



NEWSLETTER

SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF THE MILITARY



SECRETARY WHITLOCK MESSAGE

The South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs (SDDVA) is an essential advocate for veterans, offering personal case development and tracking state and federal claims for benefits that veterans have earned. We focus on our core mission of providing professional-level representation to obtain federal and state benefits, reinforcing our reputation as one of the most educated and experienced team of advocates.

We have seen a significant increase in claims filings over the last three years. SDDVA and our partners obtained more than \$378 million in compensation and pension payments for veterans and their survivors in 2023.

In the military, personnel do not leave until the mission is complete. So, although we have secured great benefits for our veterans, there is always more to be done.

SDDVA has a new program called "What's Brewing." This program is a great opportunity for our leadership team to visit with veterans and hear first-hand about the issues they are experiencing, as well as allow for the opportunity for veterans to hear about new benefits and services. As the advocate for South Dakota veterans, we need to know what challenges our veterans and their families are facing.

You will also find our outreach team at such events as Veterans Day programs, Congressional forums, the State Fair, County Fairs, Memorial Day programs, VA sponsored events, Stand Downs, and Yellow Ribbons.

We encourage veterans to join our outreach events for conversation, information, and resources on benefits. Veterans can check out our calendar for outreach events in their area at <https://vetaffairs.sd.gov/publicaffairs/upcomingevents.aspx>.

We have also launched another new program, Operation VNF (Veterans Never Forgotten). VNF affords us the opportunity to communicate with our veterans in long term care facilities. This battle plan has three pathways – to visit with veterans, connect veterans with their local county or tribal veterans service officer, and educate the administrators about the need for VA approved rooms for veterans.

At the end of each day, our true measure of success will be the timeliness, the quality, and the consistency of the services provided to our veterans. They deserve nothing less.

To all those who have faithfully served, we thank you!

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SD NATIONAL GUARD TRAINS WITH SURF EMERGENCY RESPONSE TEAM

The South Dakota National Guard recently completed a training exercise with the Sanford Underground Research Facility (SURF) Emergency Response Team (ERT).

The exercise included a mock chemical contamination scenario where crews had to find a missing person underground and organize a simulated rope rescue from a confined space.

Barry VanSickle, SURF ERT Supervisor, said this opportunity provided valuable training and networking for his team. "Anytime you can work with an outside group, you get to learn all their equipment and capabilities. So, if we actually have a real event here, or anywhere



else, we know what they can do and we also know what they need," VanSickle said. "The South Dakota National Guard serves the whole state, and their capabilities are awesome, just awesome."

Capt. Michael Wollman with the South Dakota National Guards 82nd Civil Support Team (CST) said the opportunity to train with the mine rescue experts at SURF is also valuable for his team.

"Doing this sort of training exercise at SURF allows us to create the perfect storm. We get the tunnels, the confined spaces, we get the rope work with lowering

and raising a patient through a hole, how difficult it is to get that person out through that hole. But yet, we also get to wear our suits and do some work on a simulated chemical spill," Wollman said.

The South Dakota National Guard brought in their experts at rescue situations with nuclear, biological, and chemical contamination.

"That's their forte. They can detect and neutralize these sorts of events," said VanSickle. "They can treat and decontaminate patients. They also bring full medical labs and state-of-the-art communication systems."

"We, on the other hand are firefighters, paramedics, and we're all trained in mine rescue, so we get put into a different environment," he continued. "And that's what we're really good at. So, you bring those two things together, and it's a symbiotic relationship. This makes both of our teams better. And that's why you train with different units or different agencies to grow your team's skills."



SAVE THE DATE FOR NATIONAL SLAM THE SCAM DAY

National “Slam the Scam” Day is designated by Social Security’s Office of the Inspector General to raise awareness of government imposter scams, which continue to spread across the United States.

Slam the Scam Day is Thursday, March 7, 2024, as part of National Consumer Protection Week, which takes place this year from March 3-9.

We encourage you to visit their [Slam the Scam Resources](#) page for more information on this year’s campaign.

National Slam the Scam Day
#SlamTheScam
MARCH 7, 2024



SDDVA UPDATE



SDDVA Appeals and Training Manager Dave Hunter had the opportunity to visit with veterans this week in Pierre during the VFW annual Legislative Conference.



VA TO AWARD \$52.5 MILLION IN GRANTS

The United States Department of Veterans Affairs has announced the availability of \$52.5 million in funding for grants to community-based organizations that provide or coordinate suicide prevention services for veterans and their families — including conducting veteran mental health screenings, providing case management and peer support services, delivering emergency clinical services, reaching out to Veterans at risk of suicide, and more.

These grants will be awarded through VA's Staff Sergeant Parker Gordon Fox Suicide Prevention Grant Program. The Notice of Funding Opportunity provides information about the program, eligibility, and award process. Applications are due by 11:59 pm E.T., April 26 and awards will be granted to eligible entities by Sept. 30, 2024. The funds will be used by the selected organizations in fiscal year 2025.

Since 2021, the VA has worked aggressively to expand support for veterans in crisis, including offering no-cost health care to veterans in suicidal crisis at VA or non-VA facilities; launching 988 line (then press 1) to help veterans connect more quickly with caring, qualified responders through the Veterans Crisis Line; partnering with community-based suicide prevention organizations to provide veterans with on-the-ground support; expanding firearm suicide prevention efforts; and encouraging veterans to reach out for help through a national Veteran suicide prevention awareness campaign. Moving forward, the VA will continue to work urgently to end veteran suicide through a public health approach that combines both community-based and clinically based strategies to save lives.

This will be the third round of grants awarded as part of VA's Staff Sergeant Parker Gordon Fox Suicide Prevention Grant Program. In September 2023, VA awarded grants totaling \$52.5 million to 80 community-based organizations in 43 states, Washington, D.C., Guam, and American Samoa. The grant program is named after Parker Gordon Fox, a sniper instructor who died by suicide at the age of 25.

Grant funding will be divided into two priorities. Under Priority 1, the VA will provide opportunities for funding to those entities with existing SSG Fox SPGP awards. Under Priority 2, new organizations can apply for grants worth up to \$750,000. Following the selection of Priority 1 grantee applicants, any remaining funds will be awarded according to Priority 2. The VA may prioritize the distribution of suicide prevention services grants under this priority to: (i) rural communities; (ii) Tribal lands; (iii) territories of the United States; (iv) medically underserved areas; (v) areas with a high number or percentage of minority veterans or women veterans; and (vi) areas with a high number or percentage of calls to the Veterans Crisis Line.

VET AID SD

the **ALLIANCE**
South Dakota Military Heritage Alliance, Inc.



JULIE EDDY

**22 VETERANS
COMMIT SUICIDE
EVERY DAY**
The Alliance and its
Allies are committed to
reducing that
number, even
if just by one.



**2 DAYS THAT
WILL MAKE
A DIFFERENCE
FEATURING 2
SOUTH DAKOTA
LADIES!**

***Celebrating America
and Those Who
Served***

Fri & Sat. April 5th & 6th
At the South Dakota Military Heritage
Alliance
Doors Open at 5:30
Show starts at 6:30

**Special Guest
Danica Michaels**



Concert Ticket Information:
General Admission - \$20
Mil/Vet/First Responders - FREE
Ticket Hot-line: 605-306-6280



MELISSA STOCKWELL
Veteran, Paralympian, Author, Mom.

FRIDAY VET AID
April 5 2024

VFW
VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS
John St. Plaza - Fort 628

DAV
KEEPING OUR PROMISE TO
AMERICA'S VETERANS



MELISSA STOCKWELL

Veteran. Paralympian. Author. Mom.

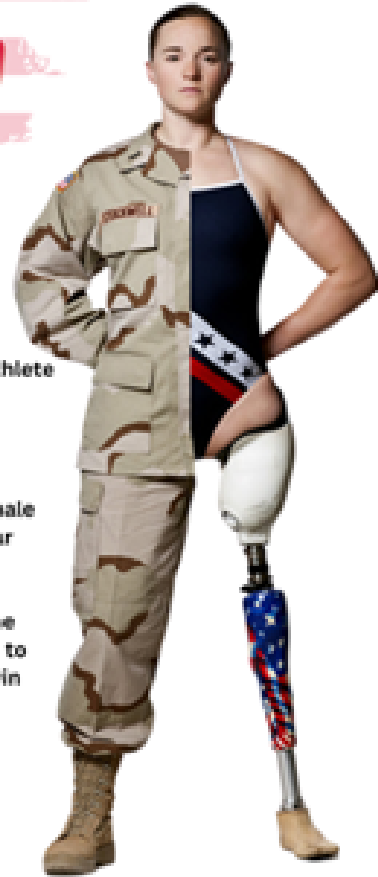
FRIDAY **VETAID**
April 5 2024

HELD AT: THE ALLIANCE
1600 W. RUSSELL ST
SIOUX FALLS, SD 57104

The Power of Choice

The Inspiring Story of Melissa Stockwell, an Army Veteran and Paralympic Athlete. Melissa Stockwell served as a Second Lieutenant in the US Army, and was deployed to Baghdad, Iraq in March 2004. Sadly, just three weeks into her deployment, a roadside bomb hit her Humvee causing the loss of her left leg above the knee. After undergoing several surgeries to recover from multiple infections, Melissa was honorably discharged from the Army. As the first female soldier to lose a limb in active combat, she was awarded both The Bronze Star Medal and the Purple Heart.

Despite the tragic incident, Melissa turned to sports for recovery. She made history in April 2008 by becoming the first Iraqi War Veteran to qualify for the Beijing Paralympics. She then shifted her focus to Paratriathlon and went on to become a three-time World Champion. Her talent and hard work led her to win the Paralympic Bronze Medal at the Paralympic Games in Rio de Janeiro on September 11, 2016.



John M. Bliss Post 628



the **ALLIANCE**
South Dakota Military Heritage Alliance, Inc.

Proceeds benefit local Veterans Support Programs

UPCOMING EVENTS

Feb 3—4—Yellow Ribbon Post Mob for 1/112th Aviation—Rapid City
Feb 16—18—American Legion Mid-Winter Conference—Deadwood
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 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 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
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)

(Continued)

UPCOMING EVENTS

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 15—Midwest Honor Flight Mission 23—Welcome Home Ceremony—Sioux Falls Convention Center—(1201 N. West Avenue)—Sioux Falls—9:30 pm (CT)
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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