



USD Women Battle To Tie With Loyola In Soccer Action.
PAGE 8

YANKTON DAILY

PRESS & DAKOTAN

Three Years Ago, Ellen McVay Of Yankton Was Diagnosed With Alzheimer's Disease. Since Then, She and Her Husband Michael Have Vowed To Fight Back For Herself And For Others With This Mysterious Illness

The Face Of The Fight



Ellen and Michael McVay stand in the back yard of their Yankton home, enjoying simple things as Ellen deals with her Alzheimer's disease and Michael serves as her caregiver. Ellen was recently chosen for a 10-member national advisory group for people with early-stage Alzheimer's, and the couple are active with efforts at the state level. They were recently featured in an interview in the Huffington Post, a news website.

BY RANDY DOCKENDORF
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Ellen McVay was driving home from the Twin Cities about four years ago when she faced a terrifying moment. The Yankton woman literally didn't know which way to turn. It wasn't a matter of losing her sense of direction — she panicked and didn't know what to do next with the car. "I couldn't tell if I should turn right or left," she said. "I froze, because I couldn't interpret the signs." Sitting in her dining room this week, she became shaken by the memory. "Thank God, nothing happened," she said, touching the side of her face. It wasn't the first such incident for McVay. A social worker who often traveled for her private practice, she recalled times when she couldn't process how to deal with upcoming highway construction cones. "It was creeping up. There were changes in my short-term memory. Our children were noticing, too, the changes in my memory," she said. Michael McVay, now a retired cardiologist, saw other differences in his wife. "I noticed changes in her visual-spatial awareness, so we had an evaluation 3 1/2 or 4 years ago," he said. A battery of tests eventually confirmed the unthinkable — Ellen McVay was diagnosed three years ago with early-stage Alzheimer's disease. She was only in her early 60s, considered young for the disease, and had no family history of Alzheimer's. The diagnosis was shocking. The specialist's delivery of the bad news was even worse. "(The doctor) gave us the diagnosis, looked at Michael and said, 'I have to get going. Good-bye,'" Ellen said. "We just looked at each other. Then we went to the car and just cried and cried. We asked, 'Is this for real?' When we got home, I just cried for days. How could we support each other and make things safe?" A follow-up visit with a neurologist confirmed that Ellen should begin medication. The neurologist prescribed Aricept and Namenda, often prescribed for Alzheimer's patients. "It doesn't cure, but it stabilizes the brain's chemistry, primarily memory," Michael said. Because of the stigma associated with Alzheimer's, the McVays didn't tell anyone of Ellen's condition outside of the immediate family for two years. However, they decided to come out with their story, contacting the Alzheimer's Association of South Dakota which had provided tremendous support and resources. The state association helped line up an "Avera Medical Minute" television segment. The camera crew visited the McVay home for the interview. "It was my story, and I didn't write anything ahead of time," Ellen said. "We talked about the diagnosis and how it affected us. We wanted to support anybody who is suffering with this." The McVays have now also gained

Rosebud

Wellness Center Part Of Diabetes Battle

BY CARSON WALKER
Associated Press

ROSEBUD — Connie Brushbreaker was a 12-Coke-a-day drinker when she was diagnosed with diabetes after the birth of a child. Now, she's helping lead an effort on the Rosebud Indian Reservation to change the mindset of Native Americans here so they no longer view the disease as an inevitable part of life. Brushbreaker started a diabetes education program 15 years ago that soon will include a new wellness center, a mobile unit to travel around the nearly 2,000-square-mile reservation and a plan to certify diabetes educators who are American Indian. The \$5 million investment came from Denmark-based Novo Nordisk Inc., the world's largest manufacturer of insulin, which planned to unveil the program at a Friday ceremony in Rosebud. "I think we're going to be able to do wonders — to get the word out there. And if we help only a handful of people, that will save in the budget but also could save some lives," said Brushbreaker. American Indians and Alaska Natives have the highest age-adjusted prevalence of diabetes among U.S. racial and

DIABETES | PAGE 16

Lights Out

Traffic Lights At 4th And Walnut To Go Dark As Part Of Study

BY NATHAN JOHNSON
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Motorists traveling Fourth Street in Yankton will soon have one less stop to make. The South Dakota Department of Transportation (SDDOT) is doing a traffic study in which it will shut down the traffic signal at Fourth and Walnut streets. It's part of a process leading up to the complete elimination of the signal when Fourth Street/Highway 50 is reconstructed beginning in 2015. "A study was done on both the Walnut Street and Douglas Avenue signals, and based on today's traffic counts, turning movements, pedestrian movement and all those types of things projected out for 20 years, neither intersection warrants a signal," said Ron Peterson, the Yankton-area engineer for the SDDOT. "But having one of them does help calm traffic, control speed and provide gaps for pedestrians, so we're going to leave the one at Douglas." The closing of the post office at Walnut Street played a role in reducing traffic at the intersection. On Monday, message boards will be erected near the intersection warning motorists that the change is coming. Beginning Thursday, the signal will flash yellow for east-west traffic and red for north-south traffic. "We're going to put the signals on flash for a while just to let people get an idea that something different is happening," Peterson said. "Then we'll

The South Dakota Department of Transportation plans to disengage the traffic lights located at the intersection of Fourth and Walnut in Yankton next week to determine the impact it would have on the traffic flow. The Fourth St./Highway 50 reconstruction project is set to begin in 2015, and officials say current traffic flow studies indicate traffic lights are no longer needed at the intersection. The test is set to last 90 days.

LIGHTS | PAGE 16



KELLY HERTZ/P&D

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MCVAYS | PAGE 5



ROB NIELSEN/P&D

Customers gathered at he Yankton Livestock Auction Market Friday for its annual BBQ Feed Cattle Sale, a tradition at the facility. A large cattle sale was held, followed by a barbecue feed for those in attendance. "We do a BBQ Sale every year just to show a little appreciation for all the customers that have sold here every year," said market manager and auctioneer Tom Kuchta.

Yankton Auction Market Says Thanks To Its Customers

BY ROB NIELSEN
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Thanksgiving came early to the Yankton Livestock Auction Market. The market held it's annual Special BBQ Feeder Cattle Sale on Friday which included a cattle auction concluded with a barbecue feed for its customers. Operations manager and auctioneer Tom Kuchta says the annual sale started as a way to show gratitude for the business they've received over the years. "We do a BBQ Sale every year just to

show a little appreciation for all the customers that have sold here every year," Kuchta says. "It seems like there's a lot of area farmers that like to sell cattle on the BBQ Sale because you get a lot of buyers and a lot of a people from a long ways away. Seems like it's always a good market." Kuchta says that while it isn't necessarily the Yankton Livestock Auction Market's biggest sale, this is a large sale for this time of year.

MARKET | PAGE 16