

Dakota Attitude: “Buying His Ranch on Time”, “Treat Neighbors as Family” & “Music- It’s a Thrill of a Lifetime”



James Fritz.

“Buying His Ranch on Time”

James’s earliest memory is of a trip to Moorhead, Minnesota, to see what was left of his father’s Minnesota family. “I was laying on the back seat of the old Model T sleeping. I remember waking up, and I got to smelling smoke. Dad was a cigarette smoker at that time, and apparently the fire, maybe even the cigarette, had blown away from him. I don’t remember. Anyway, it lit right down along my shoulder in the back seat and burnt a hole that would cover your hand. He stopped the car and put out the fire. I think he had a water jug, if I remember right. He dumped it on the area. That is my first memory.”

“Well, I’m supposed to have a high school education,” James responds to a question about his education. “The military took me out of high school. That is how I could not finish. When I first went into the service, hell, I went to school a month of two. Well, they gave me a diploma hoping I wouldn’t come back.”

He was in the military for 21 months. He helped to rebuild the USS Saratoga, “You probably heard of her in World War II. She

came back in the port at Seattle at that time and she had just taken five of them Kamikazes and she was burnt out inside.

“A neighbor ask if I wanted to buy his ranch. I said, ‘I don’t have no damn money.’ ‘You don’t need no damn money,’ he said. ‘Just come out, and we will make a deal.’ I did. I went out and worked for him. He sold me the ranch on time. I think it was 2,500 acres. He gave me a contract, and you know I just can’t remember what the contract was but it ran about \$18 an acre.”

He married Donna Hafele in 1956, and to their union were born two children. His advice to his grandkids is: “Try to get an education would be the first thing, as much as you could, sure as hell try to stay out of debt because the God damn interest would really eat you up.”

- James Fritz, Interview: June 4, 2013, County: Billings, City: Belfield

“Treat Neighbors as Family”

Growing up in Bordulac, Darrell says, “We had a lot o’ fun on the farm. We didn’t have all the games to play, either. We made our own games. When

company come the first thing we done is head for the barn. Go up in the haymow; slide down the hay. And take the BB gun, go out, and shoot sparrows. There were lot of ‘em around the barn.”

Born in 1944, Darrell was in the last graduating class at Bordulac High School. “Back then they could not hire quality people. We had no choices. Was it my junior year or senior year? The superintendent at that time was teaching a chemistry class and a typing class at the same time.

“The school was in financial trouble. They couldn’t hire teachers, they couldn’t do this, couldn’t do that. I didn’t want to be there. But I stuck it out and I’m glad I did.

“I was supposed to give a salutatorian speech, but I wouldn’t do it. I said, ‘I don’t have that coming.’ After two years at the [North Dakota State College] of Science in machine shop and welding, [then] I came back to the farm. Been here ever since.”

The interview took place in the farm shop, which was immaculate. “I follow my dad in that respect; no junk around. And I’m probably more fussy than he was about



Darrell Wolsky

that. I don’t want anything out o’ place.

“Referring to farming days—there were some good [years], but there was a lot more that weren’t so good. We had some tough times. And there have been tough times now. The younger generation thought they could spend a lot o’ money, ‘cause they made a lot o’ money. Well, they realized that maybe a rainy day could come. They get smarter as they get older. My father told us once, ‘We envied our city cousins, and we had some good years.’ He said, ‘This thing has changed. Our city cousins are envying us now.’

“Neighbors were always important; you treated them like family. And you’d work together with them. I’ve enjoyed life. I just enjoyed bein’ here. I did. And I still do.”

- Darrell Wolsky, Interview: August 10, 2017, County: Foster, City: Bordulac

“Music- It’s a Thrill of a Lifetime”

Thomas Mann was born in 1928 and Mary Machacek in 1927; they married in 1949. Tom says, “And o’ course we both loved dancing. Mary, she learned to dance very young, and I learned to dance before I started school. My



Thomas and Mary (Machacek) Mann

parents had house parties, and the neighbor came with an accordion. They had one band they called the Four Aces. One played a violin, one played a banjo, one played guitar, and the other fella played a saxophone. They would go around the neighborhood for house parties. At my folks’ place they carried everything out of the kitchen but the kitchen stove. At the dance time, the kitchen table went outside. And when they played a schottische only two couples could go, ‘cause by the time they pranced around the floor there wasn’t room for any more. So you didn’t get to dance every dance at that time. We were kinda wondering how those floor joists could take that there, because you could feel the floors go up and down.”

Mary says, “On Saturday, my dad would go to town with his team, if he had to, and he’d buy sugar and coffee. That’s about all the money you had. My mother sewed most all our clothes ‘cause there was nine of us kids. We had enough to keep us entertained. My dad called square dancing, my mother played the accordion, and eight of us square danced at home. We had

a radio with a battery that would wear out, and then you’d quit listening.”

Tom says after he and Mary married, “we moved to the farm. Dad bought two quarters of land, and we bought that from my dad and then we farmed for 40 years and raised five sons and a daughter. We had cattle. That was what kept us going over there. We bought our groceries with the cream checks mostly at that time. We did custom baling and custom spraying to make some money on the side.”

“Music was our entertainment,” Mary says. “I used to play the piano.” Tom adds, “And then the accordion. Music—it’s a thrill of a lifetime.”

-Thomas and Mary (Machacek) Mann, Interview: August 23, 2016, County: Cavalier, City: Loma

(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.)



School

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Discussion and Possible action” the board reported that there had only been one application submitted for the vacancy on the school board, Andrew Sogge. He was invited to stand, explain why he wanted to serve on the school board and answered a few questions posed by the board members. They thanked

him for his interest in serving the remainder of the term vacated by Johnston. Then Board Member, Emily Foss made a motion to accept Sogge’s application. The vote was unanimous. He will take his seat at the table in October.

The board will attend the NDSBA Convention as delegates and Sogge was asked to attend, as well, since it is in the ND Century Code requiring new board members to attend. The convention is Oct. 9 and 10.

Clooten reminded everyone of the ribbon cutting ceremony at 2 p.m. on Oct. 6 and the Oct. 14 Charity Ball that will be a Trivia Quiz Competition this year at 6 p.m. in the Sports Center. He invited all groups from the community to form a team and compete

for prizes and bragging rights - “It’s for a great cause!”

Next meeting date: Oct. 27, 2025 @ 5 p.m.

Immediately following regular board meeting the Notice to District Taxpayers was the topic of a brief public hearing on the Devils Lake Public Schools property tax levy. The numbers for 2024 and 2025 were compared with past years and questions were asked to clarify the meaning of taxable valuation. The present value of one mill was discussed as was the projected dollar increase of 4.25%, limited to a 3% cap increase on all levies except for Special Assessments and Sinking and Interest.

In the end Clooten explained, “We only levy the dollars we need.”

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ST. JOSEPH CHURCH

DEVILS LAKE, ND.

FALL DINNER

Sunday,

September 21, 2025

From 10:30am—1:30pm

St. Joseph Parish Center

Serving

Stuffed Pork Chops

Mashed Potatoes & Gravy

and all the trimmings

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Raffle Drawing for Prizes at 1:30pm

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