



NEWSLETTER

SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF THE MILITARY



SDDVA NOW ACCEPTING NOMINATIONS FOR FALLEN HERO BRIDGE DEDICATIONS

The South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs (SDDVA) is now accepting nominations for South Dakota's "Fallen Heroes Bridge Dedication" program.

This year, South Dakota will dedicate twelve state bridges in honor of fallen heroes that died while serving in combat or were classified as missing in action. More than 3,000 South Dakotans have made the ultimate sacrifice. To view the list of South Dakota casualties by county, visit the SDDVA page listing [South Dakota War Casualties by County](#).

Naming South Dakota bridges in memory of our fallen gives us an opportunity for remembrance, reflection, and respect – honoring the men and women who gave their lives in service to this nation. They cherished liberty and loved freedom enough to lay down their lives to preserve our way of life.

Nominations are due by April 1 to the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs with all supporting documentation attached. The simple, online form is available on the [Bridge Dedications page](#) on the SDDVA website. Nominators are encouraged to indicate their preferred state bridge site for their respective hero.

South Dakota has dedicated 41 bridges honoring 44 heroes since 2019. To learn more about the program and to view stories on bridge honorees, visit the Bridge Dedications page on the [SDDVA website](#).

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SDDVA SECRETARY WHITLOCK MESSAGE — INVESTING IN AMERICA'S FUTURE

South Dakota is the best state in the nation for veterans to live and work. And the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs is committed to providing veterans with a seamless transition from military service to sustainable civilian employment.

Education looks different for everyone, and it is important that veterans understand and utilize their GI Bill® benefits in the pursuit of their education. While the GI Bill® covers nearly every imaginable school related expense, from tuition, books, fees, and even a living stipend, we understand that utilizing this benefit can be confusing at times.

SDDVA's Veteran Education

Team guides veterans, service members, and their families through approved education and training programs that equip our veterans with the skills they need to achieve permanent, fulltime careers with competitive salaries. Our department partners with

both private and public employers throughout the state. Together, we understand and value the skills, ethics, and discipline of our veterans, and we work to help them accomplish their goals.

Opportunities include college degrees, certificate programs, on-the-job training programs, apprenticeships, flight training, and correspondence courses.

Veterans can choose to use their GI Bill® from 35 institutes of higher learning (colleges and universities), 25 non-college degree institutions (high schools, welding schools, and trade schools), and two flight training schools.

We encourage veterans wishing to grow their educational footprint to reach out and visit with our team. Contact Shane Olivier for education questions (shane.olivier@state.sd.us) and Ryan Fowler (ryan.fowler@state.sd.us) for OJT and apprenticeships. They recognize the specific needs and challenges veterans face in transitioning.

America's veterans are the pride of our nation. They have fought our wars, defended our shores, and kept us free. Providing quality and effective service to veterans and their dependents is, and always will be, our number one mission.



**From Boots
on Ground
To Books
in Hand**

VA PROPOSES RULE TO EXTEND PRESUMED AREAS OF EXPOSURE TO AGENT ORANGE AND OTHER HERBICIDES

The United States Department of Veterans Affairs issued a proposed rule outlining plans to expand the locations and time frames for which the VA presumes exposure to Agent Orange and other herbicides. If this proposed rule becomes final, the VA will implement a new presumption of exposure to locations where herbicides were tested, used, or stored outside of Vietnam. Specifically, this proposed rule would add locations in the United States ([full list of US locations where Agent Orange was tested or stored](#)), Canada, and India to the existing presumptives for Agent Orange in Vietnam, Cambodia, Johnson Atoll, Guam, American Samoa, Korea, Laos, and Thailand.

A presumption of exposure means that the VA automatically assumes that veterans who served in certain locations were exposed to certain toxins. Presumptives lower the burden of proof required to receive disability benefits, helping veterans get the benefits they deserve as quickly as possible. This expansion of presumptives will help veterans who served in the specified locations receive health care and benefits for certain cancers and chronic conditions. To be eligible, a veteran must have served in the identified location(s) during a specific time period and currently have a condition(s) presumptively associated with herbicide exposure.

Over the past few years, the VA has expanded presumptive service connection for more than hundreds of health conditions related to toxic exposures under the PACT Act – the largest expansion of Veteran care and benefits in generations. Thanks to this historic action, the VA is delivering more care and more benefits to more veterans than ever before in U.S. history.

This proposed rule also codifies provisions in the PACT Act, the Blue Water Navy Act of 2019, and the National Defense Authorization Act for 2021.

BHSU MILITARY APPRECIATION NIGHT

Black Hills State University will be hosting a special Military Appreciation Night event on Friday, March 1, for active military and veterans. Service members and veterans are invited to come out to watch the BHSU Men's and Women's Basketball teams take on Colorado State Christian University.

Both games will be held at the Young Center (1625 St. Joe Street) in Spearfish. The women's game starts at 5:00 pm (MT) and the men's game starts at 7:00 pm (MT).

If you're active military or a veteran you get in free at the door, plus you'll also get two free tickets for guests.

Go Yellow Jackets!!!!

FRIDAY, MARCH 1, 2024

MILITARY APPRECIATION NIGHT

All Military/Veterans will receive
two extra free tickets at the door

BHSU Basketball @ The Young Center
Vs. Colorado State Christian University



BLACK HILLS
STATE UNIVERSITY



Women's @ 5 PM | Men's @ 7 PM

Persons with disabilities requesting accommodations for these events can contact Nicky Winterstein, Nicky.Winterstein@BHSU.edu, 605.642.6003

WELCOME HOME CEREMONY HELD FOR 112TH AVIATION

A welcome home ceremony was held for the South Dakota Army National Guard's Detachment 1, Company B, 1/112th Aviation on Saturday, February 10th, at 10:00 a.m. The event was conducted at the Aviation Readiness Center in Rapid City. Governor Kristi Noem and Maj. Gen. (SD) Mark Morrell spoke at the event and praised the Soldiers' efforts as well as thanking their families.

Soldiers from the 112th were deployed in support of Southwest Border operations from October 2022 to October 2023. The 112th is responsible for flying and maintaining the UH-72A Lakota helicopters. They served under the direction of U.S. Northern Command and Texas-based Joint Task Force North. The team was split between two locations and provided aerial observation and support to Customs and Border Patrol Agents. This is the first Title 10 (federal) deployment the unit has conducted; however, they have performed multiple missions in a Title 32 status (individual mobilizations) to support Southwest Border operations.



Governor Kristi Noem recognized the accomplishments of the Soldiers and the unit. Noem stated, "We serve and love our country absolutely. When it comes to keeping us safe, the responsibility lies with the states and its civilians. What you do to step up and to serve and make sacrifices is incredible. You serve with purpose."

Members of the 112th Aviation are proud of their accomplishments. They flew over 3,200 hours and observed over 43,000 migrants trying to cross the border from Mexico into the United States. This was the fifth deployment for some of the Soldiers, while the first for others.

Maj. Gen. (SD) Mark Morrell, SDNG Adjutant General, recognized the importance that family plays in the lives of Soldiers. Morrell stated, "Soldiers, help me thank our families with a quick round of applause, as they are the 'why' we serve. Re-establishing norms with our day-to-day functions, families, schedules, and jobs are an important part of making our force resilient."

Capt. Adrienne (Quincy) Oliver said, "I am honored and humbled for the opportunity to speak on behalf of the 112th. These Soldiers continuously excelled at any task given to them and they performed critical tasks that allowed Bravo company to fly more hours than any other unit on the border."

The Soldiers volunteered in local communities where they were stationed. This was a way to give back to the communities for the support Soldiers received while deployed.

VA NEW SURGERY INITIATIVE

This week, the Joint Commission and National Quality Forum announced VA's Surgical Pause practice has been recognized with the prestigious John M. Eisenberg Patient Safety and Quality Award in the National Level Innovation in Patient Safety and Quality category for its innovative efforts resulting in improved health care outcomes of frail veterans considering surgery.

The Surgical Pause is an initiative that uses a risk analysis index to screen veterans for frailty in 30 seconds, effectively flagging high-risk veterans so the surgical team can ensure the proposed treatment plans both mitigate known risks and align with the veterans' overarching life goals. Routine frailty screening with the RAI (resident assessment instrument) rapidly identifies the 5-10% of patients who experience disproportionately high rates of postoperative complication, loss of independence and mortality. For these patients, a brief "pause" permits further evaluation to re-view goals of care and optimize treatment plans.

This initiative, which has already been launched at 50 VA facilities and is rolling out across the nation, is proven to decrease mortality among veterans. A 2023 study published in JAMA Surgery reported that from July 1, 2016 to May 31, 2019, one-year mortality fell from 20% to 16% after implementing the Surgical Pause in a sample of more than 50,000 patients.

"The Surgical Pause is an innovative, data-driven clinical practice that saves veterans lives by predicting and preventing complications before they happen," said VA Under Secretary for Health, Shereef Elnahal, M.D. "We are thrilled to be rolling out the Surgical Pause across the nation as a part of the VA's steadfast commitment to providing veterans with high-quality, world-class health care they deserve."

The VA is proven to be the best, most affordable health care in America for veterans. In 2023 alone, peer-reviewed studies showed that VA health care is better than or equal to non-VA health care; nearly 70% of VA hospitals received 4 or 5 stars in the annual CMS Hospital ratings, compared to just 41% of non-VA hospitals; VA hospitals outperformed non-VA hospitals in all 10 patient satisfaction metrics in Medicare's latest survey of patients; and more than 91% of veterans trust VA with their care.

Surgical Pause is led by VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System Surgeon Daniel Hall, M.D., with support from VHA's National Surgery Office, Office of Geriatrics and Extended Care and VHA's Diffusion of Excellence program.

VHA's National Surgery Office serves as a champion for the Surgical Pause, formally adopting it as a national initiative in 2023. The National Surgery Office will support implementation at VA facilities with surgical programs to further improve outcomes and align treatment plans with veterans' overarching life goals. To learn more, visit the [Surgical Pause page](#).



LINCOLN COUNTY NAMES NEW CVSO

Lincoln County Commissioners have selected SDDVA's David Ekle to serve as their new county veterans service officer. David served as a state veterans service officer in our claims office in Sioux Falls.

We know all of you are asking, "Where's Susan?"

Susan is the new veterans services specialist for the West Point Association of Graduates. This is a new program for WPAOG and the focus of our



program is to educate graduates about the benefits earned, connect graduates and family members to the resources available to them, and empower graduates to manage their benefits and to help classmates, teammates, and those they served with to access earned benefits. There are over 55,000 living West Point graduates and only one Susan!!!!

The good news is that Susan will be working from her home in Canton and will still be attending SDDVA training programs, both on-line and in person.



WE NEED TO TALK

2024 Suicide Prevention Conference



SDSP
SOUTH DAKOTA
SUICIDE PREVENTION



THURS, AUGUST 1ST -
FRI, AUGUST 2ND



SIoux FALLS
CONVENTION CENTER

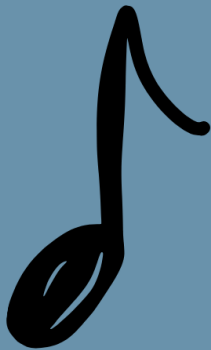
SAVE THE DATE

MINGO

(MUSIC BINGO)

FRIDAY, APRIL 26

6:30 PM - 9:30 PM



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RAPID CITY, SD 57701**



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PROCEEDS BENEFIT



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SCAN TO DONATE

PROUD EVENT SPONSOR



UPCOMING EVENTS

Feb 16—18—American Legion Mid-Winter Conference—Deadwood
Mar 1—BHSU Military Appreciation Night—Young Center (1625 St. Joe Street) in Spearfish
Mar 25—Midwest Honor Flight Fundraiser—Drive to Fly @ Great Shots—(2505 W. Benson Road)—Sioux Falls—2:00—5:00 pm (CT)
Mar 26—Yankton County What's Brewing—VFW Post 791—(209 Cedar Street)—Yankton—10:00 am (CT)
Apr 4—Brule County What's Brewing—Chamberlain Community Center—(112 N. Main Street)—Chamberlain—1:00 pm (CT)
Apr 5—Melissa Stockwell Program—South Dakota Military Heritage Alliance—(1600 W. Russell Street)—Sioux Falls
Apr 12—Day County What's Brewing—VFW Post—(521 First Street West)—Webster—6:00 pm (CT)
Apr 16—McPherson County What's Brewing—Eureka School Multi Purpose Room—(805 10th Street)—Eureka—1:00 pm (CT)
Apr 17—SD Veterans Council Meeting—VFW Post 1273—Rapid City—9:00 am (MT)
Apr 19—American Legion Post 215 Mogen's Heroes Dance—El Riad Shrine—(510 S. Phillips)—Sioux Falls—6:00 pm
Apr 26-27—DAV State Convention—Deadwood Lodge
May 7—Corson County What's Brewing—McIntosh Pavilion—(Main and First Avenue)—McIntosh—10:00 am (MT)
May 7—Midwest Honor Flight Mission 18—Welcome Home Ceremony—Sioux Falls Convention Center—(1201 N. West Avenue)—Sioux Falls—9:30 pm (CT)
May 21—Midwest Honor Flight Mission 19—Welcome Home Ceremony—Sioux Falls Convention Center—(1201 N. West Avenue)—Sioux Falls—9:30 pm (CT)
May 27—SDDVA Memorial Day Program—SD Veterans Cemetery—12:00 noon (CT)
Jun 5—Midwest Honor Flight Mission 20—Welcome Home Ceremony—Sioux Falls Convention Center—(1201 N. West Avenue)—Sioux Falls—9:30 pm (CT)
Jun 7—8—VFW State Conference—Holiday Inn—Spearfish
Jun 14—Midwest Honor Flight Day of Sweetness—Sioux Falls Chick-fil-A—(4005 W. 41st Street)—Sioux Falls—7:00 am—10:00 pm
Jun 20—23—American Legion State Conference—Pierre
Jun 30—Midwest Honor Flight Honor Ride—South Dakota Military Heritage Alliance—(1600 W. Russell Street)—Sioux Falls—Registration—1:00 pm/Ride Begins at 2:30 pm (CT)
Jul 15—6th Annual Tee it up for the Troops Midwest Honor Flight Fundraiser—Arrowhead Country Club—(3675 Sheridan Lake Road)—Rapid City—7:15 am (MT)
Jul 17—SD Veterans Council Meeting—Aberdeen

(Continued)

UPCOMING EVENTS

Aug 1—2—South Dakota Suicide Prevention Conference—Sioux Falls Convention Center
Aug 21—SD Veterans Council Meeting—Yankton
Aug 26—Midwest Honor Flight Fundraiser—The Barrel House—(4701 E. 54th Street)—Sioux Falls—11:00 am—8:00 pm (CT)
Aug 29—Veterans Day at the SD State Fair—Northwest Energy Freedom Stage—Huron
Aug 29—Sep 2—SD State Fair—Huron
Sep 3—5—SDDVA Annual CTVSO Benefit School—SD Military Heritage Alliance—(1600 W. Russell Street)—Sioux Falls
Sep 18—SD Veterans Council Meeting—Rapid City
Oct 12—Midwest Honor Flight Third Annual Elvis Night—SD Military Heritage Alliance—(1600 W. Russell Street)—Sioux Falls
Oct 16—SD Veterans Council Meeting—Brookings
Nov 9—Fifth Annual Northern Hills Veterans Appreciation Fair We've Got Your Six—Sturgis
Nov 18—Wreaths Across America Fundraiser—The Barrel House—(4701 E. 54th Street)—Sioux Falls—11:00 am—8:00 pm (CT)
Nov 20—SD Veterans Council Meeting—Sioux Falls
Nov 20—SD Veterans Council Legislative Round Table—Sioux Falls
Nov 21—SD Veterans Council Legislative Round Table—Watertown
Nov 22—SD Veterans Council Legislative Round Table—Rapid City
Nov 23—SD Veterans Council Legislative Round Table—Pierre
Dec 14—Wreaths Across America Wreath Laying Ceremony at South Dakota Veterans Cemetery—Sioux Falls—11:00 am (CT)

2025 Events

Jan 8—SD Veterans Council Meeting—Pierre
Feb 14—16—American Legion Mid-Winter Conference—Oacoma
Jun 12—15—VFW State Convention—Ramkota—Pierre
Jun 19—22—American Legion State Conference—Huron
Dec 13—Wreaths Across America Wreath Laying Ceremony at South Dakota Veterans Cemetery—Sioux Falls—11:00 am (CT)

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