

South Dakota Couple Leaves Legacy Through Christmas Tree

SIoux FALLS (AP) — Driving along Minnesota Avenue, Dale Weir looked to his wife, Dorothy, and asked what she wanted for Christmas. She pointed to the 60-foot evergreen tree outside her car window and said she wanted that — but with lights and decorations.

So Dale obliged. He found out who owned the land and bought it, then decorated the tree and gave it to Dorothy.

That was 20 years ago. Today, the massive evergreen adorned annually since 1992

with thousands of lights stands as a Christmas symbol for Sioux Falls residents and visitors.

For those who knew the Weirs, it also honors a husband and wife who donated countless hours and hundreds of thousands of dollars to the city.

“That tree symbolizes all the love they had,” said Candy Hanson, president of the Sioux Falls Area Community Foundation, who knew the couple through their philanthropic work.

“I don’t believe she thought he would do it, but Dale would always rise to the challenge like that.”

For the first few years, the Weirs kept it a secret that they were the ones decorating the tree. Eventually, they died — Dale most recently, in 2010 — and left the property to a local church. He also created the Dale and Dorothy Weir Endowment of the Sioux Falls Area Community Foundation to ensure the tradition continued.

The Weirs’ nephew, Bill Weir, said many people wouldn’t suspect that the couple had lived such a comfortable life.

The downstairs of their home was rented to a local teacher, and Dale Weir never drove a new car. The couple’s few indulgences included eating out and shopping for antiques, said Bill Weir, 69, of Sisters, Ore.

Dale Weir was more interested in helping others than living lavishly, Bill Weir said.

“He gave his resources where he felt it could give the most amount of people enjoyment and good,” he said.

Pantry

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them to bring the boxes (of items), but we didn’t know it was going to be that much. We were flabbergasted,” she said. “The kids had 87 boxes, but they weren’t small. These boxes were enormous. It was wonderful, what they did.”

The boxes included not only food but also bar soap, shampoo, toothbrushes and toothpaste, Mann said. “These are things we normally wouldn’t have (on hand) because they get so expensive and we run out of them,” she said.

The hundreds of donated items came at just the right time, Mann said.

“We had already done our Christmas boxes,” she said. “But when the school came with these three big pickup loads of food, we had all kinds of empty shelves that needed filling. We are so grateful that it happened.”

The work had just begun with the students’ delivery, Mann said.

“We had three of us working from about 7 a.m. to 2 p.m.,” she said. “We had to check the expira-

tion dates (on the products) and clean the cans and bottles so we could fill our shelves.”

The Bon Homme students and staff weren’t the only ones making special deliveries, Mann said.

“Someone donated to buy 100 hams, and someone else donated to buy 100 one-pound butters,” she said. “Then Father (Joe Forcelle) had a church group that made 100 fruitcakes.”

Forcelle serves St. Leo Catholic Church in Tyndall and St. Vincent Catholic Church in Springfield. Students in grades 7-12 — who may have assisted with the Bon Homme food pantry collection — helped with the fruitcake project.

The massive bake-off used the talents of St. Vincent parishioner Carl Eastman, a professional chef who works in Yankton. Eastman headed up the kitchen end of the project, while Forcelle provided the recipe.

“I have a recipe I’ve used for more than 30 years in my various clergy assignments,” Forcelle said. “All ingredients are purchased locally. Several parish organizations donated cash to help buy the ingredients.”

The students and other workers gathered in the Father Cronin Center at St. Leo’s one Sunday after-

noon. The work session lasted more than five hours and created nearly 12 dozen fruitcakes.

The first 100 fruitcakes were donated to the food pantry, Forcelle said. The rest were donated to the Good Samaritan Center in Tyndall to be shared with the nursing home residents.

“It’s the second year we have done this project,” he said. “Our students rate it as the most fun service project they’ve done. We plan on a repeat next year.”

Some of these same students also made fudge for the inmates’ Christmas sack program, including Mike Durfee State Prison in Springfield, Forcelle added.

When it comes to the food pantry, the Bon Homme students’ donation was timely in more ways than one, Mann said. The food pantry won’t hold another major organized food drive until May, using cash donations to purchase its needed food in the meantime.

“We have no refrigerators, so we can’t offer any milk or eggs. We have what we call the staples, like flour, sugar and breakfast food,” she said. “We would like to get more items like breakfast foods, crackers, jelly, peanut butter, spaghetti sauce, macaroni, noodles, canned soups, vegetables and fruit.”

Even with the Bon Homme students’ food collection, the pantry still needs certain items, Mann said.

“We are still out of four or five items. It’s really the basics that we need for the pantry,” she said.

“Even with this enormous amount of food, we have lots of demand and pressure on the food pantry.”

Mann described the turn of events for many families during the recession.

“A while back, we didn’t have that many families (using the pantry). We had many weeks where there were seven, eight, nine or 10 families a week. Some weeks, we only had four or five families,” she said. “Now, we have 18 to 20 families a week from around the whole county. And some of those who used to donate to the food pantry now come here to pick up food for themselves.”

Why the higher demand?

“Most of our families who come to us are on food stamps, and it doesn’t stretch far enough for families with five to eight people in the family. They have families with four or five children,” Mann said. “Some of them come to the food pantry, and we supply them with a lot of the basics.”

The food pantry is open from 8

a.m. to noon Wednesdays and other times by appointment.

The food pantry is located in downtown Tyndall, but the Bon Homme students didn’t fully realize its work until dropping off the boxes, Mann said.

“The class that delivered all this food, they knew a little bit about the food pantry,” she said. “But they were surprised when they came and actually saw it.”

Mann had spoken recently at the school about the food pantry’s needs, particularly during the holidays. She was pleased to see the Bon Homme students embrace her message, making the food drive part of their Christmas spirit of giving to others.

“The kids were so enthusiastic,” she said. “They brought all this stuff from home. Some of those houses really cleaned out their cupboards.”

For more information about the Bon Homme food pantry, or to donate cash or items, contact Mann at (605) 589-4590.

You can follow Randy Dockendorf on Twitter at [twitter.com/RDockendorf](#)

You can follow Emily Niebrugge on Twitter at [twitter.com/ENiebrugge](#)

Events

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people to take part in the week. We know that’s kind of high, but I think we can do it.”

Here is a list of events:

- Free Family Games (Board games, Twister, cards, game tables etc.) at the Boys and Girls Club (BGC) of Yankton Thursday, Dec. 27 from 1-4 p.m. Light Refreshments Provided. Prizes.
- The first School Hollidazzle Teen Dance at ShBooms/Bowling Alley, Thursday, Dec. 27 from 6-10:30 p.m.; Grades 9-12, \$5 Pre-Sale admission tickets at BGC, \$7 admission fee at the door, concessions provided; drawings for raffle prizes. Proceeds will go to the Boys and Girls Club of Yankton. Chaperoned by the Boys and Girls Club Staff and Volunteers. You must show valid High School ID for entry.
- A middle school dance at Sacred Heart Link Auditorium will be held Friday from 7-10 p.m. for grades 5-8. There is a \$5 admission fee.
- On Saturday, community members can take part in the Coalition Theater Productions Night from 6-9 p.m. at City Hall. Prizes will include a grand drawing for an iPod.
- Free swim and gym will be held at the Summit Activities Center on Monday, Dec. 31 from 1-4 p.m., and later that night, the coalition will hold a talent show and Fireworks at City Hall from 6-9 p.m. Free Ice Skating at the Alcoa Arena will also be held Monday from 6-9 p.m.





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