

News

Unity Christian High School

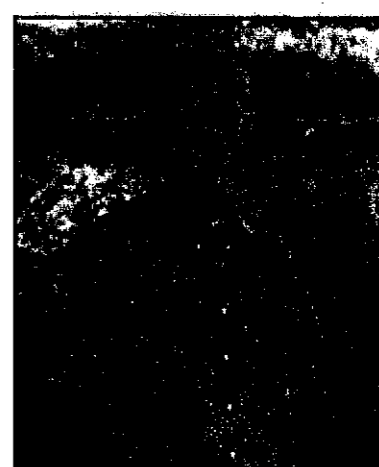
HATS OFF to our Graduates!



Nick Van Beek
NAPA Auto Parts
Sioux Center



Lisa Van Bruggen
First National Bank



Eric Van Donge
Physical Therapy Health Clinic



Katie Van Engen
How-To Store



Joshua Van Schouwen
Ten Kredit Electric



Andrea Van Wyk
Mutual Telephone/
Premier Communications



Jessica Vande Zandschulp
First National Bank



Joshua Vander Plaats
Premier Pork



Kelly Visser
Visser Elevator



Alissa Warner
Central Tire



Mark Zwart
Pizza Ranch



Karin Kobes
Merlin Zwart
Contractor/Realtor



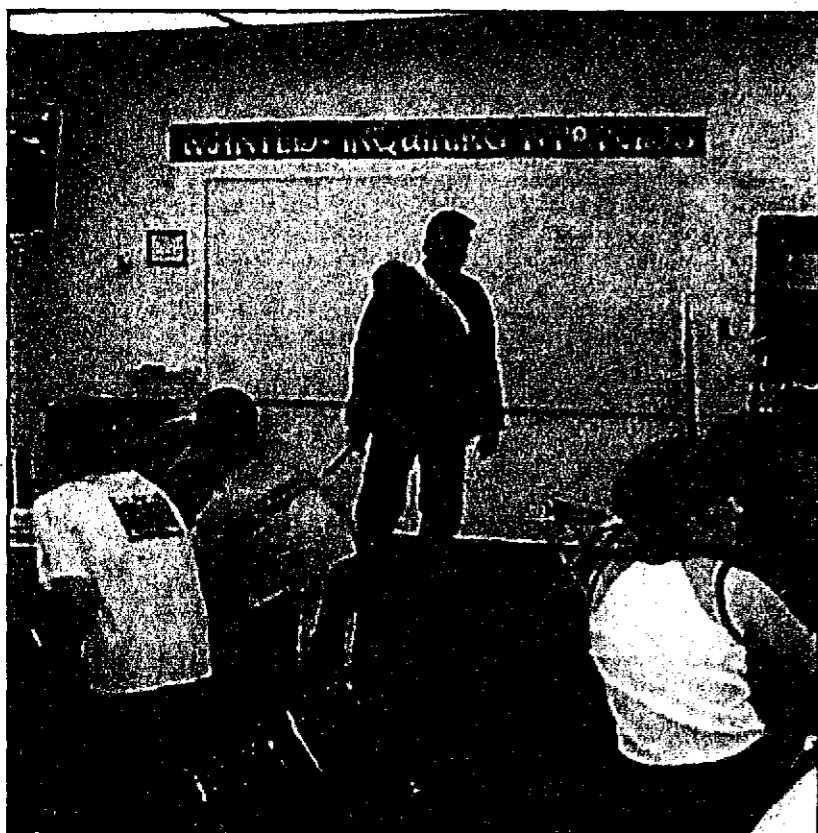
Rachel Kramer
Sioux Biochemical



Trisha Draayer
Kroese & Kroese, P.C.



Marlena Hoogland
Highland Dairy



Eighth graders learn about Civil War

The eighth graders at Sioux Center Middle School have been studying the Civil War. On Monday, May 14, Mike Harris, superintendent of the Sioux Center Community Schools, gave a demonstration for the students. Harris is originally from Murfreesboro, Tennessee, and has studied the Civil War extensively for many years. He was dressed in a full Union soldier uniform and shared with the students about the life of a volunteer soldier during the Civil War. The highlight of the lesson was a demonstration of his Enfield rifle. He showed the students how the rifle was loaded and then fired the rifle for them. Murfreesboro is near the site of the battle of Stones River, fought in late 1862. Harris shared a lesson with the students that he had written for the National Park Service. The lesson was based on excerpts from an original newspaper article written for the "Cleveland Herald" in April 1863. A wounded soldier wrote the article in a wagon ambulance on his way from a field hospital to the nearby hospital in Nashville, where he received care for his wounds. The entire lesson gave the students a great firsthand view of what it was like to be a part of the Civil War.

Teenager launches civil suit against Vander Esch, Pizza Ranch

By Heather Kuipers

A teenager from Hull has launched a civil lawsuit against Sioux County businessman Lawrence Vander Esch and the Pizza Ranch corporation.

Nicholas P. Landman, 19, filed a petition in Sioux County District Court last week Tuesday accusing Vander Esch of assault and battery and Pizza Ranch of negligence. The teenager is requesting a jury trial.

Landman claims that he was assaulted in June of 1998 by Vander Esch, who is the co-founder of Pizza Ranch. The alleged incident occurred while Vander Esch and Landman were on an overnight trip to Pella to pick up a pizza delivery vehicle for use at the Pizza Ranch restaurant in Hull.

Landman was a Pizza Ranch employee and a minor at the time the alleged abuse occurred, according to court documents. Landman turned 19 years old last Friday.

Vander Esch resigned from his leadership position at Pizza Ranch on April 6. Six days later, he was charged with four counts of third-degree sexual abuse involving two young men from Sioux County who were employed by Pizza Ranch. The victims were 17 or 18 years old at the time the alleged abuse occurred and have remained anonymous since the allegations first became public.

Landman is not one of the two young men included in the four Sioux County charges.

The civil lawsuit filed last week claims that Vander Esch committed an act which put Landman "in fear

of physical contact which a reasonable person would deem insulting or offensive" and which the teenager "reasonably believed that Vander Esch was capable of carrying out."

The lawsuit also claims that Vander Esch may have had physical contact with Landman "with the intent to cause insulting or offensive bodily contact."

In the part of the lawsuit pertaining to Pizza Ranch, Landman contends that the company breached its legal duties by failing to make regulations that protect him and other under-age employees from "sexually predatory adult employees." He also charges Pizza Ranch with failing to supervise and train employees to report questionable contact between adults and minors and "properly supervise its adult employees to prevent them from using their positions to sexually exploit minor employees."

Landman is requesting that the court demand Vander Esch and Pizza Ranch, Inc. to compensate him for damages, including past and future expense, loss of future earning capacity and past and future "mental anguish, suffering, humiliation and loss of enjoyment of life."

Specific compensation amounts were not spelled out in the court documents.

On April 27, Vander Esch pled "not guilty" to the four counts of third-degree sexual abuse that have been filed against him in Sioux County. Although a June 5 trial date

was set at that time, Vander Esch's attorney, Lee Goodwin, more recently filed a motion to dismiss the four charges.

A judge is expected to consider the motion, and all other pending motions, in a hearing next week Tuesday, May 29.

Prosecutors Mark Schouten, Sioux County attorney, and Charles Thoman, assistant Iowa Attorney General, have formally resisted Vander Esch's motion for dismissal of the charges.

No formal criminal charges have been brought against Vander Esch for the alleged incident involving Landman.

However, the 54-year-old Hull man is facing a potential third-degree sexual abuse charge in Linn County for an alleged incident involving another young man.

"No formal charges have been filed in Linn County or Marion County," said Schouten on Monday. "No final decision will be made on that until after this motion to dismiss is ruled upon."

If the case does go to trial, 23 anonymous witnesses, or "John Does," have agreed to testify against Vander Esch. They include alleged victims, their family members and other Pizza Ranch

employees. Two of the 23 "John Does" were added to the list of witnesses in the past week, according to Schouten.

"We added a couple more," he said. "We filed additional minutes and testimony in the last few days."

Schouten said the two witnesses are "Pizza Ranch employees who have had incidents with Mr. Vander Esch."

Because Vander Esch has pleaded "not guilty" to the four Sioux County charges, he can pursue a possible plea agreement with prosecutors in the case. However, Schouten said it is still premature to make any presumptions about a plea bargain.

"We're waiting for a ruling on the motion to dismiss and after that, assuming that Judge (James) Scott will overrule the motion, we'll proceed to try to set this case up for trial," he said.

In the week leading up to his arrest in early April, Vander Esch resigned from many high-profile positions in Sioux County. He left his leadership post at Pizza Ranch, and resigned as chairman of the Sioux County Republican Party and Sioux County Jail Committee. He also stepped down from his position as a city councilman in Hull.

Each conviction of third-degree sexual assault carries with it a prison sentence of up to 10 years or a fine between \$1,000 and \$10,000.