By Zachary Vietz

It is not very often that someone sticks around in a single place for 50 years, but Michael Miller has achieved just such a thing.

On Fri., Oct. 27, 2017, Michael M. Miller, a native of Strasburg and Director and Bibliographer of the Germans from Russia Heritage Collection, celebrated 50 years of continuous employment at North Dakota State University (NDSU) at the McGovern Alumni Center in Fargo.

The three-hour event was attended by dozens of present and past co-workers and other NDSU staff, people who have been members of Miller’s Homeland tours to Ukraine and Germany, others active in the Germans from Russia community, family members and friends.

The NDSU Alumni Foundation provided use of the alumni center, and the NDSU Library staff volunteered to help make the event a reality.

The NDSU Dinner Services prepared classic German-Russian hors d’oeuvres for everyone’s enjoyment.

Among fruit and other mainstays, catering served German wedding Kuchen, pumpkin and apple Plachinta and cheese buttons, also known as kase knoephla.

North Dakota Governor Doug Burgum stopped by to express thanks and praise for Miller.

Speakers shared their experiences, thoughts and congratulations to Miller.

The first speaker was Dean of Libraries Joe Mocnik, who welcomed everyone to the event.

To celebrate, as Mocnik put it, “a half century of Michael’s dedication and labor of love,” he read an excerpt from a poem by Kahlil Gibran called On Time.

Gov. Doug Burgum, center, stopped by to express his thanks for Miller’s 50 years of service. With them is Carmen Rath-Wald of Napoleon, president of the Tri-County Tourism Alliance.
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After reciting the poem, Mocnik introduced the next speaker, with President Dean L. Bresciani.

NSDU President Bresciani praised Miller (she’s) “gift” to the university and the people it serves.

“That gift,” President Bresciani said, “has involved love and passion on a very human level, including the collection and dissemination of a story about a group of people, and their culture, that might very well have never otherwise been collected, preserved and shared in perpetuity.

He went on to praise Miller’s 50 years of dedication to the GRHC and the lasting legacy that she has created in the process.

Mocnik was Director of the State Historical Society of North Dakota (SHSND) Clauss Berg.

Berg said SHSND and Miller have worked closely together on many projects over the years. Along with Dr. Tom Isen of NDSU, Miller was recognized by the SHSND in 2010 with the Profiles Honor Award. Berg said the award honors those who “have made a lasting or significant contribution in preserving, interpreting, researching, and promoting” history in North Dakota.

On the national level, Berg noted another award Miller has achieved. In 2011, the SHSND nominated the GRHC for the annual American Association of State & Local History’s Excellence in Leadership Award.

Not only did the GRHC win this award, but they also won the WOW! Award. Berg said this is a rarely presented award for projects that have “exceptional scholarship and are exceedingly entrepreneurial.”

Berg also discussed Miller’s work that led up to the state’s acquisition of the Weik Homestead site. She says she is grateful for all the hard work and collaboration between Miller, the GRHC and the SHSND over many years.

NSDU Extension Agent for Emmons County Acacia Stuckle spoke next.

Stuckle has worked with Miller since her time as a work study student at NDSU 15 years ago.

She shared fond memories of Miller throughout her years working at the NSDU Librar-

Michael Miller, left, and Jeremy Kopp, GRHC Special Collections Association, pose for a picture in front of a poster for one of the GRHC’s homeland tours.

and to teach library science, after being appointed by then NSDU President H.R. Brechter.

Isen went on to describe Miller as “indestructible” and said he is thankful that Miller is still the “native son of Emmons County who joined us here at NSDU in 1967.”

The final speaker of the night was the man himself, Michael Miller.

Michael thanked everyone for attending the event, and specifically those who spoke.

Special thanks was given to NDSU Catering for their German-Russian food preparation. Miller provided authentic recipes that the catering staff had never before used, and he said everything came out very well. Miller thanked major donors and others who have supported the GRHC, and he gave some background on each.

Throughout his speech, Miller thanked people and organizations that helped make his dreams, and the GRHC, a reality.

Graduate was expressed to Bob Dambach and Prairie Public TV for making nine award-winning documentaries concerning German-Russian heritage.

Volunteers for the GRHC and those around the U.S. and world for their help translating and other numerous jobs were not forgotten as well.

Miller closed the evening thanking everyone for “joining me with my family members, friends and colleagues to celebrate these 50 years at NSDU.”

At the reception are, left to right, Dr. Suzanne Kelley of NSDU, Carol Just of Minneapolis, Minn., Emmons County Record Intern Zachary Vietz, Carol and Dr. Lance Richey, Dean of the School of Liberal Arts and Sciences, University of North Dakota, Ft. Totten, ND, and Dr. Tom Isen of NSDU. Richey is writing a biography of Lawrence Weik and has done research at the GRHC and NSDU.

With Miller, right, are Brad and Suzanne Schmidt of West Fargo. Schmidt is a Linton native.

Honoring Michael Miller, second from left, are N.D. Secretary of State Alvin Jaeger, SHSND Director Claudia Berg and Zeeland native Robert Klein of Fargo.

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Miller’s family came to the event to show their love and support. Left to right are grand-nephew Ryan Miller of Fargo, nephew Jay Miller of Strasburg, Miller and niece Mary Kay (Miller) Feist of Bismarck.

Michael Miller, left, and Allan Burke of the Emmons County Record pose in front of a Homestead of North Dakota poster. Miller and Burke worked with District 28 Sen. Robert Erbele and others on the SHSND acquisition of the Weik Homestead.