

FEATURED

In the Community

Party like it's 1979

Wahpeton High School alumni reunite

By Frank Stanko • Daily News franks@wahpetondailynews.com Aug 11, 2019 Updated May 4, 2021 0



Graduates of Wahpeton High School's record-holding class of 1979 and their guests got down at their annual high school reunion, celebrated beginning Friday, Aug. 2. It included a dinner and dance at the Wahpeton Event Center.

Frank Stanko • Daily News

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Dual record-holders, Wahpeton High School's class of 1979 reunited the weekend of Friday, Aug. 2.

Their individual achievements are matched by two feats that have yet to be surpassed. One-hundred seventy-three students graduated in 1979, members of the "Wops." Wahpeton High School's basketball team not only went to the state championship, they defeated the Jamestown BlueJays, 47-43.

Forty years later, the pride endures. It's remembered and strongly felt just by hearing a song like "We Will Rock You." Freddie Mercury's vocals and Queen's distinct sound were emulated by Wop fans.

"There was a reason we were undefeated at home," recalled Wahpeton Councilman-at-large Perry Miller. "When this song came out, we'd be in the stands going boom-boom-boom on the old wooden bleachers. 'We-will, we-will WOP you.' A whole gym like that — it was something."

Daily News got in the spirit of '79, looking back with a few graduates and in the archives.

Then and Now

Ted Benn:

A member of the Wop basketball team, now known as the Huskies, Benn ultimately didn't play in the championship game. He's surprised the win hasn't been matched yet. "There's a tradition for basketball in Wahpeton," Benn said. "It was an incredibly talented class." Benn is a commercial real estate attorney in Dallas.

Dr. Lori Peterson:

An organizational development consultant based out of eastern Wisconsin, Peterson (née Smith) remains proud of Wahpeton. "Growing up in an environment like this gave us tremendous opportunity," she said. "It you are able to leverage the opportunities you have here, you can take them anywhere and do anything."

Dan Johnson:

Johnson's career path has taken him from his father's drywall business to cable TV operations to the Venetian and Palazzo resorts in Las Vegas. Chief engineer for the neighboring hotspots, Johnson said life in North Dakota bred in him an attitude that he can work hard and achieve whatever he wants.

What's Happening!!

In August 1979, Twin Towns Area residents were talking about:

- the Blue Horizon Skate Center, scheduled to open in October; skating rinks were popular hangouts for youth and residents; WCCO Belting, Inc. now stands on the Blue Horizon site



- mosquitoes; then as now, the city of Wahpeton favored ground spraying rather than aerial spraying; Daily News reported aerial applications were considered "not vitally necessary"

- Richland Elementary, whose modern schoolhouse would be built in Abercrombie, North Dakota; it nearly went up in Colfax, North Dakota, home of Richland 44 High School

- lifestyles; Daily News profiled Vernae Hasbargen, Breckenridge, Minnesota, who discussed changing, exciting, non-stereotypical roles for women.

And elsewhere

- Despite the recent "Disco Demolition Night" in Chicago, dance music topped the charts. Hits included "Bad Girls" by Donna Summer, "Good Times" by Chic and the just-released "Don't Bring Me Down" by Electric Light Orchestra.

- Earlier that summer, McDonalds introduced the Happy Meal. It cost \$1.10. A gallon of gas had an average price of 86 cents. In 2019, the Happy Meal has an average price of \$2.49-\$3.29, while the national average price for gas was recorded at \$2.50.

- Optimism was high for a new decade, a sentiment President Jimmy Carter shared in his State of the Union. "We move into the 1980s with confidence and hope and a bright vision of the America we want: an America strong and free, an America at peace, an America with equal rights for all citizens."

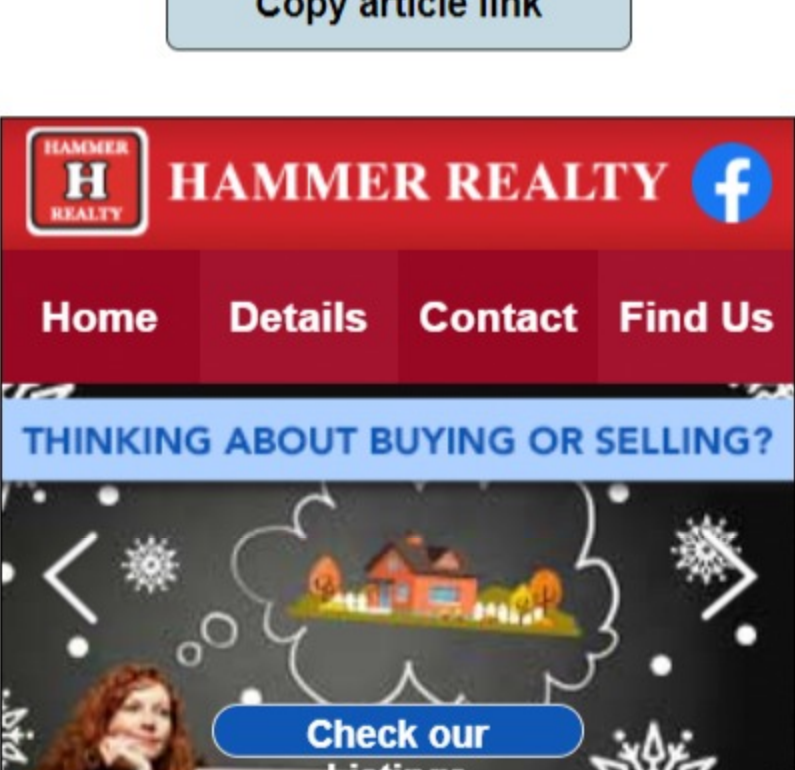
Save the Dates

Wahpeton Public Schools will honor the first members of its hall of fame in September. Clark Williams, who taught social studies in 1979 before serving 32 years as Wahpeton High School principal, is among the inaugural honorees.

City Brew Hall, Wahpeton, is hosting an 11 a.m. Saturday, Sept. 14 luncheon. Tickets are \$25 and are available at the WPS District Office or from WPS Alumni Association members. The district office is located within Wahpeton High School, 1021 11th St. N. in Wahpeton.

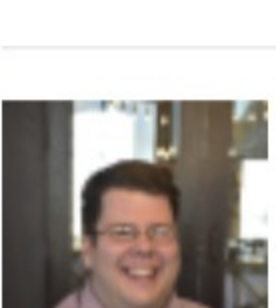
Wahpeton Public Schools' 2019-20 education year begins Wednesday, Aug. 21. Look to Daily News for sport of district events.

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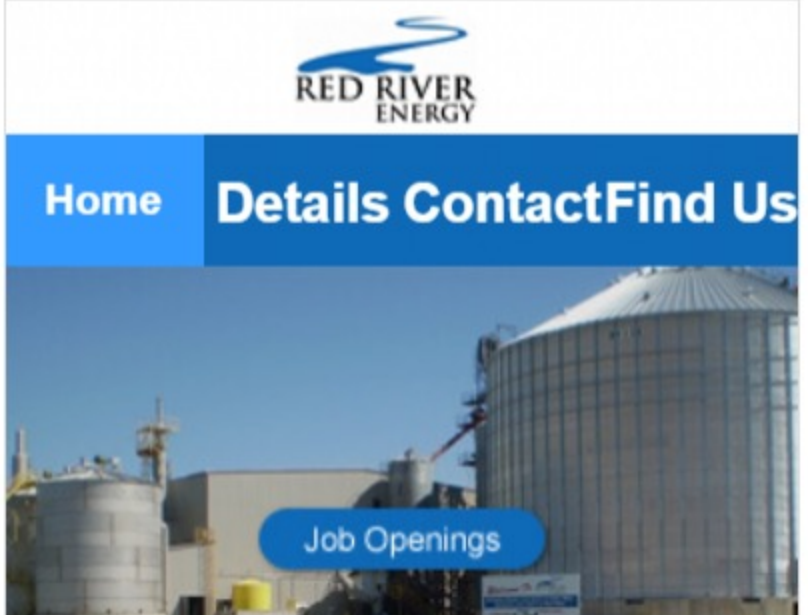
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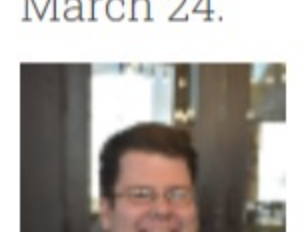
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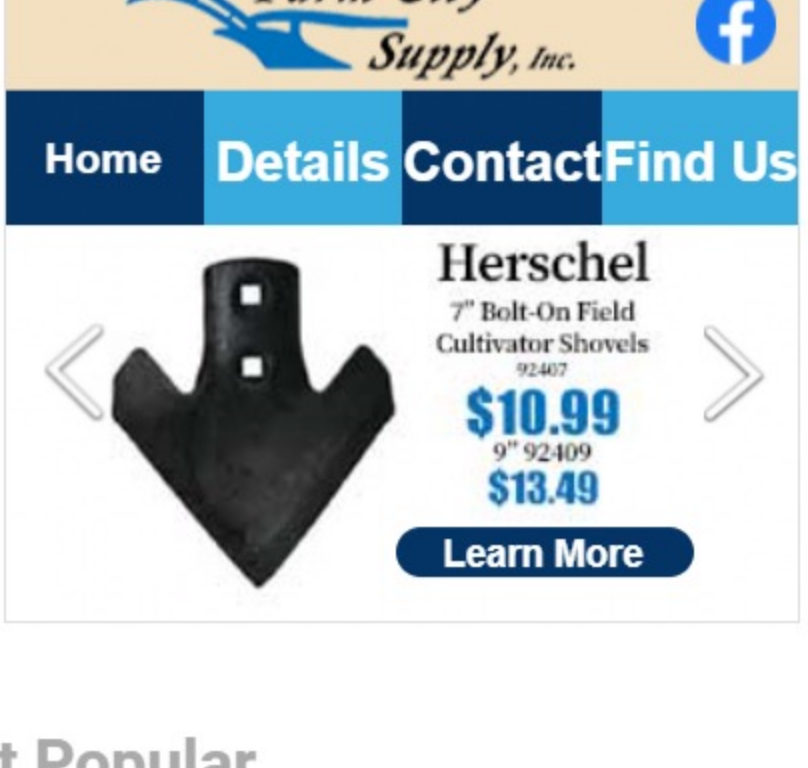
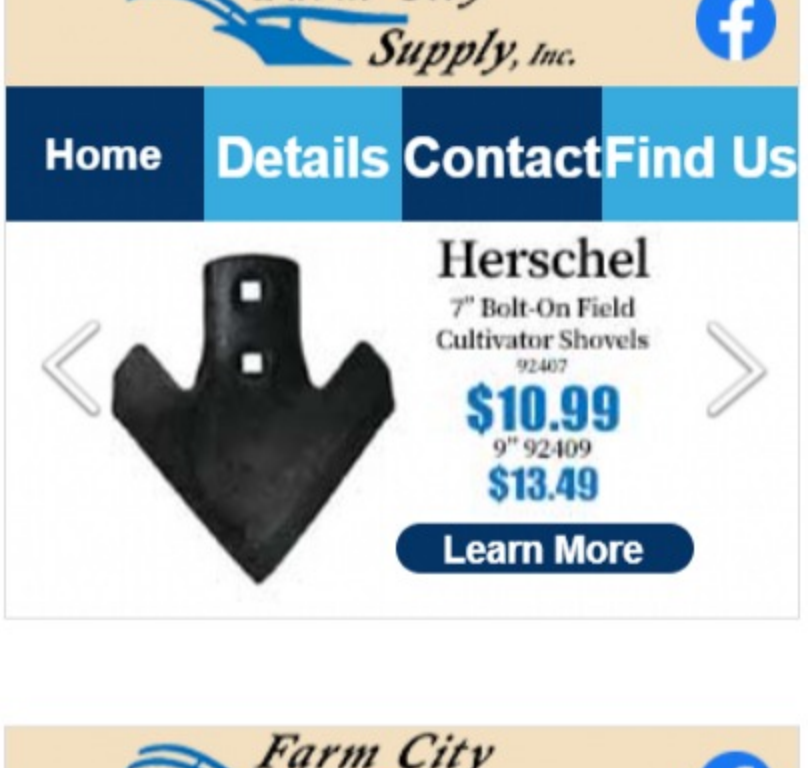
Christiansen, Haugen ND Dem-NPL's endorsed pair for Congress

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Six North Dakota Democratic-Nonpartisan League members were endorsed for state and national offices over the weekend of Thursday, March 24.



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