer when the school does not.

In the meantime, the community of Vermillion continues to generously give through service at the welcome table, a place to socialize and serve.

"While the food might be important, it's the community that happens here that's most important," Lushbough said. "We like making people feel comfortable."

For more information, visit [www.welcometable.org](http://www.welcometable.org).

# HICKS AND HIPPIES



There were a heck of a lot more Hippies than Hicks Tuesday at Vermillion High School, but that didn't matter as Homecoming Week was in full swing. Check back next week or online at [www.plaintalk.net](http://www.plaintalk.net) for a full recap of Homecoming festivities.

Alan Dale / The Plain Talk

# Utopian Vermillion: Long overdue

By Sarah Wetzel  
For the Plain Talk

"Am I a townie or a gownie?" This is a question that no one should be asking themselves according to Kelsey Collier-Wise. Collier-Wise is the executive director at United Way of Vermillion as well as being on the city council.

On Wednesday she met with fellow Vermillion community members to discuss civic engagement.

"I'm hoping that people will have the bug to spread this to other people," Collier-Wise said. "I hope that more people start talking about how we've all got a responsibility."

This responsibility rests with all who live in Vermillion according to Collier-Wise. This includes those attending the University of South Dakota.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau and the USD website, in 2013 the USD enrollment was only 457 less than the population of Vermillion.

That means that almost half of the city's population experiences a high turnover rate. The fact that the 'gownies' expect to graduate and move on should not make a difference in their level of civic engagement according to Collier-Wise. Everyone should consider themselves a 'townie.'

"This is our community," she stated. "You're not staying here. Your house isn't a motel. Two years isn't a temporary residence. You live here and you're a part of this community."

The university does have a service-learning center which offers students hundreds of opportunities to get involved, according to the USD website.

USD staff are not the only ones hoping students will connect themselves more with the community.

Those present at the library last Wednesday were asked what type of artifact they would bring back from a future utopian Vermillion.

"My artifact would be a humble USD college student who has a sense of community," Catherine Beem responded. "There's a pervasive sense of Vermillion is a small town. There's a sort of



Kelsey Collier-Wise gives her presentation on what's a townie or a 'gownie' and civic engagement at the Vermillion library last week.

Sarah Wetzel / For the Plain Talk

negativity that runs through. So my artifact would [also] be someone from the faculty or staff that has a good feeling who would give that to their students and find ways they can collaborate."

Beem also mentioned that she has seen that many college students and faculty do have that community sense. Vermillion seems to be headed in the right direction.

As the discussion progressed, all in attendance agreed that USD students and permanent residents alike have the responsibility to take the first step in finding ways to become part of a unified community.

"It has to be primarily individual," said Jim Wilson. "You have to reach out and hope you find acceptance. My wife and I moved 17 times in 46 years. I always found welcoming people in any place we were but I had to make an effort. I never thought it was the community's job to welcome me."

Collier-Wise's presentation included discussion on how civic engagement can transform a hometown into a local paradise. She cited three aspects of change.

First: organizing and policy-making. Long-term solutions are made by actively mobilizing others.

Second: education and advocacy.

Catherine Alexandra was one of those in attendance and agrees that being educated about your community can definitely increase civic engagement. She mentioned the time when she was new to Vermillion. "I didn't know how to get involved," she said. "A lot of it was I didn't know what existed."

The third aspect of change according to Collier-Wise is direct service.

"[Direct service is] hands-on involvement to meet people's immediate needs such as food, shelter, clothing or medical care," she stated.

Meeting immediate needs and finding other ways to make Vermillion a better place will take a lot of work, but Collier-Wise says it is time to step up to the plate.

"If we all worked together we could do so much as opposed to the tendency which is to say, 'Why aren't things better? Why isn't someone else doing it for me?'" she said. "We are the community. We are the ones we have been waiting for."

Though there are many avenues Vermillion citizens may take to participate in the community, anyone wishing to volunteer through United Way of Vermillion please visit [www.unitedwayofvermillion.org](http://www.unitedwayofvermillion.org).

# Credit card options are now available

PIERRE — The South Dakota Department of Revenue announces that taxpayers now have the option to pay tax to the state by credit card.

Taxpayer's may use Visa, MasterCard or Discover to pay sales and use tax, contractors' excise tax, motor fuel tax, bank franchise taxes or the 911

Surcharge. A 2.45 percent convenience fee is charged on each credit card payment.

Payments can be made by using your EPath account. If you do not have an EPath account, you can use the "Make a Payment" option.

Access EPath and "Make a Payment" at

<http://dor.sd.gov/> under E-Services on the homepage.

Taxpayers that file and pay their sales tax electronically using EPath receive a collection allowance of 1.5 percent of the tax due, not to exceed \$70, each reporting period. No allowances are given on contractors' excise tax returns or if you have a

past tax due.

For more information on credit card payments or to pay by phone, contact the South Dakota Department of Revenue at 1.800.829.9188.

- Courtesy South Dakota Department of Revenue

# OBITUARIES

## Wayne Merrigan

Wayne "Moose" Merrigan, 86, of Vermillion, SD passed away Tuesday, September 16, 2014, at the Sanford Vermillion Care Center.



Merrigan

Wayne was born May 19, 1928 in Vermillion to Eddie E. and Cecelia (Houlton) Merrigan. He went to Vermillion schools graduating from Vermillion High School in 1946, and attended the University of South Dakota, playing football for the Coyotes until his father's passing. Moose married Mary McMunigal on September 6, 1950, in Wakonda, SD. He worked on the farm all his life, was an avid sports fan and loved the USD Coyotes.

He is survived by his wife Mary of Vermillion; four

sons: Michael (Michael Petrelis) of San Francisco, CA, Thomas (Mary), Gregory (Janet) and Nicholas (Mary) all of Vermillion; 11 grandchildren and nine great-grandchildren.

Preceded in death by three sons, Steve, Todd and John.

Wayne's family would like to extend a special thank you to the Coyote family for their friendship throughout the years.

Funeral Mass will be 11:00 am today (Friday, September 19, 2014) at the St. Agnes Catholic Church with burial to follow in the Calvary Cemetery in Vermillion. Visitation was held Thursday starting at 5:00 pm with a prayer service at 7:00 pm all at the church.

In Lieu of flowers please direct donations to St. Agnes Catholic Church or the USD Athletics.

[hansenfuneralhome.com](http://hansenfuneralhome.com)

## Charles Spencer

Charles A. Spencer, 73, of Vermillion, SD, died Sept. 10, 2014, in Vermillion.

Charles was born Oct. 14, 1940, in Niagara Falls, NY. He graduated from Lewiston-Porter High School in Youngstown, NY. He received his bachelor's and master's degrees from Indiana University and received his doctorate at the University of South Dakota in Vermillion.

He worked as a

professor, chairman and dean in the health, physical and recreation departments at University of South Dakota and Western Illinois University in Macomb. He once served as the state director of the South Dakota Special Olympics. He enjoyed hunting, fishing and boating.

He is survived by his wife, Lynette; daughter, Karyn Spencer and husband, Brit Ward; daughter, Mary and

husband, Jason Vyhnanek and their children, Cora and Grace; and a brother, Richard P. Spencer and wife, Lynne Tyler.

A private memorial service will be held. He

requested no memorials or flowers. Please celebrate his life in a way of your choosing, perhaps a toast with your favorite beverage.

[HansenFuneralHome.com](http://HansenFuneralHome.com)

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