

# A \$10,000 Boost Helps VDCA

BY SARAH WETZEL  
For the Plain Talk

The South Dakota Community Foundation's Community Innovation grant program presented a \$10,000 check to members of the Vermillion Downtown Cultural Association (VDCA) last Thursday to assist in their Downtown Revitalization Project.

According to the VDCA board the funds will be used in the remodeling and revitalization of the Vermillion and Coyote Twin Theaters which were recently purchased by the organization.

Jeff Veltkamp, director of development for the South Dakota Community Foundation explained the grant the VDCA received came from what the foundation calls their South Dakota fund of unrestricted dollars and also their partnership with the Bush Foundation on community innovation grants.

"We have a committee on our board and people across the state read them and evaluate [the grant applications] and the decision is made by that group," Veltkamp said. "This one was deemed worthy as a good cause that will help kind of invigorate Vermillion so that's why they were selected."

According to VDCA President Bill Anderson, this chance to revitalize downtown Vermillion stemmed from simple conversations about the need for an enriched cultural environment in Vermillion that connects the businesses, the university and the broader community.

The problem was they didn't know where to start.

"When you look at things like cultural integration into the community, that can be hard for people to grasp so it's difficult to identify what sort of touchpoint can set a group like that forward," Anderson said. "We were just lucky that Betty and Michele were having that sort of conversations for several months at the same time these theaters came available and it was a great touchpoint for us to kind of leap off the angel investment and the growth of the culture across town with this being the first play. Timing was great."

According to VDCA board member Elizabeth Smith, the organization was able to form and act in the nick of time.

"What happened was basically we were threatened with the loss of these two theaters," she said. "A gentleman in Florida owned all three screens and he started selling off equipment in the Vermillion theater which now has no projector. He had them on the market for a while and was just ready to fold up his tent and retire in Florida. We



SARAH WETZEL/FOR THE PLAIN TALK

**Vermillion Downtown Cultural Association received a \$10,000 grant from the South Dakota Community Foundation. Shown Left to Right-Elizabeth Smith (board), Kimberly Grieve (Dean of Students), Ted Muenster (board), Michelle Maloney (Vice Pres), Bill Anderson (Pres), Jeff Veltkamp (director of development for the SD Community Foundation), Jim Wilson (board), Nate Welch (VDCD).**

kind of thought that would be a devastating blow to downtown."

According to Smith, a few people were brought together and partnered with the University of South Dakota knowing that USD needed to be an integral part of any plan they would have.

"We actually created an angel investment group, people who were all willing to come up with \$5000," Smith said. "The chamber development came up with some money and the university was extraordinarily generous, on an ongoing basis to provide favorable rates to students but also in terms of capital infusion."

Now that funding has gotten a good start it is time for the VDCA's dreams to become a reality.

"The vision at this point is we get this theater really operating well and we increase our marketing," Smith said. "There had been no marketing before which is why the theater was not doing well. We want the theater to do well, we want it to thrive. We want it to be part of the community but we also see this enormous opportunity in the theater across the street, the Vermillion Theater, which we would like to reopen as kind of an arts/culture/classic cinema. It will provide more than first run movies."

"We'd like to, for example, partner with the Shakespeare festival with the University and show Shakespeare the month before the festival starts," Smith continued. "Ted Muenster wants a John Wayne festival and we want to do it for him. What we've tried to do is assemble a dynamic board of members of the community and members of the university. Members of all ages and interest."

Though the theaters represent the starting point of the VDCA, the board members hope it becomes a springboard to launch some

more life into downtown.

"Ultimately the dream is we do well enough that we'd be able to subsidize other downtown cultural events and really make this a vibrant part of this community," Smith said. "We'd eventually like to see this generate a revenue stream that would benefit more than just the theaters but would make Vermillion a vibrant, exciting downtown cultural experience. Years ago we used to have an arts festival. It was affiliated with the Fine Arts school. That really died with the lack of funding years ago. One of my things is someday we will be able to bring that arts festival back to Vermillion with some serious funding from the cultural association."

Right now, however, the focus is on getting the theaters to thrive.

According to board member Ted Muenster, they are in the process of planning a new facade to the theaters and other basic improvements.

"Hopefully that can be done by June of next year," he said. "Then we can move onto other things."

Jim Wilson of the board further expounded upon that idea.

"Right now we're working with Jeff Hazard and he's provided us with a wonderful proposal for the Coyote and also provided us within the last day or two with a proposal for the front and interior of the Vermillion," he said. "Since these two are operating, it would be nice to get the Vermillion up and running. In the event that we decide to do extensive renovations here we would have a theater that was operating."

According to Wilson, the idea is to have the theaters go far beyond simply operating.

"We want to make movie going an experience," he said. "Our first cult classic was the Princess Bride.

Everybody in the world has seen the Princess Bride but not a lot of people have seen it on a big screen. There were 65 people here at midnight to watch the Princess Bride."

Wilson also mentioned that there were 60 attendees at the second cult classic showing, Pulp Fiction.

Other partnerships are making a new movie-going experience in Vermillion as well according to Smith.

"Last Saturday we have a partnership with the National Music Museum to show films about music and composers and so we had a Bob Dylan documentary," she said. "On a Saturday morning we had 50 people. We feel there is a real need in this community, people are really responding to the theater."

USD is enthusiastic to play a part in this endeavor.

"When we were approached we were so excited," said Kimberly Grieve, Dean of Students.

"We brought it to the executive council and President Abbott and they agreed that it would be a wonderful thing for student retention, for student recruitment and just to build the vibrant community that we've hoped for. It's just really been electric on campus. People are talking about it and so excited for us to move forward."

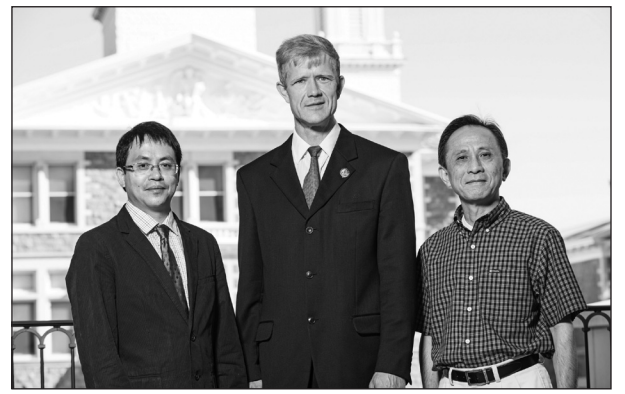
The VDCA board shares Grieve's sentiments.

"One of the best things that was so appealing was the reinvestment aspect for downtown," Anderson said. "We really did have a risk of losing the theaters which is not only an entertainment source but also a business right downtown that's not just a bar or restaurant. For us to be able to bring in the art culture and the mission of the VDCA is just very exciting because of what they can do next and are doing right here. It just made perfect sense because it pumps into the economic engine which is downtown."

VDCA Vice President Michele Maloney agrees.

"We've just always taken it for granted that it's been here and it's always been here," she said. "We want to give families the reason to come downtown other than the library and ice cream shop. We really wanted it to make more of a family friendly environment and have something for the students who are not 21."

"When we give the community tours to prospective professors and students alike the two things that we have in the last year have driven by and shown them is the theaters and the park project because those are future things that we are really excited about. Without having projects like this to talk about it makes it a little bit more challenging."



COURTESY PHOTO: USD

## USD Recognizes 3 Faculty With President's Research Awards

The University of South Dakota has awarded grants for outstanding research in three categories to three faculty members who were chosen by external reviewers.

The 2015 award recipients, who receive a \$3,000 grant and a plaque:

- President's Award for Research Excellence: New-Mid Career Faculty, Z. Rick Wang, Ph.D., assistant professor in the Department of Chemistry;
- President's Award for Research Excellence: Established Faculty, Yuhlong Lio, Ph.D., professor in the Department of Mathematical Sciences;
- President's Award for Research Innovation & Entrepreneurship, Grigoriy Sereda, Ph.D., professor in the Department of Chemistry.

Candidates were reviewed based on past and current research accomplishments, including criteria such as publications, presentations, successful grantsmanship, peer reviewer experience, maintenance of an active graduate or undergraduate program and being conferred other competitive research awards. The Innovation & Entrepreneurship award further required that the winner demonstrate innovative thinking or research findings that had promising commercial potential as well as a concept that had progressed beyond the theoretical stage to the applied stage.

"Research is an essential component of USD's mission, and one of many ways USD contributes to the economic development of the state," said James W. Abbott, USD president. "Our award winners this year are from chemistry and mathematics, which are disciplines of significant strength at USD and complementary to the university's prominence in the fine arts, humanities, and professional programs."

## Dragons At The Library

It's true that dragons are too seldom, but we're happy that they will be making a special appearance at the library this fall! On Tuesday, September 22nd, and Wednesday, September 23rd, Markie Scholz and her Dragons Are Too Seldom Puppet Productions will drop by to share wonderful stories and fun with the children of our community. Public performances of the show "In the Center of Things," will begin both days at 10:30 am in the Kozak Community Room.

"In The Center of Things" is the story of Hedgy Hedgehog and his best friend Sally A. Wolf. Hedgy is forced into the Big Woods by the Niggle Naggles who constantly tease and pick on him. He must find his way home but not before he comes face to face with Growl the Troll who is trying to be a friend, a bullying caterpillar, a sly fox who wants Hedgy to do his work for him, and a nasty wind with an awful attitude. Throughout Hedgy's adventure, Sally and Growl try to help Hedgy learn how to handle bullies and get out of the Big Woods and back home safely. For more information about Marie and her dragon friends, go to dragonsaretooseldom.com.

Additionally, there will be a hands-on puppet-making workshop for children in 2nd - 4th grades on Tuesday from 3:30-5 pm in the Kozak Community Room. All materials will be provided - don't miss the fun!

The Edith B. Siegrist Vermillion Public Library is located at 18 Church Street in Vermillion. For more information call the Library at 605-677-7060.

## Sales For Tails Rummage Sale Set

YANKTON - Heartland Humane Society (HHS) is having a rummage sale Friday, September 11th 12pm - 6pm and Saturday, September 12th 8am - 2pm. HHS would like you to stop, shop and support! The sale will be at the shelter located at 3400 East Highway 50 in Yankton, SD.

"We have seen a lot of generosity. There are so many items, whether it is furniture, décor, electronics or gardening supplies...the list doesn't end there. There is truly something for everyone, even a bake sale! We are all so grateful for the individuals that have contributed to such a great cause," said Christa Kranig, shelter coordinator for HHS.

All profits from the sale will go towards the care of animals, and your purchases are tax deductible. If you happen to be out rummaging, or just simply in the area, stop, support, shop or snack at the HHS Sales for Tails Rummage Sale!

For more information on the fundraising event, contact Heartland Humane Society at 605-664-4244 or email hhs3@midconetwork.com. You can also see additional details at www.heartlandhumane.org.

## Serve

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"Once we started helping individuals in town we'll have students say 'Can we help this person this year?'" Billberg said. "Now that it's become something that we do, the kids are aware of it and they bring a lot of things up as well."

According to Billberg the students break into pre-organized groups and work from about 8:45 a.m. to around 3:30 p.m. with a break for lunch provided by the Vermillion Chamber and Development Company at Prentis Park.

"They do trimming, they do painting, they move furniture, they rake, they clean windows, sometimes they read to the elementary students, they've sung with people at the care center," Billberg said. "Everything you can imagine we've probably done it. Washed equipment for daycare centers, we've shredded documents, we put up a Facebook page for the humane society."

The kids don't seem to mind the work either. "If you ask our administrators we probably have some of the best attendance on that day," Billberg said. "The kids really seem to enjoy it."

Transportation is provided for the students unless a project is close enough for them to walk.

According to Billberg, the most popular service for the kids is actually the smaller and more intimate projects.

"The kids that get to go into the individual homes, they seem to get the most, they help the most and they offer a real change for some people," Billberg said. "We're not like we once were in the old days where we helped out all of our neighbors and we got out and did good things. We probably don't even know our neighbors anymore. So many times the kids will make a connection with this person and they'll go back and help year round. That's been really neat to see."

Creating this habit of service has given the youth unforgettable memories according to Billberg.

"A while ago one of the people actually carved each of the students that came to help him a special bowl," she said. "He was losing his sight and that's why he couldn't do all the

things around his house. He gave them to the kids after they had done all the work and they just cried because here's this guy who can't do much but he felt he needed to give this to them. He made them individual because he requested the same kids year after year. Those stories happen every year.

"We get thank you letters that come for two or three weeks that the kids are so proud to see that they made a difference," Billberg continued. "Everybody has a story to tell. If you ask our students they'll tell you. For me it's probably the greatest day of the year because I go around and take pictures and it's a lot of fun."

Billberg hopes that the community comes to realize how amazing their high schoolers are.

"We have so little trouble with discipline on this day you would be shocked," she said. "The kids are so excited to help. People don't understand that these are

the kids that work at all the fast food restaurants and do all the things in town. They just don't realize how much they can do. They don't have to be worried about them."

For more information contact Billberg at lenni.billberg@k12.sd.us or call the high school at (605) 677-7035.

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Slide Show Presentation of Tours,  
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UPCOMING TOURS	Departure	Return
Christmas in Branson	11/13/15	11/18/15
Christmas in Branson	11/30/15	12/5/15
Christmas on the San Antonio Riverwalk	12/3/15	12/8/15
Tournament of Roses	12/30/15	1/3/16
Florida's Winter Getaway	1/24/16	2/9/16
Let's Cruise Texas	2/13/16	2/27/16
California's Pacific Coast	2/25/16	3/14/16

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