Pool of knowledge
VCSU professor helps form facility to educate on ND water issues
By Jean Schlegel

Andre DeLorme, director of Valley City State University’s Macroinvertebrate Lab, has always focused on water-quality issues in the state. Now he’d like to share some of that knowledge with students, teachers and adults.

He said he got the idea to start Prairie Waters Education and Research Center in the Kathryn School, or the Kathryn Center as it’s also known, when he learned the school was empty and available last spring.

“The point is to get kids out there and teach them about water issues,” said DeLorme, who will lead educational activities starting in the fall.

Four areas of focus for the Prairie Waters Education and Research Center are:

- educational activities for elementary school-through-college groups
- teacher training
- professional workshops
- and VCSU macroinvertebrate lab research.

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department learned about DeLorme’s plan and gave $22,000 for equipment and materials for the Kathryn Center. The Environment Protection Agency provided $732,000, which was distributed by the North Dakota Department of Health.

“We also got $78,000 startup money from the North Dakota Legislature the last biennium. I was pleasantly surprised how popular this had become,” DeLorme said.

“So now we have more than $800,000 in funding for the next five years to get rolling,” he said.
The city of Kathryn owns the center, and VCSU will rent it for water activities' purpose. It was previously a team-building facility run by Fargo-based Corporate Adventures.

“I’m just so excited about this and hope we get a lot of use of this. It’s important for students and adults to understand water issues,” DeLorme said.

He wants the research center to be available to local schools and will have all kinds of activities involved in water science.

“Where we’ll be located, we can take them on field trips. We’ll have several large wetlands, the Sheyenne River right there, Clausen Springs and Little Yellowstone.”

DeLorme will have displays inside the Kathryn School building. He wants to teach the students about North Dakota rivers and mussels and clams in the rivers, and about mammals. They will also talk about pollution.

The displays will explain about water quality in general and teach about floods and watersheds.

“The displays will be in the building and then we’ll take them outdoors on activities, even in the winter,” DeLorme said.

DeLorme said his research lab has brought in more than $1 million in grants and contracts to the university during the past 10 years, and a lot of that money has gone for equipment.

“We have the best equipped aquatic lab in the state,” he said.

Another angle DeLorme is excited about is a research lab in the Kathryn School, where students will come to see research performed.

“This will be the working component of the research center,” he said.

DeLorme will base some of his staff and lab manager, Louis Wieland, at the facility, and they plan to hire an education specialist once they get rolling.

He hopes to develop this plan in the future to where science education students can get experience at the research center.

DeLorme told Washington Elementary School fourth-grade teacher Natalie Boe about his plan that will be based at the Kathryn School.

She said there’s a lot of interest among their staff, and the advantage of having this education center so close is really an advantage. She said it will be a center for students’ hands-on projects. And it’s important for teachers to have workshops and training.

“It’s good pairing for social studies and science,” Boe said.