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HONORING OUR VETERANS

Honored to serve her country

■ Personality...versatility...just a little rebel...that's Veda...her twinkling blue eyes...and captivating smile...are dynamic in political circles...ask any alliance biggies... they know....A human dynamo for work...too modest to write her own biography... aggressive...ambitious...brilliant...spells Veda Ponikvar

— 1942 Drake University yearbook profile

Editor's Note: This is the fourth feature in a month-long series of stories on area veterans.

by Matt Nelson
HDT intern

She ran the Chisholm Free Press and Chisholm Tribune for a half century. Before that, as a college student she worked against the odds to get FDR's son to speak at Drake University in Des Moines. And even before that, she picked bugs off potatoes. When she wasn't picking bugs, she went to school.

Education is a powerful and driving force that carries an influence over a person for the rest of his/her natural life. If excellent, children are given a tool that can help them in unlimited situations. Veda Ponikvar, a Chisholm native, received 12 years of first-rate education, punctuated by unusual (by today's standards) medical benefits and dedicated instructors, such as James P. Vaughan.

"Vaughan was the school superintendent for 40 years," Veda explained. "He was extremely devoted to finding the very best teachers in every subject. He even went out of the area and combed the entire state—to find teachers that were extremely qualified." These teachers proved to be Veda's guiding forces that came into play later in her illustrious career. "I had Ann Sahlman in 8th grade and Helen Armstrong in 9th grade for English. They were unusual visionary teachers. She read to us every single day—poetry, essays, historical pieces. They'd take time out in the early morning and afternoon to read. It didn't last very long — I'd say maybe half an hour, but it left an impact on all of us."

Discipline in the Chisholm schools seems somewhat extreme when compared to today. Two minutes before the bell rang to go to the next class, students stood in line and were absolutely silent. One of the teachers stood by the door, and when the



Veda Ponikvar enlisted in the WAVES, the women's branch of the Navy after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. She was assigned to Naval Intelligence and sent to Washington, D.C., where she was in charge of the Yugoslav, Polish and Czech desks. Upon returning home to Chisholm, she started her own newspaper — The Free Press.

ens or cows. Rich was the family that had a horse. It held us together — it got everybody involved, even us kids. For example, the gardens were planted with potatoes. The potatoes would have potato bugs on them, and the kids would have to

teacher opened the door, the students would march out, without muttering a word.

Ross Miller, Veda's chemistry teacher, made a statement during one of his lectures that Veda has never forgotten—a haunting comment foreshadowing the end of World War II—and the turbulent second half of the 20th century. "Ross Miller said to us, 'God help the universe when man comes to the point where he breaks the atom.' I just get goosebumps when I think of what that man taught us. Who in the world ever thought of atoms as a senior in high school at that time? I graduated in 1937—so he was talking about that in 1935 and 1936."

Running a school system to such high standards is no mean feat—especially during the Great Depression. Veda vividly recalls aspects of Iron Range Depression life that are non-existent today.

"There was a little bit of mining, but overall the mines closed, and no one had a job. Our little city of Chisholm was so affected by it that it got to the point where in order to hold the community together, (the city) issued and had printed what we called scrip. That was value that you could only use in Chisholm. You could not take a piece of scrip and go to Hibbing or Buhl and buy anything. It all had to be right in the community. The families—even downtown—planted vegetable gardens in the backyards—extremely big gardens. The people raised potatoes, carrots, and cabbages. We picked all kinds of berries. That put every family through the winter.

There was a sharing all the time—not every family could afford to have a hog or chick-

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Jeff Warner

Galen Getting performs some detail work on a deer mount.

OUTDOORS

Deer registration numbers are up

■ Taxidermists are extra busy preserving memories

by Jeff Warner
Staff Writer

HIBBING — The 2007 deer hunting season is about complete. With deer registration up twenty percent, local taxidermists are extra busy encasing people's memories in time.

Two taxidermists, Galen Getting of Edgewater Taxidermy in Hibbing, and Wayne Nevalainen of Wolf Ridge Taxidermy in Chisholm give a glimpse of why and how they perform this intricate, and often misunderstood, art form.

Each has his own story as to why he loves to preserve people's memories, and how he got into it. No matter the history, they both believe that love for nature, and to be an artist, are the two primary ingredients to success at taxidermy.

"Anyone can put a cape on a mannequin, and make it look like a dead deer. It takes an artist to make it look alive," Nevalainen said.

Getting said that people are amazed every time he shows them something he has mounted because it is evident how much time and energy went into preserving the memory.

"Time and quality go hand in hand. You can't rush perfection," he said.

And perfection is what they both strive for — preserving every detail of the live creature as closely as possible.

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Jeff Warner

With a wall of deer trophies behind him, Wayne Nevalainen poses with a mounted friend: a fishing squirrel.

STATE

Grim anniversary for families

■ Private guards abducted in Iraq still missing

ST. LOUIS PARK, Minn. (AP) — Families of four American security guards working in Iraq had expected them home in time for last Thanksgiving. But a year after the men were abducted by suspected militiamen, the families are still waiting.

"We just need our father. We miss him so much," Casey Reuben, 16-year-old daughter of Paul Reuben, said Saturday at a benefit breakfast in the Minneapolis

suburb where he once worked as a police officer.

Families of some of the men held benefits or prayer services this weekend to mark the first anniversary of their disappearances, airing concerns that the U.S. government has stayed too quiet about efforts to free them — and considering alternate ways to secure their release.

"They don't tell us anything," said Sharon DeBrabander of Kansas City, Mo.,

mother of John Young. "I've been praying and praying, hoping something would have broke by now but it just hasn't."

Reuben and Young — along with Jon Cote of Buffalo, N.Y.; Josh Munns of Redding, Calif.; and Bert Nussbaumer of Austria — worked in Iraq for Crescent Security Group, a Kuwait-based private security firm. They were kidnapped Nov. 16, 2006,

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Inside

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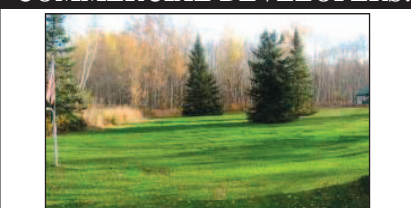
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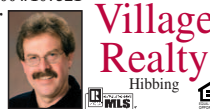
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NEWS

Honored: First woman publisher in a man's world

From Page 1A

get a pail and pick them off." These potato bugs became the subject of an essay Veda wrote during fifth grade. Her teacher gave her an assignment to write about something she did every day. "I wrote my paper on picking potato bugs and blueberries. When I got my paper back, it had the highest mark on it. My teacher said, 'Don't ever stop writing.' It just stuck with me." Veda also went to school during the time that Dr. "Moonlight" Graham worked there. Veda remembers Graham as a man devoted to the students. "He went to Mr. Vaughan and he said, 'I would like to start taking blood pressures of the kids K-12.' Every child K-12 was registered when he took the blood pressures. Later, Dr. Graham went back and said, 'I would like to start a dental office in the school. The reason for that is that this is a community of immigrants. They are doing their very best to see that their children are in school. However, they don't know what toothpaste is, or a toothbrush. If we establish that, I guarantee you we can decrease the cavity situation in children's teeth by 50 percent.' Mr. Vaughan said, 'You are the doctor. You know what you are doing. Go ahead.'"

At one point, the small-town school had a doctor, registered nurse, and a dentist working for the students. Immigrants like the ones Graham described, according to Veda, began to become increasingly worried as the news of Hitler's rise to power steadily seeped into the community. "So many came from central Europe—Austrians, Yugoslavia—they came from that whole area. The information about Hitler was big news. The Germans, for example, wrote to the German people here in the same way that the Italians and all of the Slavic countries wrote. The families were very much aware of what was going on, and they would talk, and it was in this way that the kids might become aware of it."

After Veda's graduation in 1937, she received an honor scholarship and went to Drake University in Des Moines, Iowa. "I studied real hard because I couldn't ask my father to pay for something like that. There was my sister, my brother, and the twins, who'd been born in 1929. I had to work for my room and board to help pay." Veda found work at the Vickery family's home, where she worked for four years to help pay for college. Veda became involved at Drake, becoming president of the Drake Democrats. One night, she received a phone call. "It was from Mr. Bob Evans, the chairman of the Democratic Party in Iowa. He told me that Franklin Delano Roosevelt's son was coming to Des Moines." The two of them decided it would be a good idea to get Franklin Jr. to speak at Drake.

The next day, Veda went to Dr. Moorehouse, the university's president, to get permission. "We wanted to get the auditorium for this event. Dr. Moorehouse

said they would let me know if I could use it or not on Monday. That was pretty late because the president's son was going to be coming on a Wednesday. What happened was that in the meantime it got out into the newspapers, so when I went to the office on Monday afternoon to find out if we could get the auditorium, it was full of newspeople, and I knew I was in trouble. That was when I met Drew Pearson — one of the greatest newspaper people in the nation at that time.

I asked Dr. Moorehouse again, and he said, 'I've come to the conclusion that we cannot grant your request.' It was such an ornate auditorium that I could understand....they didn't want it to get it wrecked." Veda knew about another theater nearby, and she knew the owner. She was able to convince the owner that the theater would not get destroyed, and Franklin Jr. had a place to speak.

"We had 5,000 people that showed up. People were hanging from the rafters—including the kids. None of the kids knew what it would mean to skip classes—it was at 9 o'clock in the morning. Those kids came from all of the different buildings. The teachers were real nice about it—well, mine were anyways. They gave me the lessons so I could get by."

Veda was down at the yearbook office at Drake University on Dec. 7, 1941. "The phone rang and I picked it up. Mrs. Vickery told me I needed to come home right away. She came and picked me up, and when I got into the car she just started sobbing. I thought maybe something had happened in my family or hers. The Japanese have bombed Pearl Harbor," she said. When Veda came back to school the next day, the campus had emptied considerably—the en masse enlistment had begun.

The professor got a phone call from Franklin Delano Roosevelt himself. Apparently they needed help with the germ warfare. Veda enlisted in the Navy while she was still a senior. "I was in the Navy WAVES. That was a brand new unit — they never had women before. The government began to worry what the Navy would do with the women.

It ended up that we filled in for an awful lot of stuff. I was with the office of Naval Intelligence for the whole war." Veda's parents were very proud of their children — Veda's sister, Jen, became an Army recruiter, and her brother, John Jr., joined the Air Force.

"I was sent to Hampton, Mass., for basic training," Veda said. "They gave us all sorts of tests, and from mine they determined that I had a language background. I had two years of Latin, two years of German and two years of French — all back in high school. I also spoke Slovenian, and Serbo-Croatian, and Croatian. They sent me to a school in Maryland where I brushed up on pretty much everything except for the

Slovenian. After that I was assigned to Naval Intelligence in Washington, D.C." Veda was sent to Constitution Avenue. "Now, Constitution Avenue is one of the most beautiful places to go. Back then it was a street of World War I barracks, where I was stationed for four years. They were small — if you had a desk you were lucky, but if you didn't, you didn't say anything. No one ever complained."

Some of the things Veda encountered during her time in Naval Intelligence were unknown to the public then—and Veda isn't talking. What she did say about her duties, "We had to do a lot of coding, and that was fascinating for me." Veda also was able to meet Edward R. Murrow, famous war correspondent for CBS who delivered some of the most groundbreaking newscasts to come out of World War II. "There were many people like that—they would come and go. What was interesting though was that a lot of them had very technical information. They would get embedded in certain spots, and when they would come back—once we understood we could trust each other, we could exchange information.

It was very interesting, the information they had, and the information we had."

Veda met Gene Casey, who was on the staff of the National Democratic Party, the summer before she went to Washington. When he found out she was there, he called her and told her he thought she should meet the president. "About a week later, I got a phone call that told me I was to be ready. I went to the White House. His desk was straight ahead of me when I walked in. I saluted. He motioned me forward, and when I got there, he said, 'I want to know something. How do you WAVES keep your tie in place?' (We had two pieces to the tie—but everyone only saw one piece of it, so nobody knew how it worked). I said to him, 'Mr. President, I'd like to tell you, but that's a military secret.' He just roared!"

FDR had scrapbooks that detailed his son's speech in Des Moines. "He asked me how it went, and I told him.

At the end I said, 'Mr. President, your son was just absolutely fabulous, because he thanked the people for being there, and the students, and then he said, 'My father has nothing against Mr. Wilkie. He's an American citizen, and he has a right to run, just like everybody else. But you know what kids? I still think my old man's a hell of a lot finer.' The President said, 'But Franklin never told me that!'" Work in the WAVES was always unpredictable. As the transmissions were intercepted by enemy forces, the Defense Department time schedule constantly shifted.

"I ended up going to work at one o'clock in the morning. I always knew ahead of time though. We would usually know what we had to do."

When battles were fought, Veda found herself on her toes. "We didn't have the luxury of communications that they do today. We communicated through telegraph or Morse code." The job stayed daily throughout the war, and when the war ended in 1945, Veda was asked to stay on. She did so. She finally came home on Dec. 31, 1946. By this time, however, Veda knew she was going to start the Free-Press, the first offset newspaper in the state of Minnesota.

"The Navy was really a forerunner of the offset process," Veda says. "I learned most of the things I needed to know. The problem I had was that you needed all these different machines to run the paper — it's not like it is now. That was tricky because when the war started, manufacturing stopped."

Nevertheless, the paper took off. "It was a tremendous challenge at first because," Veda laughs, "I was the first woman to become a newspaper publisher in a man's world. It required all the determination I could muster. The first few years were very demanding, but after awhile it settled out."

Veda's brother and sister were discharged before she was. "My brother went to the University of Minnesota to learn about the environment and learn about forestry. My sister went to Sergeant College in Boston, where she met her husband. Come Korea, and my brother was sent back. He was killed then."

Veda heavily contributed to the bicentennial project to make Chisholm a Bicentennial City. This project resulted in the creation of the Ironman, Taconite Pile-up, and the Bridge of Peace leading to Chisholm's main street. "We wanted to be the first Bicentennial City in the state of Minnesota, but Duluth said they had it first. The state commissioner called me and said, 'What do I do?' I said, 'Well, both cities can be first.' He said, 'Chisholm and Duluth?' I said, 'Yes, because "c" comes before "d".'"

Out of all her experiences, Veda still credits the education she received in Chisholm growing up as the most memorable. Perhaps it was a chemistry instructor's comment. Maybe it was an English teacher reading a story. Possibly words of encouragement on an essay about potato bugs.

The value of education is priceless, having brought Veda Ponikvar a full life she could not have gotten anywhere else.

Grim: Families want to hire private firm to find loved ones

From Page 1A

by men in Iraqi police uniforms who ambushed a convoy they were escorting near the southern border city of Safwan.

The last indication that the men were alive came in January, in a video recording showing all five speaking briefly and saying they were being treated well. Since then, State Department officials have indicated they believe the men are still alive, DeBrabander and other family members said.

A State Department spokesman said Saturday that efforts continue to free the men, but he would provide no further information.

"There are a number of people held hostage in Iraq, including many Iraqis and a number of Americans," said the spokesman, Kurtis Cooper. "We work closely with Iraqi authorities and others to bring about their safe returns."

The families get updates from the State Department in a weekly conference call, though several participants said there's been little new information for months. "Everything we ask about, they tell us it's secret and confidential," said Francis Cote, father of Jon Cote.

The U.S. military reportedly stripped Crescent Security of its license to operate in Iraq in March over alleged weapons violations. Calls placed Friday

and Saturday to a Crescent Security telephone number in Kuwait were not answered.

Several family members said the goal of this weekend's fundraisers was to pay for someone to go to Iraq and work to obtain the release of the men. Cote said they've spoken with several individuals who think they could do the job.

The FBI has tried to discourage any such action, said Paul McCabe, a spokesman for the bureau's office in Minneapolis.

"The FBI is sympathetic to the terrible strain on the families of the missing men," McCabe said. "The FBI along with the State Department, the military and Iraqi authorities continue to press forward in a coordinated effort to bring these men home."

That's little comfort to Casey Reuben and her twin sister, Bree, who waited tables Saturday at the restaurant where their family held a pancake breakfast to raise money.

Bree Reuben recalled the last time she and her sister spoke by phone to their father was about a week before he was abducted.

"He said he was scared and he wanted to come home," Bree Reuben said. "He was talking about being with us for Thanksgiving and Christmas. He said he loved us with all his heart, and he said he'd be safe."

Around Minnesota

NORTH MANKATO, Minn. (AP) — Two people died early Saturday after an explosion and fire at a mobile home park.

North Mankato police said they received several 911 calls at 1:25 a.m. Saturday. When firefighters arrived at the Camelot Mobile Home Park, they found the rear of the residence fully engulfed in flames.

Two bodies were recovered from the charred mobile home.

The names of the victims were not immediately released. Autopsies were being conducted and authorities said the fire was under investigation.

GRAND FORKS, N.D. (AP) — A Minnesota man accused of shooting at a passing semitrailer cab on Interstate 29 has pleaded not guilty.

Authorities say 20-year-old

Matthew Osowski, of Oslo, Minnesota, pleaded not guilty on Friday to several charges, including reckless endangerment, marijuana possession and drunken driving.

The Highway Patrol says a Winnipeg, Manitoba, truck driver notified authorities on October 8 that a passing driver had shot at him.

Richard Dupont was not hurt, but he showed a trooper where a bullet had hit his driver's-side door.

The patrol says Osowski's pickup was stopped a short time later, and a search turned up firearms.

Osowski is free after posting \$3,750 bail. His next court appearance is set for February 28.

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To all of our dear family and friends, our sincere "THANK YOU" for the many acts of kindness given to our family during the sad loss of our dear husband, father, father-in-law, grandpa and great-grandpa, August E. Kujala. Thank you also to all of the staff and our extended family at The Heritage Manor in Chisholm for their loving care and kindness, to Pastor Jeffrey Jones for his kind words and sermon, the soloist Jason Gellerstedt, the organist Pat Lenci, Jerry and Anna at the Range Funeral Home, the eulogies by Jean Pessenda, Jane Kujala and Gary Skalko and the delicious meal served and prepared by the Deluxe Cafe. You all helped to make our final farewell to August a very memorable one. Thank you also to Dr. Ryan Kelly and his staff and Dr. Jeffrey Copeman and his nurse Brenda for their many years of dedicated care for what is important in life is that through life and its many ups and downs our daily lives must go on and we should find some beauty and joy in each day.

With our love and sincere appreciation to each of you,
Gladys, Larry and Jane, Clayton and Caroline, Jake, Sara and Emma Rose, Nick, Kristen and Meredith.

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