

SD VETERANS COMMISSION MEETING
July 22-23, 2004
PVA North Central Chapter Home Sioux Falls, SD

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Bill Locken at 1:00 PM on July 22, 2004. He led the Pledge of Allegiance. Introductions were made and these agenda changes were made:

1. Fit #7 Jerry Muhs in later as he is returning to Sioux Falls from job related travel.
2. Interrupt the afternoon proceedings to allow Joe Dalpiaz to make his report, so for Friday
16a. Dr. Petzel (b. Dalpiaz moved to Thursday afternoon) c. Peter Henry.

G Murphy moved that the agenda be accepted as changed, second by D Clarke, motion carried.

Two amendments were made to the minutes: add the statement: "Dr. Petzel stated there was no concern on dollars for prosthesis," (in regard to the returning Iraqi-Afghanistan veterans). Also the information about SMOCTA was corrected to Desert Storm Veterans, not Iraqi. (SMOCTA is the Service Member Occupational Conversion Training Act.) P Evenson moved the minutes be approved as amended, second by D Loudner, motion carried.

MG Gorman had his report on the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs. One Extended unit, the 842nd is back at Ft Carson. The Welcome will be Saturday, 31 July. The 740th which was also extended is due home in July with a tentative August 2 Welcome. There are still approximately 900 soldiers in Iraq. The 109th Engineer Group is in Afghanistan. The 1085th Helicopter Unit is in Kosovo. There are about 30 Air Guard still in Iraq. There are 80 still serving in the US.

Recently there were several Guard members with special training activated and they will be deployed with a Guard Unit from Louisiana. There will also be the activation of replacements for the 153rd in Huron.

The outreach efforts to make the returning veterans aware of benefits available and entitlements are going very well. MG Gorman had a press conference on July 16th covering this issue. It is another of the avenues to reach the returning personnel. With the Demob Teams going to the Demob sites, South Dakota is #1. Then the Family Support Groups are hearing the briefings before the soldiers return and then the veterans are hearing it at the first training assemblies of the Guard Units and the briefings and Family Support Groups meetings are all open and encouraged for all returning veterans, not just Guard, and their families.

The Welcome Home booklets were a combined effort of the SD DVA, the VA, the Vet Centers, C/TVSO's, Human Services and Community Mental Health Services. This booklet is also on the website of the SD Division of Veterans Affairs. People can call 1-800-658-3930 a hotline for Family Support Services. A suggestion was made that the listings be expanded to include the State and National Headquarters of the TREA, American Legion, VFW, DAV and PVA in future publications. Perhaps also SD Department of Labor should be included.

The Korean War Memorial Dedication planning is progressing and the hope is that it will be as big as the World War II Dedication was.

MG Gorman also stated there would be another Veterans Summit scheduled in the fall to work on common ground and communication among the various veteran-related organizations. It was suggested that Veterans Employment Service (federal and State) should be included in participation list.

A question was raised about the replacement of things lost in a fire in the base of the 153rd Engineer Battalion in Iraq. Gorman said essentials are being replaced, but the personal items were up to the individuals.

Another question was whether Demob teams were talking with reserve units. The response was it is available if it is wanted. A team did meet with Army Reserve returnees on 10 July.

There was concern raised that the VA Gulf War Registry Exam for returnees was being done but NOT for those in Afghanistan. It should be for all because they are in very similar environments /areas.

Larry Wilcox had a report from the SD Veterans' Home. There are 9 new admissions, 1 discharge, and 2 deaths since he last reported. There are openings for 25 people at this time for independent living. He has encouraged people to see the County or Tribal Veteran Service Officers for application information. There are a number of couples on the waiting list and this issue needs to be addressed-there have been several calls but no applications.

For special projects Wilcox reported that in Canyon Cottage, doors, windows, floors, ductwork are about done. Still need the carpet and a few other things but it is scheduled for use by the Department of Labor meeting in September and it should be ready.

The issue of the Cemetery for the Home was brought up. 35 names were submitted for grave markers. The question is should it be modernized by sinking a well for watering purposes, electricity for lighting, etc.?

Heroes Park is 85% complete with lighting and benches. The roofing crew is doing building 3 roof. The 20 August dedication is being attended by MG Gorman who will be the guest speaker, and Senator Tom Daschle. There is also renovation in Building 2. The update includes new ceilings in the halls, and a kitchen for the residents to use.

The grant for the construction of the Chapel has priority status and is to a final stage of getting money in August. This money would be available in 2005 or the start of 2006.

There will 12 residents attending the Korean War Memorial Dedication and the 52 Chevy Pick-up will also be brought along.

Question was raised about the food contract issue. Individuals are requesting food items, so they do have input. It is the same contractor, CBM, but the menus are adjusted for nursing care

people, the dietary needs of the SD Veterans' Home are being met. If something is needed, CBM will provide it.

L Wilcox had checked further on the requirement of licensing for the administrator of the SD Veterans' Home. Federal and State-owned are exempt from licensing, however Wilcox has begun the application process for his nursing home administrator license.

B Locken added that he has been hearing good reports back from the Home, especially in regard to the food.

D Clarke suggested the use of the State AL and VFW magazines/newsletters to advertise the openings at the Veterans Home. Wilcox said that is already being done.

Item 10 is Earl Schultz and he began with a big compliment to the SD Employer Support for the Guard and Reserve. The observation is that it is being well run here in South Dakota. He has calls coming from employers about bringing the veterans back at the correct level. There is priority for these Guard and Reserve job seekers. They are not being hired as readily or retained, if termination is possible.

The DOL Conference at Hot Springs has asked Dennis Foell to be a speaker. At the SDDOL meeting in Hot Springs and the National Training Institute in Denver there are refresher training courses for case workers. The SDDOL will also be attending the SD DVA Benefits School in August/September.

The Homeless Veterans Initiative grant applications were not funded. There were 2 Faith based grant writers, and SD was one of the 7 states with priority that did not get a project funded. There is some investigation to determine why the 2 grant requests for the homeless veteran projects from South Dakota were not funded.

The DAV grant is pending again. Crow Creek and Ft Thompson are looking to apply. Pine Ridge spent their funds, it was not as well attended as had been hoped. With the budget, they are taking some cuts in staff. Creative accounting is being used to provide for the 5th Quarter funding for the DVOP's.

Reemployment rights have been asked about at the Family Support Group Meetings attended by SDDOL people. They need to be set at the position/level at which they were when they left.

Murphy moved that the Congressional Delegation be asked to introduce legislation to bring back SMOCTA for the time period of the Iraqi conflicts to cover Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Iraqi Freedom, and Operation (ONE). Under this legislation the US Government paid 50 percent of salary. It was interesting to note that Homeland Security does not have "Veteran's Preference."

Todd Kolden reported that much of their funding will depend on the outcome of the elections. Funding for the individual states depends on how many vets in the state are looking for work.

Thus SD has minimum funding. They are back trying to get extra [funding. SD](#) is always in the top 5 in that Vets are finding jobs-good jobs.

The person in charge of OJT Training in South Dakota is Don Reese. The SDDOL is also advertising for benefits assistance through their organization-contact the C/TVSO. There is an offer of training for transition assistance training-Employment priority (not preference) because the veteran is at the top of the list. DOL and M&VA are working together.

Kolden also told of the Business Outreach Program (Job Development) which is intensive services to get people ready and suitable for employment. Recently separated veterans have preference in the priority program.

Reports from the Congressional Delegate representatives:

Mark Gerhart from Daschle's Office reported on Mandatory funding of Health Care (Care and Insurance). This is a crisis "today". He is also working on an amendment to the National Defense Funding Act to provide mandatory funding for all veterans' health care. The last vote was 49 - yea, 48 - nay, but the vote requires a 60% majority to pass. He encouraged people to write to their delegates whether Democrat or Republican to get legislation passed. This has become a partisan issue and it should not be. D Foell had a letter from Senator Daschle specifically addressing the issue of Mandatory Funding.

Amy Bilka-Skilbred spoke on behalf of Senator Johnson who also finds this issue of highest priority. He has initiated a letter to Principi to allow certain veterans back into the VA Health Care System. He also is working on an amendment to the Defense Authorization Bill. Work is also being done on Mandatory Funding and Concurrent Receipt legislation and Survivor Benefits.

Pam Miller was the representative for Representative Stephanie Herseth. Representative Herseth is on the Veterans Affairs Committee in the House of Representatives.

There was a question about the Code Talkers being honored from D Loudner. It is being worked by some of the delegates.

In regard to mail service for the Congressional Delegations, for Senator Daschle one should use either fax, e-mail, Fedex, or telephone. For either Johnson or Herseth in the "In-State" offices, there is no hold-up with regular mail.

The report from the newly established Dakota Regional Office in Sioux Falls was given by Gaylyn Reiners in lieu of John Smith. Smith is the new director of the Dakota Regional Office as of May 16, 2004. It serves both North and South Dakota. Two new staff are to be hired by August 15. These will be veteran services representatives to handle claims and outreach. There is a hiring freeze after that

There will also be one counseling psychologist in the Hills region. The travel budget will impact outreach and on-site field exams (competency tests).

Sioux Falls is recognized nationally as one of the top 7 for accomplishments in adjudication-receiving/pending.

Reiners reminded the assembly that the veteran has some responsibility to keep a claim moving, help through the C/TVSO when they hear that a vet has received a request for info. Nothing happens until the info is received.

Jerry Muhs and Phil Ringstrom reported on the Iraqi Freedom Committee-MI, IL, ND, KS, NE, IA, SD, MN-SD has really gone out to help newly returning veterans.

Greeting from the Vet Center in Sioux Falls and Gary Johnson in Rapid City and the Vet Center in Martin. Bilbery, a counselor, has left the office. The Federal Government voted GWOT positions (GS-7 - GS-1 1) to hire 50 persons. These 2 positions in SD would help in North Dakota and Minnesota. SD is looking at GS-7 to do "busy" work, 70% outreach. This projected position to be "housed/officed" in Pierre is on hold, but would be primarily to help with Native American areas or underserved areas of the Dakotas.

The Vet Center reminds veterans that "readjustment issues" are not unusual, in fact quite normal.

Jerry Muhs, Pat Kroupa, and Mike Holzhauser were on the Demob Team that went to Ft Carson to brief the returning Guard Unit. The Post is doing a good job of debriefing these troops-the VA, mental health areas, etc. are organized by Ft Carson. According to Pat, 80 of 146 of the returned veterans have been in touch with her, with a couple forwarded to the Vet Center.

Now 90 days after their return these veterans are receiving a debriefing as they go back to drill. The returning vets need to be reminded "again" about deadlines, especially applying for dental work to be covered - they have only 90 days from discharge.

There is a Stand Down tentatively scheduled for May, 2005, requested by the American Legion Auxiliary and it will be West River.

MG Gorman stressed that this help for veterans is not Guard specific. In the works is a message from Governor Rounds welcoming all home and to check the website for information appropriate for him/her. Public Relations is a big part of this push to help with readjustment. The networking is vitally important to get person to the appropriate area for assistance. "Have you seen the C/TVSO, the Labor people, or the Vet Center, or the Mental Health offices?" The Reserve Units need to be contacted so they can avail themselves of this demob/debrief service.

There were reports by Gloria Brown and Helen Van Laecken, both service officers in the Sioux Falls Claims Office. They have worked with women veterans-National Association of State Women Veterans Coordinators and National Summit on Women Veterans Issues respectively. The first group had a national conference in conjunction with the National Training Conference for Veteran Service Officers, 20-23 May, 2004 in Rapid City. Helen was in Washington, DC for the summit meeting that was sponsored by several organizations. Of note is that the percentage of females in the military is up. 12% of the SD National Guard is female.

Joe Dalpiaz-(See handout.)-on the subject of returning veterans there have been two snafu's - fixed. Call him personally if you hear of or know of other than exemplary care for the newly returned veterans.

D Clarke commented that we need to make known the positive side of strides or good work at the VA! If it isn't positive call Dalpiaz first!

The question was raised about fee-based appointments for regular check-ups, not serious or major work.

The PTSD-as an adjustment issue-will not surface right away.

The Bus that was discussed at the last veterans commission meeting was not what it seemed. There is a question if it is free or \$50,000. It would be used to take a team of doctors and adjudicating team to reservations specifically or underserved [areas](#). VA Black Hills is looking at it-if it is free except to bring it out to South Dakota from Washington, D.C.

D Foell reported on the Veterans Bonus Program. The training for the C/TVSO's has been completed, the secretary interviews are done, the bonus director interviews are next week.

The debriefings and demob visits are ongoing.

The annual Benefits School will have the usual format and will be a 4-day event in Pierre at the Ramkota, August 30 - 2 September, 2004.

The Purple Heart Memorial is arriving next week. There will be a small ceremony associated with the dedication on August 7th in conjunction with the National Purple Heart Day. Director Foell will contact all service organization state HQ's once everything has been finalized with the details of the ceremony.

For the Emergency Loan program there is \$252,399.12 outstanding and the bank balance is \$132,353.09.

Dave Wherry at the Claims Office in Sioux Falls had a handout. The problem of salary, specifically for new hires, who are trained, and then are sometimes lost to the VA. The question was raised whether this was an issue/problem in other states comparable to SD like Iowa, Nebraska, Montana and North Dakota. SD is in the top 3 for dollars coming into a State.

George Summerside reported on the State Approving Agency, Veterans Education. Summerside handles most of the schools, Dr. Murphy handles most of the OJT-APP, supervisory and technical.

Summerside is still concerned about the Veterans Administration Education Liaison Representative. The reports coming back from ELR have many mistakes that cause the Pierre office many problems. Right now there are 51 schools, 110 training establishments, 5 OJT's pending, 1,450 in college programs and 120 in OJT/Apprenticeships bringing in about \$700,000.

The total amount in education benefits is close to \$8 million. This is realized as benefits to the students, colleges, communities, etc.

SD also led in getting the funding cap raised. There are lots of outreach letters of introduction.

Summerside and Murphy have been involved with the demob debriefings as well. Education benefits for Chapter 35 entitlements, REPS program for Chapter 35 is not well-known. Need to get the word out on it. Suggestion to put outreach information into the Overseas Veteran and in American Legion publications.

B Locken reported on the National Training Conference for Veteran Service Officers. There were 15 or 16 from South Dakota who attended. There was approximately \$10,000 spent on the Conference by the SD Association of C/TVSO's. Some was paid by the National Association. This was the 2⁶ largest hosted by the National Association and they would like to have SD host it again. On a personal note, Al Janzen, President of the SD organization, has recently found out that his son has cancer.

Thank you from D Loudner to the Commission for sending him to represent them at the National Training School. He had the pleasure of introducing Clarence Wolf Guts who also attended the Conference of State Women Veteran Service Coordinators. Clarence Wolf Guts was at the National C/TVSO School. He was one of the Code Talkers from World War II. There was a special time of honoring these Code Talkers at the National Conference.

The meeting was adjourned about 6:30 PM.

On Friday morning it was reconvened at 8:05.

The Veteran Service Organization Leaders had reports. Joel Niemeyer from PVA is the Executive Director of the North Central Chapter. It is the 40^h anniversary of the PVA in South Dakota. He invited everyone to visit the new veterans Memorial Park. The PVA and DAV are building part of it. There are federal matching funds, donations, city funds and they are now in phase 2, with landscaping and work on a parking lot. The ongoing project will be to add "Pavers" in honor/memory of people. In the visitors' center there will be Medal of Honor centers, etc. The annual Trap Shoot, Pheasant Hunt will be 12 - 13 September and other activities are in the works.

The DAV spokesman was Roger Andal, the State Commander. He opened with a thank you to Gene Murphy for representing the DAV in the State, nationally and in the City. DAV for SD is among the national leaders in membership. The DAV transportation program is going strong. There are 3 new vans and requests for 3 more from Huron, Sisseton, and Aberdeen. The DAV relies on other veteran organizations as well as some counties for financial assistance. Coordination of the whole program especially drivers is a BIG JOB.

There have been questions about telephone solicitation, but the DAV does not do phone solicitation.

For the Veterans' Park they are hoping to present to them a bronze sculpture they have.

The American Legion State Commander Gene Schumacher of Aberdeen addressed the Commission. His theme is Teamwork and Working Together. This refers to the State of SD (including the Demob Teams and the Veterans Commission), VFW, DAV, PVA, and all other veteran-related organizations plus the auxiliaries. He felt we need to keep the regular service personnel in mind. The Guard is strong but these others need to be welcomed and encouraged to take advantage of the network set up for all. He invited everyone to his "Homecoming" on August 21st in Aberdeen.

D Foell mentioned, in regard to keeping regular service personnel in mind, that the *DOD recently discharged list* has been received in the Division Office, with the agreement to use the information carefully, not to let the information out.

In regard to the bonus the advertising will be in all SD papers, all national organization publications, and all national military publications with the hope that family and friends will alert veterans or current military personnel of the bonus in South Dakota.

Susie Clyde is the new American Legion Auxiliary President and she wanted all to know they are ready to help in any way they can. They are planning a Stand Down West River in May of 2005. The local units will be looking at ways to assist the families of service personnel, family support within their respective communities.

Dave Parr spoke for the VFW as their State Service Officer. He was proud to announce that the new State Commander is a veteran of Desert Storm and the first female in that position. They are making efforts to reach out with the other members of the network to "welcome home" from active duty all veterans. One of their big projects has been "Operation Uplink", phone cards to soldiers and the at-home dependents. They are promoting the Korean War Memorial Dedication with a float, promoting the Korean War Book and the contact of Korean War Veterans.

For TREA Dave Jungemann had sent a letter. They are working on the POW/MIA Ceremony at Mount Rushmore and elimination of the parking fee for attending this ceremony. The new TREA Club Home will be dedicated on August 14, 2004 at 5 PM (RSVP please). TREA entertained the SDVH residents at a picnic. They will also be participating in the Korean War Memorial Dedication in Pierre.

Dr. Petzel reported from VISN 23. On the national level there is a search underway for Undersecretary of Health. There are 3 names about ready for Secretary Principi. The actions of the Senate about passing on a recommendation are not known. The President's budget has gone to the House. The sub-committee has added to the Presidential Budget amount, but it may not be enough. Probably, his guess-we won't see action on this until after election.

Spinal Cord Injury (SCI) Beds are in Minneapolis because the support resources are here. There are 20 in-patient beds, 10 out-patient evaluation beds.

The numbers for Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom are really high because of the tremendous outreach. There are 80% of the returning troops in need of dental benefits. In order to meet the demand however, fee-based dental care is not an option really for the initial exams.

According to Peter Henry some balancing with local dental care will be done. The policy is, if it is necessary especially after initial exam, it will be fee-based. The distance issue was supposed to be taken into consideration.

There are efforts being made to "beef-up" the mental health services system-wide. For the Native Americans there is the use of Tele-psychiatry. This is for PTSD-remote psychiatrist.

There are compensated work programs on the Standing Rock and Pine Ridge Reservations and they are successful.

There are veteran outreach programs on the reservations through medical teams, veteran bonus teams and often State Personnel are along to work with them. There has been some real cooperation between the IHS and the VA recently.

Peter Henry had the report from the VA Black Hills Health Care System. (See handout.)

He mentioned that there are limited contracts for the Cheyenne River (Eagle Butte) Compensated Work Program. This is being presented to Secretary Principi by Mr. Nesby.

The goal is always to get the time down, but on "Waiting Times" the veteran should realize there will be a wait, but he should not be put off.

Mr. Henry was commended for the West River CBOC's, they show great consideration for people, so they do not need to travel such distances for care.

B Locken wanted to praise the good things at all the VA's and this pays big dividends-patient/employee morale, community support, and that leads to good press and so the cycle goes. By the same token the Commission and veteran organizations need to be on them to make needed improvements.

Legislative issues for the upcoming State Legislative Session would be to fix the statutes. There is a possibility of a veteran license plate and a State veterans' cemetery. The position on the last one in the SD Division of Veterans Affairs is that they are not opposed, however ongoing expenses are dollars needed to be spent in the best interest of veterans. Should that be for those deceased or those still living?

For the Veterans Plate each Commissioner and the members of the Veterans Council also are asked to prepare a point paper outlining their thoughts on a veteran's plate and get it to Bill Locken so it can be discussed in October. This needs to be done now as 2006 is the time when SD is due to redesign the plate. One problem with the present plate is that the license plate with the number and decal does not go with the veteran, if the car is sold. Hal Weber should send information to D Foell to follow-up on this issue.

Larry Bouska had a report as NSO for DAV. Fred Wager of that office is possibly being recalled to Active Duty again. The claim activity in South Dakota keeps going up. The process is becoming more liberal-actually more user friendly. They have a Mobile Service Officer

Program which is two service officers with wireless CP with access to VA databanks, fax, and copy machine. They travel to the community and serve veterans. They took claims from 113 veterans at 9 stops including Pine Ridge (the heaviest day). In October of this year there will be a reservation specific claim outreach.

Mike Rothenbuehler is the new NSO for PVA since May. He is looking to be of service to veterans.

The future dates for the Commission are:

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|-----------------------------------|-------------|-------------------------------|
| 14-15 October, 2004 | Aberdeen | Location TBA |
| January/February, 2005 (Date TBA) | Pierre | NG Museum |
| April, 2005 | Rapid City | TREA (suggested tour of CBOC) |
| July, 2005 | Sioux Falls | DAV or PVA |

The second quarter meeting should be outside of cycle. If Commissioners have input, it needs to be heard.

The schedule of American Legion District Meetings will be provided by Ron Boyd for SD DVA representation.

- Clarke said Hand County is putting a veterans' memorial up. It will be for all veterans and if anyone has input, please get the info to Dick Haigh, Hand County VSO.
- Locken indicated that Federal law says money derived from tribal trust funds or social security benefits income is not figured against pension. But this is happening again. All income is reportable, but all income is not countable. Dave Wherry should please get laws and statutes information to B Locken to do some research.

New C/TVSO Directories will be sent to the Commissioners when they are printed.

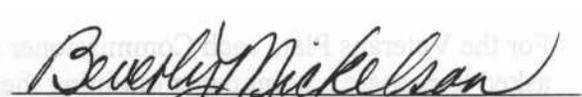
In closing, a thank you to Dennis Foell and Bev Mickelson for preparing materials for meeting and also to the audience for their attendance and participation.

- Loudner may miss the October 14-15 Meeting.

meeting was adjourned at 11:25 on July23, 2004.



Director, SD Division of Veterans Affairs



Recording Secretary

9-2-04
Date

| | |
|--------------------|--|
| Dennis G. Foell | Director, SD DVA |
| MG Mike Gorman | Department Secretary, M&VA |
| Bill Locken | Chairman, SD Veterans Commission, Spearfish |
| Gene Murphy | Commissioner, Sioux Falls |
| Don Loudner | Commissioner, Mitchell |
| Roland Benson | Commissioner, Ft Pierre |
| Donald Clarke | Commissioner, Wessington |
| Paul A Evenson | Commissioner, Sioux Falls |
| Warren Aas | SD American Legion, DSO |
| Gene Schumacher | SD American Legion Commander |
| Ron Boyd | SD American Legion Adjutant |
| Dick Steams | VFW |
| Dave Wherry | Superintendent, Claims Office, SDDVA |
| Larry Wilcox | Superintendent, SD Veterans Home |
| Marsha Boyd | SD American Legion Aux, I st Vice, VA&R Chair |
| Susie Clyde | American Legion Auxiliary President |
| Richard Sievert | Minnehaha County Commander, American Legion |
| D R Mason | American Legion |
| Earl R Schultz | VETS, USDOL |
| Todd Kolden | SD Department of Labor |
| Roger L Andal | DAV State Commander |
| Andy Gerlach | DMVA |
| Dave Morgan | PVA/State Fair Veterans Building |
| Amy Bilka-Skilbred | Representative Senator Tim Johnson's Office |
| Pamela Miller | Representative Stephanie Herseth's Office |
| Phil Ringstrom | Vet Center |
| Jim Foster | DAV/PVA |
| Loren Murren | SD Veterans Council |
| Mike Rothenbuehler | PVA NSO |
| George Summerside | SDDVA, SAA |
| Mark Gerhardt | Representative Senator Daschle's Office |
| Gaylyn Reiners | Acting VSCM |
| Joe Dalpiaz | Director, VA Medical Center, Sioux Falls |
| Helen Van Laecken | SD DVA Claims Office |
| Gloria Brown | SD DVA Claims Office |
| Pat Kroupa | Minnehaha VSO |
| Jerry Muhs | Vet Center Counselor |
| Dave Parr | VFW Representative |
| Dr Randy Petzel | VISN 23, Minneapolis |
| Douglas Callahan | Sioux Falls, Veterans Council |
| Peter Henry | Director, VA Black Hills Health Care System |
| Larry Bouska | DAV NSO |
| Beverly Mickelson | Recording Secretary, SD DMVA |