



South Dakota

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(South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs)

Leaders Recognized for Their Service to South Dakota's Veterans

PIERRE, S.D. – County and tribal veterans' service officers (CTVSO) and staff from the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs (SDDVA) were recognized for their dedication to serving veterans and veterans' families at an awards program Tuesday, Aug. 23, in Pierre.

The annual event, organized by the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs, was held in conjunction with the veterans' benefits training conference for CTVSOs.

"The South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs and our CTVSOs are here to serve all veterans from every conflict and every generation who have defended our nation and the American way of life," said Larry Zimmerman, SDDVA secretary. "It is important to recognize individuals who provide outstanding service. These leaders enhance the lives of our veterans and their families and they carry out our mission to be the voice for our veterans. Their recognition is the culmination of hard work, caring and being the best of the best."

"The SDDVA staff and the county and tribal veterans' service officers network labor tirelessly to make certain our veterans receive their benefits," said Deputy Secretary Aaron Pollard. "I'm very proud of this year's award recipients for their personal dedication and contributions to our team and to our veterans." Pollard noted that with so much talent and dedication within this network it is challenging to select just one winner each year.

Dan Cullen, veterans service officer for Fall River County in Hot Springs, received the 2016 County Veterans Service Officer of the Year award. Dan was recognized for his outstanding commitment to veterans, submission and completion of accurate forms, his communication skills and his compassion to enhance the lives of our veterans by securing their benefits in a timely fashion.

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David Schaefer of Hamlin County in Hayti received the 2016 Outreach of the Year award. David was instrumental in developing a new program in his county to increase community awareness about hiring veterans. “We Didn’t Forget....We Hired a Vet,” was a campaign vision of Schaefer’s to build strong relations between employers and veterans. Schaefer recognizes businesses that hire and employ veterans.

Peg Raml, assistant CVSO for Codington County, was awarded the 2016 Partner of the Year award. Raml was recognized for her compassion, commitment, knowledge and professionalism when assisting South Dakota’s veterans.

Jeri Smith, SDDVA executive secretary, was awarded the SDDVA 2016 Employee of the Year award. Smith was recognized for her commitment to the Department’s partners. “Jeri has been an asset to our team as we branched out on new projects and programs,” said SDDVA Deputy Secretary Aaron Pollard. “She has a unique drive to take on more responsibility and continues to demonstrate her strengths as a leader within our Department and our network.”

Former VSO’s Roy Farabee (Gregory and Charles Mix County) and Neal Lutke (Pennington County) were recognized by the County and Tribal Veterans Service Officers Association for their years of service to South Dakota’s veterans.

Sen. Mike Rounds, a member of the United States Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs, joined the CTVSOs and the SDDVA staff Tuesday morning. Rounds thanked this team of leaders for the job they do and for communicating with him and his team regarding the challenges they are facing within the VA footprint.

(Photos available upon request)