

Dakota Attitude: “Survivor of D-Day on Juno Beach”, “Climbing the Windmill” & “Prisoner of War Fills a Void”

“Survivor of D-Day on Juno Beach”

Born in 1920, Russell Plesuk saw a lot before he married Ethel Skorick in 1948. As a young man, he and others “rode the rails” to Washington state in search of work. By 1940, Russell had made five trips west. “I bet one time there were maybe 50 of us in one boxcar.”

Then Russell went to Detroit, where he had two brothers. There he built B-24 bombers until drafted into the Navy in 1943. Russell’s LST, a landing ship for tanks, was part of the June 6, 1944, Normandy invasion. “We landed on Juno Beach. We unloaded servicemen and trucks and tanks and reversed, and went back to England for more. We made a lot of missions from England to France.” Is he now proud to be an American? “One hundred percent and then some.”

Russell grew up on the farm near Butte that his Ukrainian immigrant father homesteaded in 1901. Russell remembers as a child, the entire family [of eight children] was always present at mealtime, at which time his father would recite the Lord’s Prayer in Ukrainian. At 15, Russell says, “I was seeding all the crop. But when we were eight, nine years old, we were men. We worked like a man. By six years old, we were milking



cows already. There was no money but plenty to eat. One penny for a stamp.”

“Yeah,” Ethel interjects, “By the time you are six you better know how to milk a cow. It was different in those days; so much was expected of the parents, and especially the mother. You go to church—[the children] have to be absolutely quiet. Hardly any whispering or anything, and if you fuss you would be taken outside and they’d be given a spanking. [Marriage] is all I’ve known. I never had no other experience.”

“My [eight] children turned out fairly good,” Ethel says. “I’m always telling them I’m very proud of them. And I am. Success in life to me is having a happy family, having a good relationship with all the kids.”

“And with your husband,” Russell says.

“Especially husband and wife—and their kids, too... sometimes,” Ethel laughs, adding she is just kidding.

Russell and Ethel (Skorick) Plesuk, Interview Aug 24, 2014, County: McLean, City: Butte

“Climbing the Windmill” Bert Dickson remembers the 90-foot windmill on their farm as it was “going

up. I s’pose I was five years old.” He thinks he was about 10 years old the first time he climbed it—without his parents knowing, of course. From the top, you “could see the whole area and look over the country and see what was going on.” Bert was born in 1931 and grew up on the family farm northwest of Gilby. The windmill was a big convenience that many didn’t have in the Dirty ‘30s. Bert says, “It had batteries in the basement of the house, and the wind would charge those batteries up and then we’d have a 32-volt bulb, I s’pose, in the kitchen and whatever else it ran.” What was it like to climb the windmill? “You didn’t get scared until you got older and smarter. My brothers only climbed it once to my knowledge. But I was one with not too many brains, so I went up to the top [several times].” As farm kids, Bert and his brothers had chores. “Usually whatever we did was under duress. We didn’t want to do it. But we did.” After graduation, Bert went right back into farming. His crop was potatoes, but he is also a potato consumer. “Do I eat ‘em?” Bert responds when asked the question. “Love ‘em. So does my wife.



Baked. Whatever. But baked is a real, real good way to have ‘em. When we were on the farm, we had potatoes at least twice a day. Lunch, supper, both.” In 1960, Bert married a widow, Nathalie “Nat” Loveid Langie, from Warroad, Minnesota. “[Her husband] was a pilot in training in Florida, and his jet went down. So [a friend of hers] brought her out for dinner one night and had me come. A year later we were married. Nathalie was an RN. She had a little, young son.” For many years, Bert sang at funerals. Nat accompanied him on the piano. “I’m still singin’. I’m with a group in Grand Forks now with the Shrine. We are ‘The Chanters.’ I feel good about still [being] able to do something that I love.”

Bert and Nathalie Dickson, Interview: May 12, 2016 County: Grand Forks City: Gilby

“Prisoner of War Fills a Void”

What had begun as a joyous autumn for 11-year-old Al Leier and his family in 1944 quickly turned tragic. “My mother was in the hospital giving birth to my youngest brother on October 20, 1944. And it was on October 23, while she still

in the hospital, word came that he [Al’s older brother, Andrew,] was missing in action. On December 8, the rural mail carrier brought a telegraph saying that he was confirmed dead, killed on October 7.

“I can remember my dad going through the mail, hoping to find a letter from his son that would be dated after December 7, 1944. That would mean that the telegram was wrong about Andrew’s death. After Dad died in 1989, we went through my dad’s personal effects and found my brother’s war records, his Purple Heart, his Flying Crosses, all the medals, and all the correspondence that came. Included was a letter from this man who was still living. He served with my brother. This fellow was a prisoner-of-war, after they got shot down, [the Germans] took him as prisoner. And after he got back from service, he wrote this letter to my folks and that was part of what was in the box.”

After finding the letter, Al contacted its author, Lloyd Boling, who visited the Leier family. Meeting Lloyd and hearing about the plane crash Lloyd survived, but killed Andrew filled a void

and satisfied many unanswered questions for Al.

“Lloyd was the last person to see Andrew alive,” Al says. “In my heart, Lloyd has taken his place like a brother.” The spirit perpetuates because Al’s story about the encased U.S. flag atop his living room piano explains how he continues doing his part to fill similar voids for those serving in the military.

“I had a niece who served in Iraq, and I wrote to her every month. I was the only guy who wrote to her in longhand. She said that her colleagues or those she served with were fascinated that my mail would not come as email—that it would come in longhand writing.”

Al Leier Interview: August 24, 2014 County: McLean City: Butte

(Editor’s Note: These profiles of North Dakota residents were collected by author James Puppe between 2004-2018, covering 617 subjects and 113,000 miles. He has given permission for his book to be serialized in North Dakota Newspapers at no charge. To find out how you can read the entire collection of Dakota Attitude profiles go to dakotaattitude.com.)

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Retirement Party
Join us in honor of **Rodney Ivesdal**
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and City of Devils Lake
Recycling!

Tuesday, June 17, 2025
11:00am-1:00pm

Roosevelt Park Shelter
Open House
Lunch provided!

Inez Piltingsrud Scholarship recipient announced

The recipient of the Inez Piltingsrud (Herman, Buttz) Scholarship Fund for the year 2025 has been

announced by the Devils Lake Area Foundation:

Brinly Gregory, daughter of Jason and Tara Gregory, will complete her Associate in Arts degree from Lake Region State College this fall. In the fall of 2025, she will be attending Mayville State University to pursue her Bachelor of Science degree in Elementary Education and minor in Early Childhood. She enjoys playing basketball, babysitting, working at daycare, taking part in

community activities and spending time with family and friends.

Inez Piltingsrud (Herman, Buttz) was a full-time elementary education teacher in the Devils Lake Public Schools from 1963-78. This was preceded by many years of substitute teaching. She started teaching at 18 years of age in a one-room school house near York, ND. She loved teaching and was very proud of the many fine students she had

worked with. She was particularly concerned about encouraging new people to enter the profession of elementary education. This fund has been established in her name as a memorial to her service to the Devils Lake community.

DEVILS LAKE AREA FOUNDATION
P.O. BOX 160 • DEVILS LAKE, ND 58301

June 3, 2025
Devils Lake Daily Journal

Attn: Deb Toso
VIA EMAIL: dtoso@cmpapers.com

Re: DLAF – Inez Piltingsrud (Herman, Buttz) Scholarship Fund #40-0374

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Enclosed is a news release announcing the 2025 winner of the Inez Piltingsrud (Herman, Buttz) Scholarship Fund. Please publish this in your paper as soon as you have space available for the entire release as it is important to the donors. We ask that you send us a tear sheet for our file.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at 662-5547.

Thank you.
Sincerely,
Stephanie Shock
Executive Secretary
SS/dl
Enclosure

NORTH PRAIRIE NOTICE OF ANNUAL MEETING

North Prairie Ag Annual Meeting
June 26, 2025 | 5:00 p.m.
Barley Hall Osnabrock, ND

In accordance with the By-Laws of North Prairie Ag, you are hereby notified that the 2025 Annual Meeting will be held at 5:00 p.m. on the 26th day of June at the Barley Hall in Osnabrock, ND. The purpose of the meeting is to update the patrons on cooperative news, financial status, and to elect 2 board members. Absentee ballots can be obtained by communicating with any North Prairie Ag director. Ballots must be returned by June 25, 2025. We hope to see you at the meeting and appreciate your continued support. A meal will follow the meeting.

GOOD LUCK to all **4-H Participants** in the **Lake Region Livestock Expo**

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FEDORCHAK FORUM: CONVERSATIONS WITH CONSTITUENTS!

Join the statewide discussion with Congresswoman Julie Fedorchak. Julie will answer questions and discuss key legislative priorities in real time!

June 10th at 7:00pm CT

Scan the QR code or visit our website to sign-up to participate.

Fedorchak.house.gov @RepFedorchak @RepJulieFedorchak

Good Luck To All Participants in the **Lake Region Livestock Expo** For All Your Insurance Needs

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