

Vigil

From Page 1

death penalty. “We’ll be gathered here again for Donald Moeller’s execution,” Kayser said, referring to later this month when the convicted murderer is put to death. Moeller was sentenced to death for the 1990 slaying of 9-year-old Becky O’Connell in Sioux Falls. Moeller’s first trial was held in Yankton, but his conviction was overturned. Moeller was convicted again at his retrial in Rapid City. Monday night’s vigil was held on the plaza of the government center, which some participants said presented a symbolic gathering site for a state-sanctioned execution. The death penalty violates the commandment “Thou shalt not kill” and, in the case of Robert,

amounts to assisted suicide, Kayser said. “He declined all appeals and asked to be executed,” he stated. “We’re not only imposing capital punishment but also assisting his suicide.” Kayser pointed out that Bishop Robert Gruss of Rapid City and Bishop Paul Swain of Sioux Falls put out a statement last week opposing South Dakota’s death penalty. In the statement, they urged the “repeal of the death penalty itself because it serves no necessary purpose in our state and undermines the moral authority of our government. This would also lend assurance that innocent persons wrongly convicted, as has happened in some states, may be exonerated.” During the vigil, Michael Sprong of the South Dakota Peace and Justice Center offered prayers for Johnson, the murdered prison guard. “We are also (praying) for his family, who has been impacted in

ways that we, who have not experienced it, will never know,” he said. However, prayers were also offered for Robert and his family. Sprong also prayed for those gathered at the vigil. As South Dakotans, they find themselves part of capital punishment in general and Monday night’s execution in particular, he said. Kayser noted Monday’s execution as a reflection on South Dakota’s tradition of faith, its system of government and “our consciences.” “This (execution) perpetuates the cycle of violence rather than put an end to that violence,” the priest said. “Forever, these two men (Robert and Johnson) will be linked together by this experience.” Sprong said those gathered were praying for an end to state-sanctioned executions. “We are not in agreement with (a prisoner) being strapped to a table and filled with chemicals in

his vein.” Instead, the vigil participants sought non-violence. “We ask that the state no longer kill in our name,” he said. The vigil included the reading of a Watertown Public Opinion editorial, reprinted in the Yankton Press & Dakotan, noting that execution costs more than life imprisonment, and the death penalty brings neither deterrence to crime nor closure for the victims and their families. The evening also included remarks from Father Andrew Kelly, a Catholic priest from Yankton, and the Rev. Kwen Sanderson, a chaplain with the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA) serving at Mike Dufree State Prison in Springfield. Statements opposing the death penalty were also read from the United Methodist Church, the ELCA, the Mennonite Churches USA, the United Church of Christ (UCC) and the Presbyterian Church USA.

Forum

From Page 1

teacher at Yankton High School (YHS) was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2004. She was teaching at YHS around that time, but was set to move to Hawaii for a teaching fellowship. “During the course of some last-minute exams before I moved to Hawaii, this anomaly came up,” she said. She added that when people go through challenges like breast cancer or another disease or hardship, things seem to become so sudden, overwhelming and may seem insurmountable at times. Miner said once she was diagnosed with breast cancer, she made the process proceed as quickly as possible. She was diagnosed in September 2004, then had an ultrasound performed in Hawaii on Sept. 13 and she was

home in Yankton a few days later. She had her mastectomy performed Sept. 27. “After that, I really just sat around and ate a lot,” she said, laughing. Miner returned to her classes in Hawaii by the middle of October. “It was an adventure, to say the least,” she said. “I always had someone there for me right from the beginning of the process.” She said that her diagnosis with breast cancer changed her life in many ways. “Whatever the challenges are that you might be facing, they allow you to look at life through a different lens,” Miner said. “Instead of thinking about decisions I would make in terms of life or death, I began to think of things based on life and life. It really taught me to keep all things in perspective.” Before Miner took the stage, Sternquist offered the audience facts and tips about cancer, risk factors and how women can protect themselves against various

forms of cancer. “Screenings really help to find the disease before symptoms arise,” she said. “It’s important to keep going for regular follow ups.” She added that 1 in 3 women will be diagnosed with some sort of cancer in their lifetime and 1 in 5 women will die from that cancer. Dr. Mary Milroy, who served as the emcee for the event and is also on the committee that plans the forum, talked about how important events like this are for the community. “One of the nice things about the forum is that it helps raise awareness about cancer,” she said. “It’s about pulling together and being aware about the types of cancers out there.” She said such events help cancer patients and survivors through the emotional trials of dealing with cancer. She added that the event is powerful and important for the healing process. “The event shows survivors

and people diagnosed with breast cancer that they have support from the community,” Milroy said. “We’re also raising funds for a great cause.” Last year the forum raised about \$1,500 and organizers are hoping that number is even higher this year. Organizers also sell raffle tickets which provide a large amount of the donation money. “This event is really about a community coming together to make a difference,” Milroy added. “People are coming together to raise awareness and show the importance of the issue. The forum provides tremendous support and helps women with breast cancer see that they are not alone.” Cancer numbers are statistics and numbers but those statistics are people.”

You can follow Andrew Atwal on Twitter at twitter.com/andrewatwal

County

From Page 1

Osdel, a Republican who is a retired car salesman and journalist. The county completed a new \$1.8 million shop on the northern edge of Yankton earlier this year, and discussions have been had of selling the former site in the 400 block of West 11th Street that has a building dating back to the 1930s. “My thoughts on that have always been that it should be put up for sale,” Freng said. “Obviously, I’m not willing to sell it if we cannot get market value for the property. I feel like we can get market value, and we can put it back on the tax rolls. I don’t see any huge use of that property for the county besides storage. I think it’s too valuable a piece of property to use for storage.”

Discussions have been had of using the buildings to store equipment for the county’s Office of Emergency Management. Johnson said it’s estimated that \$100,000 of upgrades would be needed for that re-purposing. That is more than Johnson said he wants to spend. “If we can’t get the market value, and it’s of more value to us to save it, then by all means we should save it,” he stated. “But I truly believe we will not have an issue getting market value, selling it and improving that area of town.” Van Osdel said that if the county can get market value for the property, it should be sold as soon as possible. “I think it’s an eye sore,” he stated. “It needs to be painted. We need to do something with those county sheds, and I hope somebody can make some use out of them.” The candidates were also asked their thoughts about proj-

ects with the City of Yankton and what different types of joint projects they would like to see. Van Osdel said he recalls the history of Yankton County cooperating with the City of Yankton beginning in the mid-1970s when the Yankton County Courthouse and Safety Center was built. The two entities joined forces again several years ago to remodel and add on to the existing facility. “I’m not aware of any other projects that could be taken on, but I think that the Fourth and Walnut location has been a marvelous addition to the community,” Van Osdel stated. Johnson also cited the law enforcement project and pointed to work planned for Bill Baggs Road and West City Limits Road in future years as examples where the two entities collaborate. “It is crucial that we continue to work hand-in-hand with the city,” he said. Freng said she has observed the relationship between the gov-

ernment entities strengthen during her time on the commission. “They are sometimes butting heads, and we don’t always have the same agenda,” she said. “But because we’ve been meeting often with the joint City/County Planning Committee, I think those kinds of issues are falling to the wayside.” Freng stated that she would like to see more collaborative work on zoning issues just outside the city limits. When asked their opinions of the county drainage ordinance that took effect in June, all three candidates said they are happy with the way it has been implemented and support the law. The forum will be rebroadcast on Knology channel 98 and Mid-continent Communications channel 3 at 7:30 p.m. Oct. 17.

You can follow Nathan Johnson on Twitter at twitter.com/AnInlandVoyage

Hunter

From Page 1

Nogelmeier said he didn’t know what caused Larsen to fall out of the tree. The hunter may have slipped, fallen asleep or suffered a heart attack, the sheriff said. Nogelmeier encourages bow hunters to include harnesses when setting up their tree stands. The popularity of hunting alone makes it even more important for outdoors enthusiasts to inform others of their planned location, Nogelmeier said. It’s important to carry a cell phone or have access to other communication in case of an emergency, but it’s not a substitute for letting others know your plans, the sheriff said. “You could take someone with you (on a hunt), but a lot of people like the quietness and serenity of hunting alone,” Nogelmeier said. “Hunting is a sport, and hundreds of guys do it by themselves.” At the time of his death, Larsen was employed as an advertising sales representative at Yankton radio station WNAX. “It’s a sad day here at WNAX as we mourn the loss of one of our family members over the weekend,” the station posted on its website. Larsen graduated from Hurley High School in 1981. He grad-

uated with a business degree from Dakota State University (DSU) of Madison in 1985. After graduation, he worked at Madison radio station KJAM for 26 years, most recently as station manager. Larsen chaired the DSU Alumni Association and was immediate past chairman of the South Dakota Broadcasters Association. He officiated basketball and football for many years. Funeral services will be held at 1:30 p.m. Wednesday at the Dakota Prairie Playhouse in Madison, with burial in the Hurley Cemetery. The family will be present at 7 p.m. today (Tuesday) at the Weiland Funeral Chapel, Madison. Larsen’s survivors include one son, Logan, of Crooks; three daughters: Kelsi Larsen of Sioux Falls, and Kristin (Brady) Wiebe and Jordyn Larsen, both of Madison; his father, Roger Larsen of Hurley; two sisters, Lori Benson of Hurley and Lisa Cotting of Anchorage, Alaska; and special friend, Sue Keenom of Washington, D.C. Memorials may be directed to the Lorin Larsen Scholarship Fund at Hurley High School. To send a message of sympathy, visit online at www.weiland-funeralchapel.com.

You can follow Randy Dockendorf on Twitter at twitter.com/RDockendorf

Robert

From Page 1

Berget also has pleaded guilty in the killing but has appealed his death sentence. A third inmate, Michael Nordman, 47, was given a life sentence for providing materials used in the slaying. Warden Doug Weber accompanied Robert into the execution chamber Monday night, asking him for his last words, then giving the signal to the execution team. The Minnehaha County coroner was present to declare Robert dead. Robert’s attorney, Mark Kadi, told The Associated Press that none of Roberts’ friends or family would be in attendance. Kadi told the Argus Leader on Sunday that Robert’s commitment to dying for his crime had not wavered.

“He’s been very calm,” Kadi said. “I’ve seen him angry and stressed out, and that’s not what he is right now.” Robert ate ice cream for his last meal on Saturday night and had been fasting since for religious reasons. Gov. Dennis Daugaard said the execution marked a “sad day for South Dakota.” He said in a Monday night statement that executions are rare in the state and are “warranted only with extreme forethought and certainty.” Daugaard says he hopes Robert’s execution brings closure to Johnson’s family. Moeller, 60, is scheduled to be put to death the week of Oct. 28 for the 1990 kidnapping, rape and murder of a 9-year-old girl. Robert had been on death row only for about a year, while Moeller has been there for more than two decades.

Coroner

From Page 1

tion there. Some reports have very little information about the scene or the deceased, whereas other reports are very detailed.” Smith, who has served with the Yankton County EMS for 18 years, agreed that more training for deputy coroners is key. “If they want to stay deputies, they need to work it in their schedule to get training,” she

said, adding that all her deputies are very good at their job. “We’ve tried many times to set a time each month to have training, and it doesn’t seem to work into our schedules.” Also needed is more organization when responding to calls, Smith added. “The different techniques people have when they go out on call needs to be more standardized,” she said.

You can follow Nathan Johnson on Twitter at twitter.com/AnInlandVoyage

Ex-Kansas Soldier Gets 10 Months For Sham Marriage

WICHITA, Kan. (AP) — A former Kansas soldier will spend 10 months in federal prison for entering into a sham marriage so he could get additional military benefits and his Jamaican bride could become a legal immigrant, a federal judge ruled Monday. In a rare move, U.S. District Judge Monti Belot rejected the prosecution’s request for leniency for Joshua Priest, saying it was not justified in this case. The former Fort Riley private pleaded guilty in July to conspiracy to commit marriage fraud and wire fraud, and testified against his wife, Shannakay Hunter.

“The fact you came in and co-operated is fine, but it doesn’t ex-

cuse what you did,” Belot told the crestfallen defendant during the sentencing hearing. Belot also ordered Priest to pay nearly \$30,000 in restitution for the fraudulently obtained housing and subsistence benefits given married soldiers. “The worst part of it, Mr. Priest, is that you were a member of our armed forces,” Belot said. The judge said Priest had a “higher responsibility” than others since he had taken an oath to serve the country. He said the former soldier violated that oath. Testimony at Hunter’s trial pointed out that Priest, who earned about \$33,000 a year as a soldier, didn’t feel he was making

enough money and decided to cheat the government. Hunter was convicted in August of conspiracy to commit marriage fraud and lying to the government. She will be sentenced Nov. 26. Priest testified at his wife’s trial that the couple had not personally met until she came to Kansas to get married, telling jurors that they never had sex or lived together. Assistant U.S. Attorney Brent Anderson said Priest and his attorney had been helpful from day one and urged the judge to accept the government’s sentence recommendation, which was filed under seal before the hearing. Anderson called the suggested punishment the “best course for this defendant

who has a bright future otherwise.” The sealed motion that prosecutors filed is the kind that typically asks a judge to grant a shorter sentence than the federal sentencing guidelines in cases where defendants provide substantial assistance to the government in prosecuting others. Prosecutors did not specify at the hearing what sentence they were seeking. Defense attorney David Freund told the judge that Priest had financial problems and made “a poor decision” but has since enrolled in college in Virginia and understands his obligation to make restitution. Freund asked for Priest to be sentenced to probation.

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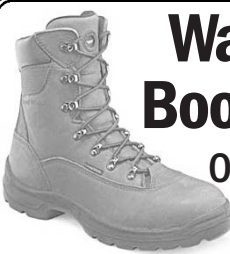
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