



Happy Easter

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Hitting The High Notes

Vyborny To Sing At New York's Fabled Carnegie Hall

BY SHAUNA MARLETTE
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Not even losing her voice could keep Sophia Vyborny from earning an honor that most people can never dream of.

The Sacred Heart Middle School eighth grader is going to be performing at Carnegie Hall in New York City as part of the Middle School Honors Performance Series, a highly competitive and selective international honors choir.

Vyborny was selected from thousands of applicants based on a recommendation from her choir director, Emily Nelson, and a series of vocal auditions.

The big kicker: Less than a week before her final audition, Vyborny couldn't talk, let alone sing.

"I was as sick as I had ever been," Vyborny said. "I couldn't talk, but we contacted them and they let me audition a few days later than I was scheduled."

According to Sophia's mother, Cindy Vyborny, the entire audition experience has been one that their family and school supported, all starting with a recommendation from Nelson that she consider applying.

"I received the information about the program last fall and could only nominate two students," Nelson said. "I immediately knew I wanted to nominate Sophia. The first time I heard her sing, I got chills by her voice. Add to that, she is a dedicated musician and is very talented. I knew she would take this opportunity seriously and follow through."

Nelson said that Vyborny's range is incredible for an eighth grade student.

"She can sing both the high and the low parts of music," Nelson said. "I knew she could sing any part, but because of her cold, we decided she should apply as willing to sing any part. I knew she would be able to handle singing the harmonies, even though Sophia identifies herself as a soprano I think her alto range is maybe her strongest, so I knew she could do it."

Sophia said the final audition songs she chose were Phil Collins' "Strangers Like Me" from the movie "Tarzan" and "Heart of Courage" from the album "Legend".

She was notified in March that she was selected.

"I cried. I screamed," Sophia said about receiving the news she was accepted. "I knew it would be that Monday but wasn't sure when I would find out one way or the other. My mom, who

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KELLY HERTZ/P&D

Sophia Vyborny, an eighth grader at Sacred Heart Middle School in Yankton, recently was notified that she has been selected to participate in the Middle School Honors Performance Series at Carnegie Hall in New York City. The highly competitive program selects only the best singers from across the nation to perform in a special concert in June.

Volunteer Trio Keeps Gayville-Volin Students Healthy

BY JORDYNNE HART
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GAYVILLE — "We wouldn't do it if we didn't want to," Glennys Jepsen said as she divided a handful of big, green grapes into plastic cups.

Jepsen worked alongside Ardys Olson and Jane Petersen loading fresh produce into 178 cups during their weekly volunteer work for the Gayville-Volin's school district's Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP). It's a federally assisted program that provides free fruits and vegetables to students during the school day.

The three volunteers, all over the age of 85, said they were proud to be a part of a program that exposes students to healthy foods.

"I think this program is really important,"

Petersen said. "I'm sure some of these kids haven't even tasted some of these fruits before this program."

Gayville-Volin teacher Larry Buffington said that one student told him that he had never tasted a blueberry before until he received some from the program.

"With the price of fruit anymore, some people can't afford to buy them," Olson said. "It's good to expose young kids to these kinds of foods to try to make them eat healthy."

The school was granted \$15,000 in 2008 to provide students preschool through grade 12 a fresh fruit or vegetable snack during the school week. According to Buffington, the program has been

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New Public Pension System Considered By Trustees

New System Would Apply Only To New State Employees

BY BOB MERCER
State Capitol Bureau

PIERRE — A new and separate pension system that would apply for new employees is taking shape for the state and local governments and school districts that participate in the South Dakota Retirement System.

The SDRS board of trustees would need to take the new plan to the Legislature for approval.

Administrators said the new plan is designed for new employees. At this point the new plan isn't intended for current members to cross over.

"I think we do need to do something," said trustee Kathy "K.J." Peterson. She is the chief deputy auditor for Pennington County.

Peterson described the board's role as 40-something parents who are trying to look out for children who aren't born yet.

"This is brave," she said. "We've got 90 percent of our work done here."

The biggest change from the current system is retirement ages would be pushed back two years across the board. The current 65 would become 67, the current 55 would become 57 and the

current 45 would become 47. The new plan also would feature a variable-return component tied to investment performance. The basic

cost of living increase meanwhile would tie directly to the rate of inflation with a raise of at least 1 percent guaranteed.

The current system provides an annual cost of living adjustment of 2.1 to 3.1 percent. The COLA approach now in use is generally independent of earnings, unless the investment portfolio's value drops below certain thresholds.

The current system is financially balanced on an assumed average annual rate of return of 7.25 percent. That has become difficult to steadily reach in the past decade of market swings.

Another significant change under the new plan would be the elimination of subsidies paid by the general membership for features such as early retirement,

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JORDYNNE HART/P&D

Jane Petersen, Ardys Olson and Glennys Jepsen are all over volunteer for Gayville-Volin's school district's Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP). The three spend their Thursday washing, cutting and distributing fruits and vegetables for elementary students to eat healthy.

A Sacred Procession



KELLY HERTZ/P&D

Participants carry a life-sized replica of the crucifix during the Procession of the Cross held in downtown Yankton on Good Friday morning. The procession began at Sacred Heart Church and included stops at City Hall, the Yankton County Government Center and Meridian Bridge.

Neb. VA Facilities' Wait Times Among The Shortest In U.S.

BY MARGERY A. BECK
Associated Press

OMAHA, Neb. — Less than 1 percent of medical appointments at Nebraska's largest Veterans Affairs health facility, the Omaha VA Medical Center, failed to meet the VA health system's timeliness goal, which calls for patients to be seen within 30 days.

That's one of the lowest rates in the country, and the lowest for VA medical centers in the U.S. that handled more than 100,000 appointments from September through February. And overall, all of Nebraska's 10 VA medical center and clinics all fall under 1 percent.

Eileen Kingston, associate director for patient care of the VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System, credits the ranking mostly to a weekly meeting of regional health care managers dedicated to improving access to care for veterans.

"There's a level of accountability ... and transparency, so if there's an issue that we're having with wait times in some of our clinics, then that comes out in this weekly meeting," she said.

Nebraska's VA hospitals and clinics share some characteristics with more delay-prone facilities in other parts of the country — it has a strong military presence with Of-

futt Air Force Base south of Omaha and a partly rural population.

But Kingston said the Nebraska VA system has instilled a culture of placing a premium on serving veterans. It does that by working to keep staffing levels high, meeting regularly with veterans groups and partnering with non-VA care providers to fill any gaps in care, she said.

Of the 133,500 appointments logged at the Omaha VA during the six-month time period, only 0.36 percent took longer than 30 days from the time it was scheduled until care was provided. In other

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