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Dale L. Strasser, P.C.

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Practicing in the areas of real estate, estate planning and elder law
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Dr. Jeff Saylor

Sioux Falls Family Vision
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Freeman: 925-7681 Mon.-Tues.-Fri., Olivet: 387-5530

Jason Aanenson, DDS, PC

Dr. Jason Aanenson · Dr. Trevor Kuiper
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1008 Industrial Street, Freeman, S.D. - Ph. 925-4999 - draanenson.com

Roth Realty, LLC - Glenn Roth, Broker

223 S. Main, Freeman, SD - Office: 605-925-7681
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Sarah Fodness, CNP · Tanya Schaeffer, DNP

Shane Vetch

Modern Woodmen of America Financial Representative
1008 E. Industrial Street, Freeman SD 57029
Phone: 605-925-1234 (office) · email: Shane.Vetch@mwarep.org

Sioux Nation Ag of Freeman

Large & Small Animal Services
Drs. Sophie Bengston, Roy Peters and Rochelle Reddig
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AGRICULTURE



Grade school students from Freeman Academy deliver fresh vegetables to the Bethany Food Pantry.

PHOTOS COURTESY TODD KOERNER

Vision bears fruit

Community gardens benefiting many in need

DENNIS LEHMANN

✉ FOR THE COURIER

A vision received in Montana by Todd Koerner bore fruit in the town of Freeman in 2014.

In 2013 Koerner attended a conference hosted by three churches that worshipped on Northern Cheyenne tribal land. During a learning tour Erica Littlewolf talked about the Cheyenne diet and the difficulty getting fresh fruit and vegetables in her community.

Todd thought of Bethany Food Pantry in Freeman. He suspected families that utilized the pantry might benefit from fresh produce. Thus was born the idea for First Fruits Community Gardens.

In February 2014 Koerner conducted a survey of those served by the pantry. He asked if they desired fresh produce and what kinds. From this information he tabulated a resounding “yes” and discovered what seeds to order to plant in spring.

Although Todd had the vision, his wife Suzanne was more knowledgeable about growing vegetables. She provided the expertise and logistics for growing the produce.

For the last three years two 40x60 food plots have provided about 300 pounds of food each week for 12 weeks during the summer. One plot is located next to the Freeman Academy dormitory. The second is located south of the Bethany Mennonite Church building.

In 2015 the Bethany Food Pantry decided to reduce their days of operation to the first three Fridays of each month. This caused a dilemma for the project. Where should the produce be taken on the fourth and sometimes fifth Fridays? Fortunately

only by the Koerner family, but by churches, businesses and individuals who know the value of fresh produce in people’s diets.

Todd feels strongly that the First Fruits Community Gardens project is a ministry. The organizations’ brochure quotes Matthew 25:35-40. In this scripture Jesus proclaims, “I was hungry and you fed me. If you feed the hungry, you have also fed me.”

Before this ministry began, Koerner and his family would provide the food pantry with the leftovers after selling at the farmer’s market. A passage from Proverbs 3:9 guided him in a different direction. This verse says, “Honor God with your wealth, with the first fruits of all your crops.”

The two garden plots are fulfilling this passage from the Bible. First Fruits Community Gardens are entirely for those who hunger. If the hungry are fed, then God is fed.

The Freeman Academy first-through-fourth grade classes also are an important part of this operation. They plant seeds indoors, set out bedding plants and sow seeds directly into the tilled soil. Mark Jakopak, the teacher who works with the students on this project says, “this opportunity produces a garden of teachable moments. The students love working with the plants, even though it is a challenge when a strong wind blows and the soil is muddy.

Financial support is provided not



Nathan and Connor Epp are at work with Dr. Dennis Epp.