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Bergeson settling in at STAR Academy

Pierre, S.D. – After twenty years of living in Texas, Brad Bergeson and his wife Diane are quickly adapting to living in the Black Hills of South Dakota.

While Brad took over as superintendent at the State Treatment and Rehabilitation (STAR) Academy near Custer in June, Diane has joined the local chapter of the Red Cross and spent the summer helping their three children Brian, age 15, Kate, 11, and Liz, 9, get acclimated to their new surroundings.

"Our reception, from the STAR staff and from the Custer community has been great!" said Bergeson. "Everyone is so friendly and sincere. We feel like we are back home in the Midwest."

The kids are now closer to their grandparents, who live in Colorado Springs, Colorado, Sioux Falls and Sioux City, Iowa. "Living in Texas, we had at least a 16 hour drive to see grandparents, said Bergeson. "Moving to Custer has made it possible to visit family over a long weekend."

Prior to coming to South Dakota, Bergeson was the Services Coordination Division Manager for the Texas Commission on Alcohol and Drug Abuse. He has 23 years experience in various human services and correctional facilities, including seven years with the Texas Youth Commission, that state's juvenile corrections agency for delinquent youth. Bergeson is also a Licensed Chemical Dependency Counselor, a Certified Master Trainer, and a Licensed Professional Counselor candidate.

Bergeson holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Social Work from Morningside College in Sioux City, IA and earned a Masters degree in Educational Psychology from Texas Tech University in Lubbock, TX.

Custer native Doug Herrmann served as interim superintendent at STAR Academy after Mark Snyder resigned in December 2003. Herrmann was the superintendent of the Custer Youth Corrections Center from its inception in 1996 to 2002, when he was named Director of Juvenile Services for the DOC. He now oversees all of the components of the juvenile corrections programs in the department and has his office in Rapid City.

"I am pleased we were able to select Brad as the superintendent who brings tremendous leadership skills and an accomplished background of providing quality services to youth," said

Herrmann. "I am confident he will be a stabilizing and effective administrator for STAR Academy and the Department of Corrections."

Bergeson plans to formalize the relationship between the STAR Academy and the community by establishing a Community Resource Council. The Council will be the primary liaison between the STAR Academy and the Custer community, and will support the STAR Academy by locating resources that support programming and activities that would not otherwise be possible. Bergeson hopes membership in the Community Resource Council will include representatives from the education, law enforcement, the court system, churches and clergy, area businesses, media and social services.

STAR Academy will also designate a Volunteer Coordinator point-of-contact on the boys and the girls campuses. STAR Academy youth benefit greatly from the energy and efforts of many local volunteers. Several area churches participate in the Custer Ministerial Alliance, which coordinate religious services on both the boys and girls campuses every week, as well as Bible studies and other special programming. Local business owners and others also contribute their time, talent and resources to support STAR Academy. In return, STAR Academy youth participate in community service projects. In addition to the timber work that is routinely done in cooperation with Custer State Park, STAR Academy youth help pick up litter off of several stretches of roadway in Custer County. This summer, STAR Academy youth have assisted with the Gold Discovery Days, cleaned up the bikeway in Rapid City and cleaned up the debris from the fireworks display at Mt. Rushmore.

Among the new programs that have been incorporated at STAR Academy since Bergeson's arrival is the meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous groups on both boys and girls campuses. "This is a payoff of efforts on the Department of Human Service's Correctional Substance Abuse Prevention staff's part, recruiting Rapid City and Spearfish area 12-step volunteers," said Bergeson.

"I continue to find things that are being done right in the South Dakota system," said Bergeson. "The reason the facility name emphasizes the word Treatment is that we are serving youth who stand a good chance of getting their lives turned around. They are old enough that no one can force them to change, but young enough that our programs can help them make the decision to make a better life for themselves."

The STAR Academy campus south of Custer is made up of the Intake and Holding Center, Patrick Henry Brady Academy, The Living Center, and Youth Challenge Center programs for boys as well as the QUEST and EXCEL programs for girls in Custer State Park.



Brad Bergeson (left) speaks to a youth at STAR Academy.