

# Foss

From Page 1A

store owner. In addition, he played on the Scotland baseball team. Penk said her late father looked for the good aspects of life and people. "My remarkable dad was an inspirational and usually a positive thinking man," she said.

Foss drew the attention of fans wherever he went, Penk said.

"He enjoyed being in the public and was known in many communities," she said. "It was hard to take him anywhere without someone recognizing him."

However, Foss made sure he focused on his family, Penk said.

"He was devoted to my mother and our family," she said. "He doted on his two grandchildren, their spouses and three great-grandchildren and always told me that having grandchildren was the most wonderful thing."

## EARLY START

Foss's passion for music began as a child around 1925, when he accompanied his father twice a year for business to Yankton, 30 miles away. While in Yankton, Foss watched the live entertainment at radio station WNAX. Years later, he and his group performed on the Yankton station once a month, on Saturday evenings, for about 15 years.

WNAX featured 60 live entertainers and sponsored a fiddle contest in the studio and played on the radio. Listeners sent in telegrams for their favorite performer.

"A guy from Sioux Falls won it. He got 8,000 telegrams. I didn't think there were that many radios in the five-state area (covered by the station)," Foss said with a chuckle.

Then came the Depres-

sion years, and the radio stars seemed larger than life during those hard times, Foss said.

"I thought, 'Those entertainers were all dressed up and had those shiny shoes, they must be rich,'" he said. "They were earning \$15 a week, and if they didn't get a certain amount of fan mail, they lost their jobs. A few years later, they could come back and be re-hired."

Despite his lost fingers, Foss performed as back-up pianist for his fiddle-playing father.

Foss continued his "day job" throughout his career, starting as a teacher. Growing up during the Depression, he received \$585 during his first year of teaching and was glad to have a job.

However, Foss always remained true to his music, often pairing up with his father. The played venues ranging from the Smithsonian Festival in Washington, D.C. to the national fiddle contest in Idaho.

Foss served for 25 years as a board member of the National Old-Time Fiddlers Association. He was heartened to see the emergence of a new generation of fiddlers, some starting as young as age 5.

Foss worked for a quarter-century with the National Old-Time Country & Bluegrass Festival and Contest in LeMars, Iowa. Foss served as master of ceremonies and judged the event, sponsored by the National Traditional Country Music Association.

As a nationally certified judge, he worked several states. He judged the fiddle, accordion, singing contest and harmonica during the LeMars festival.

He founded the Old Time Fiddlers festival in 1973 and remained closely associated with the jamboree throughout its history. In the beginning, the festival drew around 100 performers with sessions running until 2 a.m. Spectators traveled from as

far away as 500 miles.

One fiddler, Stephanie Lynch Taylor from Burbank, has performed in Nashville and opened for major stars.

## HAPPY MEMORIES

Throughout the years, Foss played with the Happy Memories Gospel and Country Band from Tripp. The band, founded by Maurice Bueber, performed at nursing homes, churches and prisons.

Loretta Schoenfish plays piano in the band and recalled Foss' incredible musical talent.

"Wilbur was such a great guy. He would play anything," she said. "Wilbur was such a good singer, too. He could really sing."

When the band performed in churches, Bueber would lead the worship, Schoenfish said. "We would play the hymns and extra music during the service," she said.

The Happy Memories Band played for a wide variety of audiences, Schoenfish said.

"It was word of mouth. People found out about our group, and they would ask us. A lot of times, Wilbur would have contacts from all over," she said. "We went to nursing homes and did whole programs. We went to places like Majestic Bluffs (at Yankton) and to Tripp, Parkston, Scotland and Menno."

The nursing home residents enjoyed hearing the music they knew from their youth, Schoenfish said.

"When we played at the nursing homes, people thought it was really great. More and more people came out all the time," she said. "Sometimes, we had a couple who could come out on the floor and dance to the music."

Foss maintained a lifelong love of making music with others who shared his passion for it, Penk said.

"Dad enjoyed old-time musicians. Fiddle jams

could go on for hours," she said. "Organizing events and contests was a joy for him. He also judged many contests throughout the country."

In that respect, Foss sought to pass his passion and knowledge to future generations, Penk said.

"So many have told me how he taught and mentored them when they were learning to play the fiddle," she said. "He liked fiddle music to which you could tap your foot. His favorite hymns were old, simple and comforting."

## SERVING OTHERS

Foss even served a brief political career. Then-Gov. Archie Gubbrud appointed him to the State Senate in 1961 to replace Joe Lehmann, who had resigned. Foss served as a state senator until 1963.

After leaving office as a state legislator, Foss asked then-lawmakers Loren Anderson of Yankton and Carrol "Red" Allen of Lake Andes to introduce a resolution declaring the fiddle as the official state instrument of South Dakota. The two legislators were successful, and the fiddle received its official place in state culture.

As part of his effort to preserve the state's musical heritage, Foss spoke at the Cultural Heritage Center in Pierre about the history of fiddles.

Foss believed in education, volunteering, church participation and sharing, Penk said. "Things were always possible; he was an 'out of the box' thinker. Creative ideas came his way, and he followed up on them. So many awards came his way, too many to list," she said.

Foss lived the Golden Rule in his everyday life, Penk said.

"He was a generous man and mentored people of all ages, in good times and not so good times. He treated

people the way he liked to be treated," she said.

"People were also very good to him and continue to be to my mother. There is something about them that drew people in. Many told me they thought of him like a dad or a grandpa. That pleased him."

Foss shared his thoughts in articles he wrote for the Yankton County Observer weekly newspaper, Penk said. His last article was published shortly after his death.

During his working years and beyond, Foss pursued a variety of interests in basketball refereeing, baseball, politics, horse trading, car deals, old time and country music and mentoring young fiddlers.

"Up to the day he became ill, Dad lived the way he wanted, a full and 'lucky' life, as he said so often," Penk said. "My mother, husband, children and grandchildren thank the community for the interest and outpouring of support."

## PAYING TRIBUTE

The tributes left on the Goglin Funeral Home's online guest book described a man who cared for others, not only with his music but in other aspects of life.

One person wrote that he tried to pattern his life along the lines of Foss and another Scotland leader, Leighton Gemar. Another person commented on the Fosses as good neighbors. Still others wrote of Foss' kindness as a banker in helping them with financial affairs, particularly during difficult times.

But Foss remained best known for his fiddle, which developed a loyal following. "It was a Saturday night ritual to listen to the Old Time Fiddlers on WNAX," one woman recalled in her tribute.

Others wrote how Foss encouraged them to take up fiddling and stick with it. His encouragement would

now be passed along to new generations of fiddlers and lovers of old-time music.

"Those records, tapes and CDs which he has left behind, now spread around to fiddlers all over the country, are a legacy upon which musicians will draw for generations to come," one person wrote in a tribute. "A lot of people talk about preserving 'old time fiddling.' Wilbur devoted his life to it."

Foss received a number of accolades during his lifetime. He was inducted into the South Dakota Baseball Hall of Fame, the South Dakota Fiddlers Hall of Fame, the Midwest Fiddler Hall of Fame and the South Dakota Country Music Hall of Fame and the South Dakota Hall of Fame under Arts and Humanities.

He received the South Dakota Press Association (now South Dakota Newspaper Association) Distinguished Service award. He was also named to the Eastern Arizona Hall of Fame and the National Traditional Music Association Hall of Fame in Anita, Iowa.

In addition, Foss and his wife, Elizabeth, were honored in Yankton as "Living Legends."

Gov. Dennis Daugaard has ordered flags to fly half-staff at the State Capitol on Saturday (Nov. 28), the date of Foss' funeral. Services will be held at 10:30 a.m. Saturday at Zion Lutheran Church in Scotland. Visitation will be held from 3-5 p.m. Friday at the Goglin Funeral Home in Scotland.

In his 2011 interview, Foss told the Press & Dakotan he appreciated the ability to serve a large number of people — many he never met — in so many different roles during his lifetime.

"I've had a great life," he said.

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# Adelines

From Page 1A

in 1976 and was chartered on April 6, 1978. They have performed many shows and competitions over the years. A men's quest quartet from Sioux City sang in the Sweet Adeline's annual show performed at the Senior Center on Oct. 25. The other recent performance was at the Freeman Winter Fair.

In the month of December on Monday nights, the Sweet Adelines will be performing at various nursing homes in Yankton. "The public is welcome to join us in singing Christmas music," Herman says adding that December is the only month the group is open to non-members singing with the group. (The Sweet Adelines also sing at a variety of churches, upon request.)

Along with performing, there are competitions.

"We need to compete at least every three years," Herman says.

The local chapter competed this past year in Minneapolis. "We were given scores, and we were pleased with our performance," Herman says.

The Sweet Adelines welcomes new members. They

meet every Monday night at the First United Methodist Church. Interested women are encouraged to attend at least three practices before auditioning. In the 37 years the group has received auditions, Herman notes that only one person was discouraged to join.

"She couldn't sing," Herman says, but added, "The auditions are not too difficult."

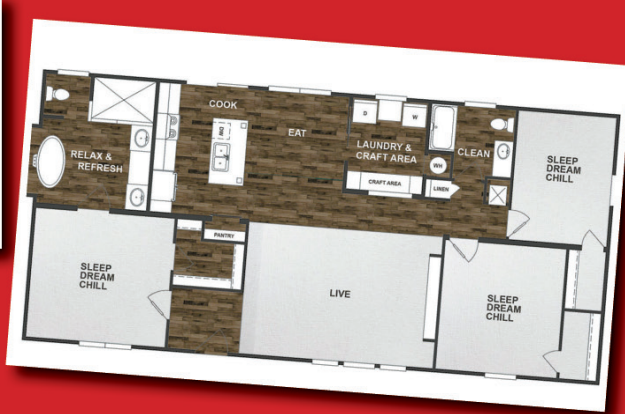
When asked what Sweet Adelines means to her personally, Herman says, "It has been a lifeline for me. I have pain issues, and I forget the pain when I'm singing. I don't think about it until I am on the way back home. ... I've made so many friends. We are a family, and we care about each other and pray for each other."

She adds, "We are encouraged to improve and to sing at home, not just at practice."

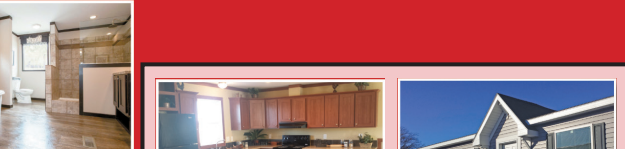
What Herman related about singing goes along with a saying on the Sweet Adeline website: "One of the only activities that activates, stimulates and uses the entire brain is music."

If you would like more information, contact Phyllis Christiansen at 668-0659 or come to the First Methodist at 11th and Cedar any Monday night at 6:30 p.m.

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