

Dr. Farmer To End His Column

BY VAL FARMER
 www.valfarmer.com

It's true. The time has come to quit. The time is right. It has been 28 years since I wrote my first column in January 1984 for the *Rapid City Journal*. I didn't know what kind of journey I was on or where it would take me. But I began with a sense of mission and that sense of mission has sustained me.

I began with the idea of writing about rural life, rural mental health, and the farm crisis. Was a column like this ever needed at that time! Waves of anger, despair and raw emotion were tearing apart farm families, marriages and rural communities. Though the seeds of the farm crisis were sown before 1984, that was the year that farmers started to talk about the private hell they were experiencing.

Because of pride and self-sufficiency, each was feeling he or she had been cut out of the herd as defective. They blamed themselves because of mistakes that *should* and *could* have been anticipated. With the spate of media attention, they came to the realization that the whole herd was in trouble.

Farm and ranch families needed to know they weren't alone. My column was validation. They were worth something. The mistakes weren't just their own and there was a story to tell. I was privileged to tell part of that story.

I put a megaphone to the cries of heart-break and struggles families were going through. In my way, I gave advice on stress and coping to help people define and deal successfully with what they were going through. There was a lot to write about. I was flooded almost immediately with an impassioned response that I used to broadcast throughout rural America.

Broadening the mission. After a couple of years, I expanded my column to address mental health topics in general. In a religious sense, I wanted to make popular that which was good and make unpopular that which was evil. I wanted to represent what was the



Val
FARMER

into my column to address common mistakes and concerns. I could write with compassion, realism and freshness because I had the unique privilege of being a part of many people's lives.

I drew on the research of my colleagues in psychology and rural sociology to tell other stories of professionals whose work I knew and trusted. Conservatives liked my writing because of the spiritual and moral underpinnings. Liberals liked it because it was fact and research based. Whatever the column's appeal, it was generally concise, practical, and readable.

Making it personal. Occasionally and to the chagrin of my wife and children, I made it personal, disclosing things about myself and my family that also had a message. I wasn't perfect and neither were they. Our struggles humanized the column.

I am a Mormon. I didn't disguise my beliefs or affiliation nor did I blandish or proselyte them. Initially, I was viewed by some with skepticism and wariness, but I became a trusted ally and resource for pastors, ministers, priests and lay leaders as we shared common goals and concerns. Thank you for that acceptance.

I became a fixture in people's lives. It has won me many friends and the ire of more than a few offended readers. My column has

best research and wisdom from my profession in this fight.

Popular culture was eroding so much of what was good and wonderful about family and community life.

I also had an active clinical practice as a psychologist. I was a witness to human error and foibles that created much suffering and heartache. I distilled my therapeutic wisdom, insights and techniques

been a steady weekly challenge for me and a reliable and generally welcome visitor into the homes and lives of my readers.

So why quit? Good question. As we moved from the Dakotas to Missouri, my wife Darlene and I were puzzled over our lives. We had a goal of serving a mission for our church.

Six of our seven children are married and have settled into careers and lives that are stable and rewarding. Our seventh child, still single, is graduating from college this next spring. We didn't want to put our lives on hold waiting for Cupid's arrow to strike.

Darlene has studied and spoke Russian for more than 15 years. She deserves a chance to use that language. I want her to have that experience and to share her incredible talents and wisdom with others. She had been the reluctant one — always reminding me of my value to the audience that depends on the column and the personal good that comes from my counseling.

We finally made the decision to end the column by the end of March 2012. Since then something remarkable happened.

An Iowa farmer and psychologist, Dr. Mike Rosmann, — a colleague and leader with considerable reputation, a man who loves and cares for rural people as much or more than I do — has committed himself to take over the column. I will introduce him to you in a future column.

I couldn't be more pleased. I won't be abandoning my readers after all. We will move on to new adventures and leave you in capable hands.

For more information on Val Farmer, visit Val Farmer's website at www.valfarmer.com.

Val Farmer is a clinical psychologist specializing in family business consultation and mediation with farm families. He lives in Wildwood, Missouri and can be contacted through his website.

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SOCIAL SECURITY

All About Retirement And Fast S.S. Facts

BY JENNIFER H
 Social Security Claims Representative in
 Yankton

Social Security is as American as baseball and apple pie. Not everyone likes apples or baseball games, but almost every American who reaches retirement age will receive Social Security retirement benefits. In fact, 96 percent of Americans are covered by Social Security.

If you're ready to retire in the near future, this article is for you. We'd like to share with you a few important items about Social Security retirement benefits and how to apply for them.

When you work and pay Social Security taxes, you earn "credits" toward Social Security benefits. If you were born in 1929 or later, you need 40 credits (10 years of work) to qualify for retirement benefits.

To qualify for retirement benefits, 10 years is the minimum. However, the amount of your benefit is determined by how long you work and how much you earn. Higher lifetime earnings result in higher benefits. If there were some years when you did not work or had low earnings, your benefit amount may be lower than if you had worked steadily or earned more.

Also, your age when you retire makes a difference in your benefit amount. The full retirement age (the age at which full retirement benefits are payable) has been gradually rising from age 65 to age 67. You can retire as early as age 62, but if benefits start before you reach your full retirement age,

your monthly payment is reduced. Find out what your full retirement age is by referring to the convenient chart in our publication, Retirement Benefits, at www.socialsecurity.gov/pubs/10035.html. It's in the second section.

Just as you can choose an early retirement and get a reduced payment, you also can choose to keep working beyond your full retirement age to take advantage of a larger payment. Your benefit will increase automatically by a certain percentage from the time you reach your full retirement age until you start receiving your benefits or until you reach age 70.

The decision of when to retire is an individual one and depends on a number of personal factors. To help you weigh the factors, we suggest you read our online fact sheet, When To Start Receiving Retirement Benefits, available at www.socialsecurity.gov/pubs/10147.html.

You may want to consider your options by using our Retirement Estimator to get instant, personalized estimates of future benefits. You can plug in different retirement ages and scenarios to help you make a more informed retirement decision. Try it out at www.socialsecurity.gov/estimator.

When you decide to retire, the easiest and most convenient way to do it is right from the comfort of your home or office computer. Go to www.socialsecurity.gov where you can apply for retirement benefits in as little as 15 minutes. In most cases, there are no forms to sign or documents to send; once

you submit your electronic application, that's it!

In addition to using our award-winning website, you can call us toll-free at 1-800-772-1213 (TTY, 1-800-325-0778) or visit the Social Security office nearest you.

Either way you choose to apply, be sure to have your bank account information handy so we can set up your payments to be deposited directly into your account.

To learn more, please read our publication, Retirement Benefits, at www.socialsecurity.gov/pubs/10035.html.

FAST FACTS ABOUT SOCIAL SECURITY

When you think of Social Security, you probably think about a monthly payment for retired and disabled workers. But Social Security has a rich history full of interesting facts. The program has been around for over 75 years, so there has been ample time to put together a list of fun facts and figures. Here are a few.

Social Security paid benefits to more than 54.6 million beneficiaries in 2010. Fifty-six percent of adult beneficiaries were women.

Here is some trivia about wages over the past few years. In 2007, the average annual wage was \$40,405. In 2009, it went up to \$40,711. And in 2011, the average wage was \$43,517.83 (estimated).

Looking at the average wages, it's plain to see how easy it is to reach your full Social Security credit each year. For example, in 2011, a wage-earner needed to earn and pay taxes on \$4,480 of wages

to earn the full four credits of Social Security coverage for the year.

When you retire, you'll fully appreciate just how useful Social Security can be. In 2009, 88 percent of married couples and 86 percent of single people aged 65 or older received Social Security benefits. Social Security was the major source of income (providing at least 50 percent of total income) for 54 percent of aged beneficiary couples and 73 percent of aged single beneficiaries. Social Security made up 90 percent or more of income for 22 percent of aged beneficiary couples and 43 percent of aged single beneficiaries.

New benefits were approved for about 5.7 million people in 2010. Of these new beneficiaries, 46 percent were retired workers and 18 percent were disabled workers. The remaining 36 percent were survivors or the spouses and children of retired or disabled workers.

Then there's Supplemental Security Income (SSI), a program that provides income to needy people aged 65 or older, or who are blind or disabled. Payments under SSI began in January 1974, with 3.2 million people receiving federally administered payments. As of December 2010, the number of recipients was 7.9 million. Of this total, 4.6 million were between the ages of 18 and 64, 2 million were aged 65 or older, and 1.2 million were under age 18.

To learn more, read our online publication Fast Facts & Figures About Social Security, 2011 at www.socialsecurity.gov/policy/docs/chartbooks/fast_facts.

VISITING HOURS

How To Brave Cold Weather Exercise

BY ANGIE O'CONNOR
 Avera Sacred Heart Community
 Wellness Coordinator



Even with the above normal temperatures we've been experiencing this winter, it can still be difficult to stay motivated to exercise during winter. But you don't have to hang up your sneakers until spring. There are lots of ways to continue your fair weather workouts indoors. And, with some common sense, there's usually no reason you can't exercise outdoors year round.

STAYING MOTIVATED

To keep yourself motivated, focus on what you'll gain if you keep exercising from fall straight through winter. You'll continue to reap the short and long term benefits of exercise. You'll be in better shape come spring. And you'll have a way to burn off those extra calories consumed over the holidays.

Exercise, too, can help shake those "winter blues." It can improve your mood, increase your energy level and help you sleep better.

Try to set aside 20 to 30 minutes a day for exercise. Treat it as you would an appointment. Schedule time for it and write it on your calendar. For extra motivation, work out with your spouse or a friend.

MOVE INDOORS

There are a lot of ways to exercise indoors. This winter, consider:

- Mall walking. The hardest part about mall or indoor track walking is getting there. But once there, you may be amazed how quickly you finish your workout. You may even meet new people.
- Joining a health club. Find one you're comfortable with. Have someone show you the different equipment. You may find something new to try.
- Diving in. Working out in water is easier on the joints than other forms of exercise, so it may be a good choice if you have bad knees. Don't let a fear of deep water keep you from trying a water workout. Most water aerobic classes are taught in the shallow end.
- Purchasing exercise equipment. Set the machines in front of a window or read while you work out. Plan your workout around a favorite TV show. If you like biking, buy "rollers" that turn your regular bike into a stationary one. There's no "ideal" piece of exercise equipment. Try to find one that's practical, easy to use and enjoyable.

BRAVE THE WEATHER

Unless your doctor has advised against it, there's usually no reason you can't continue your favorite outdoor activity year round, provided the weather isn't extreme.

If you walk or jog outdoors, maintain your schedule. Just bundle up. Consider learning a

new outdoor sport, such as snowshoeing or cross country skiing. Or find some outdoor yard work to do.

TIPS FOR EXERCISING OUTDOORS IN THE WINTER

If you do brave the weather, remember to:

- Dress appropriately. Dress in layers. You should be a little cool starting out. You don't want to sweat a lot and become chilled. Most heat loss is through the head wear a hat. Wear synthetic fabrics that keep moisture away from your skin. Wear brightly colored or reflective clothing so drivers can see you.
- Head into the wind. You want to end your workout (when you're likely to be the sweatiest) with the wind at your back.
- Drink plenty of fluids. Even in cold weather you need to drink plenty of water to prevent dehydration.
- Exercise defensively. Beware of slippery surfaces. Exercise in daylight, if possible. Anticipate that drivers may not be able to see you or stop quickly.
- Talk to your doctor. Some medical conditions make working out in the cold unsafe. Exercising in cold weather can bring on angina (heart related chest pain). Cold air can also trigger asthma in some people with this condition. (Wearing a face-mask or scarf over your mouth can help.)

If you're older or fairly inactive, talk to your doctor before beginning any exercise program.

BE CREATIVE

There are many ways to work in a little exercise here or there. It does not have to be strenuous. Make a workout of cleaning. Or walk the stairs in your home (if possible). Whatever you choose, balance the four main types of exercise endurance, strength, balance and flexibility.

For example, mall walk (for endurance) and lift hand weights (for strength) on alternate days. Try yoga (for balance and flexibility), and stretch slowly (for flexibility) before and after you exercise.

Don't be too hard on yourself if you miss a day. Just get back on schedule as soon as possible.

THIS WEEKLY COLUMN IS PRODUCED BY THE PUBLIC RELATIONS OFFICE AT AVERA SACRED HEART HOSPITAL TO PROMOTE HEALTHY LIFESTYLES AND PROVIDE USEFUL MEDICAL INFORMATION TO OUR COMMUNITY.

'Exercise: Prescription For Health' Challenge Announced In S.D.

PIERRE — If you're looking for a healthy way to start the New Year, consider the "Exercise: Prescription for Health" challenge. The web-based challenge is a joint effort of the South Dakota Department of Health's Healthy South Dakota initiative and the South Dakota State Medical Association.

"Exercise: Prescription for Health" is open to all adult South Dakotans. It runs Jan. 15 through Feb. 29 and signup is underway now at www.HealthySD.gov. Once the challenge begins, enrolled participants can go online at the site to log their minutes of moderate or vigorous physical activity. At the end of the challenge, 10 randomly selected participants will receive a South Dakota State Parks pass.

"Regular physical activity is one of the most important things any of us can do to improve our health," said Kristin Biskeborn, state nutritionist for the South

Dakota Department of Health. "It reduces the risk of chronic diseases such as diabetes and heart disease, controls weight, improves quality of life, and can even reduce the symptoms of anxiety and depression. Exercise is wonderful medicine."

Unfortunately, too many South Dakotans are not physically active. In 2009, 55 percent of adults in the state reported being physically inactive on a regular basis, compared to the national average of 49 percent.

Individuals with questions about their ability to be physically active should consult with their physician before beginning any exercise program.

The Healthy South Dakota website and its regular challenges are part of the department's Health 2020 objective to help South Dakotans be physically active, eat healthy, and live healthier lives.

How To Eat Healthy During The New Year

LINCOLN, Neb. — Now that the holidays are over and a new year is here, it's a perfect time to focus on healthy eating. Whether young or old, healthy eating can make a real difference in the way you feel today as well as your health in years to come.

"One of the key issues is that while most people typically gain a pound or two over the holidays, often times it isn't lost afterward, contributing to overweight and obesity later in life," according to Dr. Joann Schaefer, Director of the Division of Public Health in the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services. "Weight gain typically occurs over many years, and added up, it's easy to become at risk for serious health problems such as heart disease, stroke, diabetes and some cancers."

Being overweight raises your risk for type 2 diabetes. Losing weight is one of the best things you can do to defend against diabetes and prevent other health problems. If you need some motivation to shed those holiday pounds, take the online test at www.defendagainstdiabetes.net or <<http://www.defendagainstdiabetes.net>> to find out if you are at risk. If you are overweight, losing 7% of your body weight by making healthy changes in the way that you eat and being physically active is the best way to prevent or delay type 2 diabetes.

Here are a few tips to get you started:

Eat more fruits and veggies. Make half your plate fruits and vegetables. Selecting a colorful variety of fruits and veggies is a key to healthy eating since they

are naturally low in fat and high in vitamins and minerals.

Drink water instead of sugary drinks. Drinking too many sugary beverages (soda, energy drinks, sports drinks, sugar-sweetened juice drinks, etc.) can add too many calories, leading to weight gain and increasing the risk of diabetes.

Avoid oversized portions. Check the labels on what you are eating and drinking to see how many calories are in each serving. Cut back on those high-calorie items or decrease your portion. Eat off a smaller plate or split your meal in half at a restaurant and take the rest home.

Small changes over time can make a big difference in successful weight loss. Start by making healthy food choices today!

For more information about proper nutrition and weight management, go to:

Defend Against Diabetes – Aim for a Healthy Weight http://dhhs.ne.gov/publichealth/Pages/diabetes_campaign_healthy-weight.aspx

DHHS Nutrition and Activity for Health <http://dhhs.ne.gov/nafh>

ChooseMyPlate.gov <http://www.choosemyplate.gov/>

National Diabetes Education Program <http://www.ndep.nih.gov>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nS1XVWmQ8qQ>
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nS1XVWmQ8qQ> (YouTube video about healthy eating)

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January

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