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### **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. 20, 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 County and Tribal Veterans Services officers serve as counselors, ministers, lawyers, fellow veterans and much more,” said Larry Zimmerman, Secretary of the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs. “Veterans’ needs vary from mental to physical health needs. These award winners are the best of the best. They care for each and every person that walks through their doors.”

“Do we, or can we, say thank you enough? At least from my perspective I cannot and do not,” said Aaron Pollard, Deputy Secretary of the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs. “These awards, which are selected by the recipient’s peers, serve as a way to say thank you for what they have done and are doing. As I’ve stated in the past, everyone who touches the lives of veterans and their families deserves recognition, but there are those who stand tall and go above and beyond the rest of the pack.”

Sheila Carpenter, veterans service claims assistant for Hughes, Stanley and Sully Counties, was awarded the 2018 Partner of the Year award. Sheila was recognized for her compassion, commitment, knowledge and professionalism when assisting South Dakota’s veterans.

Tom Sparrow, county veterans service officer for Turner County, received the 2018 Outreach of the Year award for being instrumental in recognizing veterans of all eras, making contact with veterans wherever he goes and thanking them for their services. Most recently, Tom worked to honor over 150 World War II veterans in numerous counties.

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Aaron Walberg, veterans service officer for Brown County, received the 2018 County Veterans Service Officer of the Year award. Aaron was recognized for his outstanding commitment to enhance the lives of veterans by securing their benefits in a timely fashion and submitting flawless claims.

Mike Maske, SDDVA field officer was awarded the SDDVA 2018 Employee of the Year award. Maske was recognized for his commitment to the Department's partners and our veterans.

Sen. Mike Rounds, a member of the United States Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs, joined the CTVSOs and the SDDVA staff Wednesday morning via video conference. 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.

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(Photos available upon request)