

Clark County Courier

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It's high school prom time.
Clark is Friday night.
Willow Lake is Saturday night.



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Words and deeds earn Tonak family "FFA Family of the Year" Award



The Tonak family received the FFA Family of the Year award during the State FFA Convention on April 12. Those present to receive the award were, left to right, Logan, Reed, Nicole, Dan, Lori, Jennifer, Ashley and Holten.

Submitted photo

By Gerri Ann Eide
SD FFA Foundation Exec. Dir.

The SD FFA Foundation named the annual "FFA Family of the Year" award, honoring a family's long-term involvement in the SD FFA/Agriculture Education program. Because the 2020 SD FFA Convention was virtual, the award was presented and the family recognized at the 2021 SD FFA Convention, on April 12, in Rapid City. The 2020 recipient of this award is the Tonak family, including Lori, Dan and Nicole, along with their

children, spouses and grandchildren: Samantha Tonak and fiancé Michael Pettit; Ashley (Tonak) and Jordan Wiesen, and son Holten; Logan; Jennifer; and Reed and daughter Camryn.

"The purpose of this award is to recognize a SD FFA family that has gone the extra mile for the FFA at the local and state levels through their words and deeds. The actions of the entire Tonak family through multiple generations have modeled the FFA mission ... developing premier leadership, personal growth

and career success through agriculture education. We are proud to recognize them with this special award," said Gerri Ann Eide, SD FFA Foundation Executive Director.

The Tonaks put the phrase from the FFA Creed, "a faith, born not of words but of deeds" into action. Dan reflects, "The biggest influence I had in becoming an ag teacher was the love for agriculture our father instilled. My first choice was to be a farmer, but that wasn't in the cards." Lori adds, "I started college

as a dairy production major but was intrigued by the variety of courses Ag Ed majors were taking. After much soul searching, as my mom never wanted me to enroll in an agriculture course in high school, I switched to Ag Ed and never looked back."

The name Tonak is almost synonymous with FFA in South Dakota. Active at the chapter, state, and national levels of FFA, their association with the blue corduroy jacket spans decades. Siblings Lori and Dan, as well as Dan's wife Nicole have, and continue to actively support FFA for more than 36 years. Their father was an FFA member, as were three additional siblings. Their youngest sister LaDonna was the first female state degree recipient for Clark FFA in 1983. Lori, as one of the first female agriculture education teachers, has taught more than 28 years. She started FFA chapters in Artesian and Kimball, as well as taught agriculture education in Tulare and Newell, and currently teaches online ag courses for the DIAL Virtual School.

Dan has taught Ag Ed in Willow Lake for 34 years, where Nicole has been a huge supporter. They impact countless students in their own classrooms as well as other chapters. Dan has advised 27, and Lori six, state winning teams/individuals in different events that advanced to nationals. Roxanne & Eric Knock, who had Lori and Dan respectively as advisors, share "They had a way of getting students

invested in their own education and developing in them a drive to succeed. Lori had a passion for developing students and uncovering their strengths. Dan helped students apply Farm Business Management principles to real life situations. Each of them gave students opportunities never imagined. They and their families have given a tremendous amount of time and talent to benefit FFA students throughout the state. This quote to describe the family: 'There comes that mysterious meeting in life when someone acknowledges who we are and what we can be, igniting the circuits of our highest potential.' We appreciate you, Dan and Lori, for acknowledging the talent that students didn't see in themselves and to the entire family for supporting you in this endeavor."

Both Lori and Dan are active members of the SD Association of Ag Educators and SD Association of Career and Technical Education organizations, serving in officer positions and being recognized with various awards. Dan currently serves as Past President for SDAEE and Lori serves on the National Agriculture Education Council, and currently serves on the SD FFA Board of Directors. They also serve as liaisons for FFA Leadership and Career Development events and Dan is a member of the SD FFA Foundation board. As parents and teachers, their children were active, influential and successful FFA members in the Kimball and Wil-

low Lake chapters, where their FFA chapters served the community and its members by conducting countless service projects. Dan, Ashley, Jordan, Samantha, Jennifer, Reed and Logan served in chapter and district officer leadership positions. Nicole has judged and chaperoned countless FFA events and through her business contacts has helped coach, and secure various sponsorships for local, district and state events and activities, including a grant for the FFA Ag Adventure Center at the SD State Fair.

The family has seven State and four American FFA Degree recipients, and were members on eight teams that advanced to a national competition. Lori, Dan and Nicole have each received the Honorary State FFA Degrees. Ashley and Jordan are in their second year of sponsoring a scholarship for SD FFA; Ashley and Jennifer actively judge numerous competitions at the district and state level.

Nicole works with Farmers Business Network. Samantha works at Wagner Super Foods and does photography. Ashley served as a state FFA officer and now works for ADM. Jennifer interned for the SD FFA Association and now works for LG Seeds. Logan works in production agriculture raising a small flock of sheep, growing crops, and working for a local farmer. Reed works for Farmers Implement and Irrigation.

Tonak family
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Clark and Willow Lake proms are this weekend

The 2021 Clark High School and Willow Lake High School Junior/Senior Proms are scheduled for this weekend. For decades, the Clark Prom was on Saturday night and the Willow Lake Prom was on Friday night. This year the two schools have flip-flopped with the Clark Prom on Friday night and the Willow Lake Prom on Saturday night.

The Clark 2021 Junior/Senior Prom theme is "Garden of Dreams", held Friday, April 23 at the C.H.S. gym. The meal is slated for 5:30 p.m. with the Grand March set for

7:00 p.m. Open attendance is in effect.

The freshmen waiter/waitresses include: Musonda Kabwe, Sara Thonvold, Conner Mudgett and Aaron Zemlicka.



The Willow Lake Junior/Senior Prom will be held this Saturday, April 24, at the Willow Lake High School gym. "Just Another Day in Paradise" is the theme. The banquet is at 7:00 p.m., with pictures scheduled after the banquet. The Grand March starts at 8:30 p.m.

Municipal Election Results

The Municipal Election was held Tuesday, April 13.

In Ward III, City of Clark, Melissa Nesheim defeated Don Tesch, 73-10 for a two-year term.

For the three-year term, Ward III City of Clark, Amy Woodland

appeared on the ballot but she had formally withdrawn her petition. Andrew Zemlicka defeated Woodland, 54-19.

In Garden City, for a three-year term on the town board, Joyce Hansen defeated Laura McCoy, 16-8.

Joan Boehnke started teaching in Clark in 1978

Forty-three years ago, Superintendent Q.C. Miles hired Miss Joan Springer from Aberdeen as the Title One teacher at the Clark School.

Miss Springer later became Mrs. Boehnke in 1984 and she has been with the Clark School system since 1978. However, as the saying goes, all good things must come to an end and this is the year that Joan Boehnke has decided to retire from full time teaching.

Her last 16 years have been teaching at the Fordham Colony which is a part of the Clark School system. She started there as the K-8 teacher with nine children.

Currently her 11 students in grades second through the fourth grade weren't even born yet when she started teaching at the colony.

"I'm really going to miss the kids and the friendships with the families that I've made since teaching out here. They are like my second family," stated Boehnke. "They've been taking good care of me all these years and always helped out when asked for different projects we've done. Colony people are very generous and I've appreciated that." Watching the students make

progress in their work has been rewarding for Boehnke she states. She also loves those hugs and has a lot of good memories over the years along with a lot of warm and fuzzy moments, such as hearing, 'You're the best' and 'I love you'.

"Those will start the water works," the soft-hearted teacher admits.

One student even sent her flowers after her 40th birthday. Keeping his name anonymous at his request was adhered to by his favorite teacher and a big bear hug come graduation time with the whisper 'You're the best!' is a memory that Boehnke will never forget.

Who inspired me

A young Joan Springer's first and fourth grade teachers were who inspired her to become a teacher. Her next door neighbor was her first grade teacher - Marguerite Stowa.

Caroline Hare was her fourth grade teacher. "Both of them were especially influential and I wanted to do what they do. To be an influential teacher like they were, a

Boehnke
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After 43 years of teaching within the Clark School District, Joan Boehnke is retiring at the end of the school year. She started as the Title (Chapter) teacher in 1978 and held that position for 19 years after which she taught third grade for five years and second grade for three years.

The last 16 years have been at the Fordham Colony which is also within the Clark School District. Relaxing, traveling and visiting her children, friends and relatives out of state are among Boehnke's future plans in retirement.

Herd immunity is the key to curtailing the COVID-19 pandemic

By Bart Pfankuch
South Dakota News Watch

Medical experts in South Dakota and across the country are concerned that reluctance among some people to get vaccinated against COVID-19 may prolong the pandemic, delay a return to normal life and possibly lead to more deaths.

Health officials say that the U.S. and individual states are in a race to reach "herd immunity," a level at which enough people are immune to the coronavirus to curtail its spread and reduce hospitalizations and deaths from the virus.

South Dakota has been a national leader in providing coronavirus vaccines to older residents and others at high risk of complications from COVID-19.

But as the vaccine rollout expanded to Phase 2, making anyone 16 and older eligible for vaccination, the demand for shots has waned and concerns have risen that herd immunity may be unobtainable.

"It's definitely concerning, and it's truly a race against time," said Dr. Shankar Kurra, vice president

of medical affairs at Monument Health in Rapid City. "If we don't get to that threshold of herd immunity, we could end up losing the race and having a new surge or wave of cases and unfortunately more hospitalizations and deaths."

National surveys and reports from medical experts in South Dakota reveal that vaccine hesitancy is more common among young people, rural and low-income residents, those with lower education levels and among some religious and political groups. Misinformation about the safety of COVID-19 vaccines is seen as a common reason people are deciding not to get vaccinated.

Failure to get enough people vaccinated could allow the current COVID-19 pandemic to linger and raises the likelihood that coronavirus variants, which appear to spread faster and more easily, would take hold and spread freely even among those who were vaccinated against the original version of the virus, Kurra said.

South Dakota medical experts will be watching closely over the

next month or so to see if vaccination rates remain stable now that eligibility has expanded to the largest population group so far.

Meagan Jensen, 25, is an agriculture teacher at Sturgis High School who has followed the progress of the vaccination effort in the news and has so far decided not to get vaccinated.

Jensen, a graduate of South Dakota State University who now lives in Rapid City, said she is well aware of the risks of serious illness from COVID-19 and has gone "back and forth" on whether to get vaccinated.

Jensen said she has friends her age who contracted COVID-19 and had "extreme" symptoms that included hair loss and the inability to taste or smell. Jensen said she wonders if she will need proof of vaccination to travel abroad to destinations such as New Zealand. She also worries that failing to get vaccinated could put her students at risk.

But Jensen said she has concerns that any vaccine, including the

COVID-19 vaccine, could reduce fertility in women, either in the short or long term.

"I'm around FFA [Future Farmers of America] students all the time, so I've probably been exposed multiple times and I haven't gotten it," Jensen said. "If I haven't gotten COVID already, maybe I won't."

Dr. David Basel, vice president for clinical quality at Avera Health in Sioux Falls, said failure to reach herd immunity would make it more likely that coronavirus variants will become the dominant strain of the virus in South Dakota and beyond.

If a large pocket of people in South Dakota or elsewhere does not obtain immunity to the coronavirus, it creates a crucible of sorts for coronavirus variants to take hold and spread, thereby raising the potential that variants could infect those who received immunizations or had COVID-19 before.

"From my standpoint, I feel like we're in the race of the vaccine versus the variants," Basel said.

Randy Dudek of Rapid City said

he received the vaccination against COVID-19 but only because he was required to as an electrician who sometimes works at Ellsworth Air Force Base in Box Elder.

"I'm not a test bunny for anybody," he said.

Dudek, 32, said he also has concerns about whether the vaccine-approval process was rushed. He gets his information about the vaccines from CDC bulletins sent to his work email and from news outlets, but not social media, which he said is rife with misinformation.

Dudek, a married father of two, said his wife has not gotten vaccinated because she works from home.

"I know it [COVID-19] affects everybody differently, but I would consider myself and my wife to be pretty healthy," he said. Basel said the medical community is trying to tamp down misinformation including 'myths' that the vaccines can cause COVID-19, that the shots reduce fertility, that the vaccines were rapidly authorized by the U.S. Food & Drug Administration with-

out proper testing and trials, and that side effects can be severe.

Jessica McDonald, 26, said that all of the residents at the South Dakota nursing home where she works as a certified nursing assistant have gotten vaccinated for COVID-19, but that she is not planning to get a shot.

McDonald, who lives in Piedmont, said she feels that the COVID-19 vaccines were rushed through the authorization process by the FDA, and she is not convinced the vaccinations are completely safe.

"I have this one to worry about, so I can't take any chances," she said, pointing to her 4-year-old daughter as they ate lunch in Rapid City. "It was rushed, like an emergency thing."

Sanford Health recently announced that it had opened vaccinations up to people who walked into vaccination sites and who did not have an appointment. But the effort to promote vaccinations suf-

COVID-19
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