



**SOUTH DAKOTA
DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS**

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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 Monday, Aug. 14, 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.

“Our SDDVA employees, our county and tribal veterans service officers and their staff are not only the backbone of our Department; they are the lifeline for all veterans,” said Larry Zimmerman, SDDVA secretary. “Veterans, military personnel, and their families have a place to go for help and these individuals who were recognized are the best of the best. Congratulations to all and thanks for being there when it counts.”

“Life is busy personally and professionally, as such we often neglect to recognize the individual contributions that strengthen the greater good,” said Deputy Secretary Aaron Pollard. “While all county and tribal veterans service officers and employees of the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs work tirelessly each day to impact the lives of veterans, there are always those who shine. These awardees are recognized and chosen by their peers as setting the example in how we contribute positively toward the lives of veterans and their families.”

Jamie Guffey, veterans service caseworker for Pennington County, was awarded the 2017 Partner of the Year award. Guffey was recognized for her compassion, commitment, knowledge and professionalism when assisting South Dakota's veterans.

Manaja Hill, tribal veterans service officer for Standing Rock Sioux Tribe received the 2017 Outreach of the Year award. Manaja has been instrumental in growing the veterans services footprint within their area. He has been a leader working to find solutions for Native American Veterans to secure housing and home loans, and along the way building relations with local, state and national leaders.

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Susan Irons, veterans service officer for Lincoln and Union Counties, received the 2017 County Veterans Service Officer of the Year award. Susan was recognized for her outstanding commitment to veterans, her compassion to enhance the lives of our veterans by securing their benefits in a timely fashion and for growing her outreach.

Will Huffmon, SDDVA field officer for western South Dakota, was awarded the SDDVA 2017 Employee of the Year award. Huffmon was recognized for his commitment to the Department's partners. "My nickname for Will is 'Bulldog,'" said Zimmerman. "Like a bulldog, he is faithful, protective and devoted to his family of veterans. His tenacity for mentoring and learning equals a great foundation for caring for our veterans and their families. He adjusts his calendar to help all veterans at every opportunity."

Former VSO's Ken Irwin (Custer County), Bill Locken (Lawrence County), Pat Kroupa (Minnehaha County), and Harlen Shaw (Potter County) were recognized by the County and Tribal Veterans Service Officers Association for their years of service to South Dakota's veterans.

Kathy Lindekugel, front desk manager for the Ramkota Hotel in Pierre, was recognized by the Department for her outstanding and dedicated service to the Department and their partners, as well as 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 Monday evening. 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)