

# NEWSLETTER

**SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS**  
**SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF THE MILITARY**



## CELEBRATING SDDVA SECRETARY GREG WHITLOCK'S SERVICE

This week, the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs and the South Dakota Veterans Council celebrated the exceptional career of Secretary Greg Whitlock, who was honored for his unwavering dedication to serving our state's veterans. After many years of distinguished service, Secretary Whitlock is retiring, leaving behind a legacy of compassion, and commitment to those who have served our country.

Secretary Whitlock's career in veterans' service spans decades, both in the public and military sectors. His steadfast commitment to supporting veterans and their families has been a cornerstone of the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs. Under his leadership, the department has grown in its ability to meet the needs of veterans, providing essential services, outreach, and advocacy for those who have sacrificed so much for our freedom.

Throughout his tenure, Secretary Whitlock's work was marked by a profound respect for the men and women in uniform. He focused on ensuring veterans received the benefits they were entitled to, and advocating for the resources necessary to support them and their families.

Secretary Whitlock's personal military service adds a deep layer of significance to his commitment. As a veteran himself, he understands the unique challenges faced by those who have served in the armed forces, and his advocacy came from both professional experience and personal empathy.

As Secretary Whitlock enters a well-deserved retirement, we thank him for his years of service and his tireless efforts on behalf of veterans.



### Table of Contents

- Day County Veterans Outreach... 2-3
- VA/DOD Announcement..... 4
- MJFSVH—Quilting Guild..... 5
- MJFSVH—DAR Tree..... 6
- MJFSVH—ALA Gift Shop..... 7
- Aurora County Outreach..... 8
- Wildland Fire Crews ..... 9
- AL Save the Last Dance ..... 10
- MJFSVH—Recruitment..... 11-14
- Upcoming Events ..... 15-16

# DAY COUNTY'S 3RD ANNUAL VETERANS BANQUET

The Day County Veterans Service Office (VSO) proudly hosted its 3rd Annual Day County Veterans Banquet, an event designed to honor "Day County Families of Veterans" and foster a deeper sense of community among those who have served our country. This year's banquet was a true testament to the growth and success of the event, which has become a cherished tradition in Day County.

The event, initiated by Day County's VSO Jeff Nelson, has grown exponentially since its inception. "We've been incredibly blessed with support over the past three years," Jeff said. "In our first year, we served 155 veterans; in year two, it was 220, and this year, we served 388 veterans and their spouses with a free prime rib dinner and an open bar."

What made the event possible? The overwhelming generosity of local donors. Over \$18,000 was raised this year to fund the banquet, ensuring that veterans were honored with a memorable evening. Jeff was quick to express his gratitude for the community's support, which has played a vital role in the banquet's success.

One key figure behind the success of the banquet is Marcia Solberg, the Day County VSO Secretary. Marcia plays a critical role in event coordination, logistics, and outreach. Jeff credits her dedication and passion for veterans as an essential part of the event's success. "Marcia does an incredible job every year," he said. "Her passion for our veterans is unmatched."

The banquet's goal is not only to honor veterans but also to

encourage them to engage with the VSO office and seek out available benefits. Jeff has noticed a significant increase in veterans reaching out for appointments and information after the banquet. "For the next month or more, I'll have new vets calling to set up appointments, and many veterans who are already clients are coming into my office to see if they're eligible for new claims or disability increases. The surge in office visits has been incredible."

(continued)



# DAY COUNTY BANQUET

## (CONTINUED)

The banquet also serves as an opportunity to highlight military symbolism and foster a sense of camaraderie among veterans. One of the evening's most poignant moments is the Grog Bowl ceremony, where veterans add individual ingredients to a large punch bowl and then raise their glasses in a toast to all branches of the military and those who have served.

For many Vietnam Veterans, the event is especially meaningful. "I have Vietnam vets who come up to me afterwards and tell me how this event is the first time they've ever felt a sense of pride in their service," Jeff shared. "Some have told me it's the first time they've felt a sense of camaraderie in over 50 years since returning from Vietnam. That's exactly what I wanted to create—a place where all our veterans can come together, celebrate, and feel connected."

Another highlight of the evening is the Missing Man Table ceremony, which honors prisoners of war (POWs) and those missing in action (MIAs). A local trumpeter plays *Taps* as the crowd observes a moment of silence, reflecting on the sacrifice of those who never returned.

The evening culminated with the presentation of Quilts of Valor to nine local Vietnam Veterans, a program that has become a heartfelt tradition in Day County. Over the past few years, a group of dedicated local quilters, known as the Day County Quilters for Veterans, has created handmade quilts to honor the service and sacrifice of local veterans. This year, one special quilter, Rita Marx, a member of the Sisseton Wahpeton Sioux Tribe, contributed six Native American Star Quilts of Valor. Jeff shared an emotional moment, noting that Rita's uncle, Master Sergeant Woodrow Keeble, was a Korean War Medal of Honor recipient and local hero. "We are so honored to have Rita as part of our program," Jeff said.



As the Day County Veterans Banquet continues to grow, Jeff and Marcia are humbled by the outpouring of support from the community and the positive response from veterans. "It's amazing to see how this event has taken off," Jeff said. "Every year it gets bigger and better, and the response from the veterans is so positive. It's truly a labor of love."



The Day County Veterans Banquet has become an important event not only for honoring veterans but also for strengthening the bonds of friendship and camaraderie within the local veteran community. It is an evening that honors the past, celebrates the present, and builds a foundation for future generations to continue supporting and honoring those who served.



# VA AND DOD ANNOUNCE UPDATES ON INSTALLATION ACCESS

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and Department of Defense (DOD) have announced an improved installation access process for veterans and eligible caregivers for medical appointments, shopping, and certain morale, welfare, and recreation (MWR) services. Veteran and caregiver eligibility will now be electronically verified during the installation access process. Eligible veterans who do not have a VA-issued Veteran Health Identification Card (VHIC), as well as eligible caregivers, can enroll for installation access at the visitor center using their REAL ID Act-compliant driver's license or non-driver's identification card.

Starting November 1, 2024, veterans without a VHIC, as well as eligible caregivers, no longer need to present a VA-issued caregiver patronage letter, VA-issued service-connected disability letter, or VA Health Eligibility Center Form H623A to enroll for installation access.

To enroll for reoccurring installation access, eligible veterans and caregivers must establish identity, fitness, and purpose on their first visit to each DOD installation they wish to access at the visitor's center. As part of enrollment, they must:

1. Present an acceptable credential VHIC or REAL ID to establish identity.
2. Undergo an on-the-spot criminal record and terrorism check to establish fitness.
3. Have their eligibility for on-installation benefits verified electronically to establish purpose. If purpose is for health care, and the DOD installation does not have a commissary, exchange, or authorized MWR service, then proof of appointment will need to be provided.

Following enrollment, the veteran or eligible caregivers can access the installation by presenting the same VHIC or REAL ID they enrolled with to gain access at the installation gate. Enrollment is typically valid for one to three years, or one year after the last visit to the given installation. If a patron's VHIC or REAL ID expires, they will need to reenroll with their new VHIC or REAL ID. Termination of a [patron's eligibility](#) will automatically result in the termination of installation access enrollment.

Veterans who do not have a VHIC and eligible caregivers will still need to provide a hard copy letter (a VA-issued caregiver patronage letter, VA-issued service-connected disability letter, or a VA Health Eligibility Center Form H623A) to show eligibility to the commissary, exchange, or authorized MWR services, as these facilities cannot electronically verify eligibility. Currently — for purposes of MWR, commissary, and exchange shopping — eligible caregivers are those who are approved and designated as a primary family caregiver of an eligible veteran under VA's [Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers](#).

[Learn more](#) about commissary and exchange privileges for veterans. Veterans with additional questions are encouraged to contact their local installation for further assistance or visit [www.militaryonesource.mil](http://www.militaryonesource.mil).

# A HEARTFELT THANK YOU TO THE HOT SPRINGS QUILTERS GUILD

The residents and staff of the Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home in Hot Springs would like to extend our deepest gratitude to the Hot Springs Quilters Guild for their extraordinary generosity and hard work in creating beautiful, handmade quilts for our veterans.

These quilts are not just pieces of fabric; they are symbols of warmth, comfort, and gratitude for the sacrifices made by those who have served our country. Each quilt is a labor of love, crafted with care and skill, and represents a powerful gesture of apprecia-

tion for the brave men and women who have dedicated their lives to defending our freedoms.

The Hot Springs Quilters Guild has been a shining example of community spirit and compassion. Through their tireless efforts, they have provided a tangible reminder to our veterans that their service is valued and honored. These quilts bring comfort and a sense of pride to our veter-



ans, many of whom have spent years serving in challenging environments. The warmth they feel from the quilts goes beyond just the physical; it touches the heart, showing them they are not forgotten.

The impact of these quilts is immeasurable. In addition to offering warmth, they serve as conversation starters, create bonds between veterans, and bring smiles to faces that have seen much hardship. Each quilt carries with it the time, skill, and love that the members of the Guild have poured into its creation, making them even more special for our veterans.



On behalf of everyone at the Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home, we want to express our heartfelt thanks to the members of the Hot Springs Quilters Guild. Your kindness, creativity, and dedication to honoring our veterans is truly inspiring. We are incredibly grateful for your support and for the beautiful quilts that will continue to bring comfort to our veterans for years to come.

# THANK YOU TO DAR

We want to extend our heartfelt thanks to the Harney Peak Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) for their generous contribution to our holiday festivities at the Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home.

The chapter has graciously donated and decorated a beautiful Christmas tree, now on display in the Bistro for everyone to enjoy throughout the season.

Their thoughtful gesture brings a festive spirit to our space, and we're so grateful for their support. The tree is a wonderful reminder of the community spirit that makes this time of year so special.

Be sure to stop by the Bistro to take in the holiday cheer! Thank you again to the Harney Peak Chapter of the DAR for spreading joy this Christmas season!





# HEARTFELT THANKS TO THE AMERICAN LEGION AUXILIARIES

A sincere thank you goes out to the incredible members of the American Legion Auxiliary for their unwavering dedication and generosity in sponsoring the Christmas Gift Shop at the Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home. For numerous years, the Auxiliary has graciously donated their time and efforts to make the holiday season extra special for our veterans, and this year was no exception.

Over the course of four full days, the American Legion Auxiliary volunteers organized, set up, and ran the Christmas Gift Shop, providing residents with the opportunity to select gifts for their families, at no cost to them. They worked tirelessly to wrap each and every gift with care, ensuring that the veterans could send their love and appreciation to their loved ones. Afterward, the team even took the time to personally deliver the gifts to the Post Office and handle the mailing. The entire process is free for the residents, thanks to the ongoing support and generosity of the American Legion Auxiliary.



This event is a highlight of the year for our veterans, bringing smiles, joy, and a sense of connection during the holiday season. The involvement of both the National ALA President, the State ALA President, and representatives from Auxiliary chapters across the state made the event even more meaningful. Their presence, alongside the local chapters, truly made this a community effort that touches the hearts of our veterans.

We are deeply grateful for the American Legion Auxiliary and their continued support. Their dedication year after year brings immeasurable joy to the lives of our resi-

dents, and we cannot thank them enough for their time, love, and care.

# AURORA COUNTY VSO HOSTS OUTREACH EVENT

Over 30 local veterans gathered last Wednesday morning for a special Veterans Appreciation Outreach event hosted by the Aurora County Veterans Service Officer (VSO), Audrey Chapman. The event, which took place at the county's community room, was designed as an informal coffee-and-rolls conversation, offering veterans an opportunity to ask questions and learn more about the various services available to them.

Chapman sent out postcard invitations to veterans across Aurora County and placed advertisements in local newspapers to ensure the event was well-publicized. "It's always a privilege to serve those who have served," Chapman said.



"This outreach is all about connecting with our veterans, listening to their concerns, and making sure they know what resources are available to them."

The event covered a range of important topics including VA healthcare, care in the community, third-party compensation and pension (C&P) organizations, veterans' compensation benefits, burial information, and specific benefits for National Guard retirees.

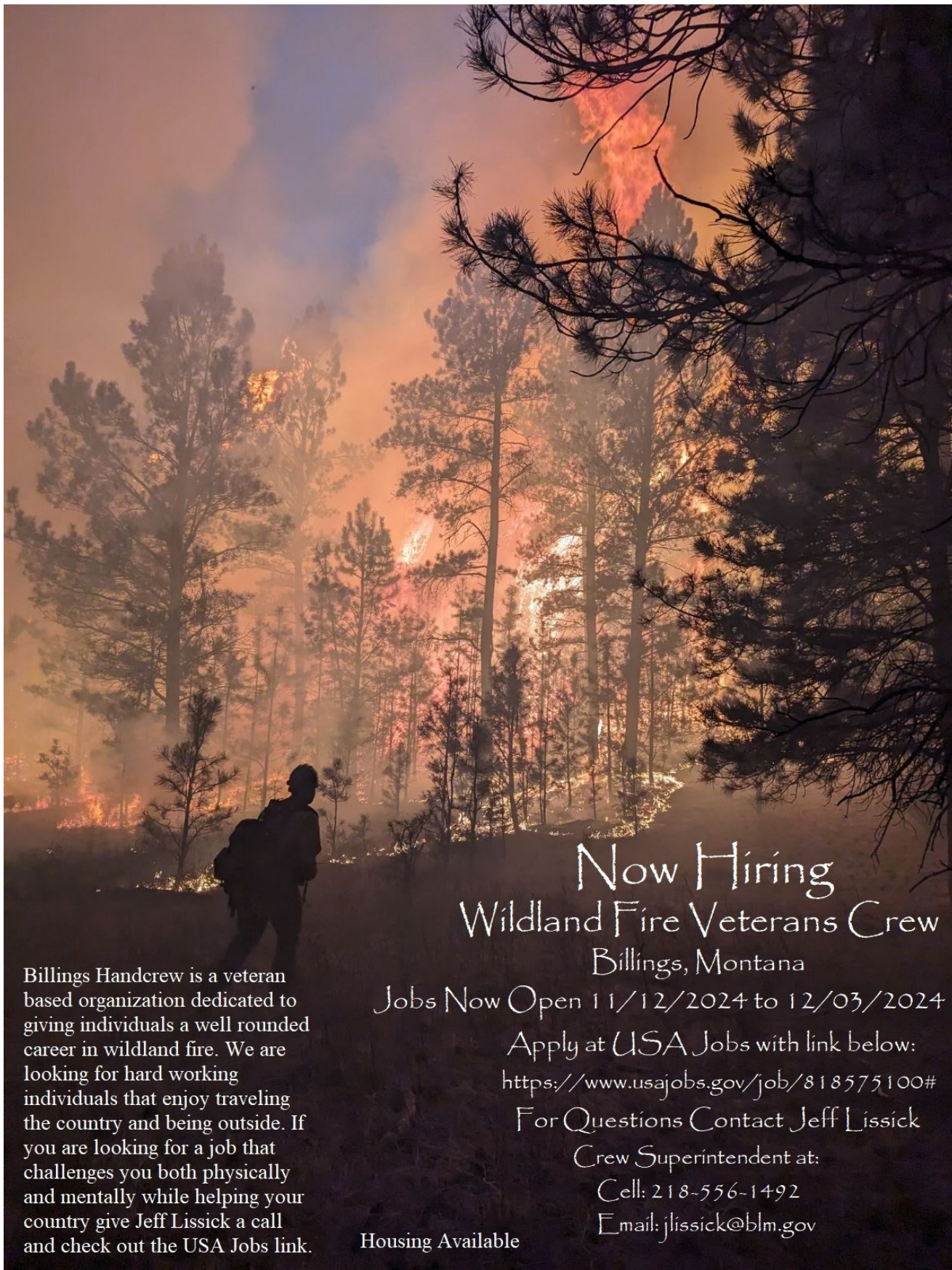
Veterans each had the opportunity to speak with Chapman and SDDVA Veterans Field Service Officer Kevin Bowen about their individual needs.

Chapman's outreach efforts are part of a continued push to ensure that all veterans, regardless of age or era of service, have the information and support they need.

As the event wrapped up, veterans left with valuable information, new connections, and a sense of camaraderie. The gathering was a reminder of the ongoing need for local outreach to support those who have served the country.

This successful event marks just one of the many initiatives Chapman has led in recent years to foster a supportive and engaged community for Aurora County's Veterans.





## Now Hiring Wildland Fire Veterans Crew Billings, Montana

Jobs Now Open 11/12/2024 to 12/03/2024

Apply at USA Jobs with link below:

<https://www.usajobs.gov/job/818575100#>

For Questions Contact Jeff Lissick

Crew Superintendent at:

Cell: 218-556-1492

Email: [jlissick@blm.gov](mailto:jlissick@blm.gov)

Billings Handcrew is a veteran based organization dedicated to giving individuals a well rounded career in wildland fire. We are looking for hard working individuals that enjoy traveling the country and being outside. If you are looking for a job that challenges you both physically and mentally while helping your country give Jeff Lissick a call and check out the USA Jobs link.

Housing Available



# SAVE THE LAST DANCE

 AMERICAN  
LEGION  
*American Legion Post 15*

# '24



## DEC 31, 2024



DANCE FLOOR DINNER TABLE FOR 8 = \$800

1st TIER DINNER TABLE FOR 8 = \$600

1st TIER DINNER TABLE FOR 6 = \$450

GENERAL ADMISSION w/ MEAL \$55  
RESERVATION REQUIRED

GENERAL ADMISSION DANCE ONLY  
\$25 ADVANCED / \$35 AT THE DOOR

**DANCE 8-12:30**  
**MOGENS HEROES - 8-10**  
**LAST CALL 10:30-12:30**



**At El Riad Shrine**  
**510 S. Phillips in Sioux Falls**

Doors OPEN at 6pm for dinner tickets / 7:30pm for dance

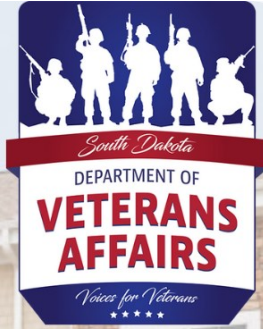
RESERVATIONS REQUIRED for tables and ALL meals with cash, check or most credit card  
at the American Legion Post 15 Office located at 1700 West Russell in Sioux Falls.  
**CALL 605-336-3470 FOR MORE INFO**

**JUST IN - ALL veterans get in FREE thanks to the generosity of Premier Bank and Premier Bankcard  
-RESERVATIONS ARE STILL NEEDED FOR ALL LEVELS OF ENTRY! Call 605.336.3470.**

# TAKING CARE OF SD HEROES

Learn more about providing nursing care to our veterans at the SD State Veterans Home

**APPLY TODAY!**



Hot Springs, South Dakota

## RN OPENINGS:

### ✓ Registered Nurse - Day Shift

**\$33.37 - \$39.14 per hour**  
+ \$1.00/hr pm differential  
+ \$1.50/hr weekend pay

### ✓ Registered Nurse - Night Shift

**Up to \$44.14 per hour**  
Base pay + \$5.00 night pay  
+ \$1.50/hr weekend pay

## Unbeatable Benefits

- ★ Generous vacation leave
- ★ 6% fully matched pension plan
- ★ 11 paid holidays
- ★ \$0 premium employee-only health insurance option



[BHR.SD.GOV/WORKFORUS/](https://BHR.SD.GOV/WORKFORUS/) >



VETERANS AFFAIRS





# Taking Care of South Dakota's Heroes



## LPN OPENINGS:

✓ LPN - Day Shift

**\$26.09-\$30.60 per hour**  
+ \$1.00/hr pm differential  
+ \$1.50/hr weekend pay

✓ LPN - Night Shift

**Up to \$35.60 per hour**  
Base pay + \$5.00 night pay  
+ \$1.50/hr weekend pay

## Unbeatable Benefits

- ★ Generous vacation leave
- ★ 6% fully matched pension plan
- ★ 11 paid holidays
- ★ \$0 premium employee-only health insurance option

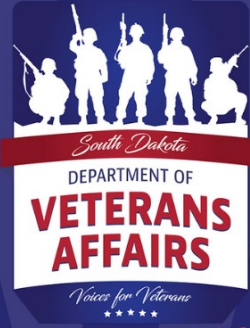


[BHR.SD.GOV/WORKFORUS/](http://BHR.SD.GOV/WORKFORUS/)



Hot Springs, South Dakota





# TAKING CARE OF SOUTH DAKOTA HEROES

VET'S HOME-HOMEMAKER (CNA)

DAY SHIFT - STARTING AT \$17.92/HR DOE  
NIGHT SHIFT- \$17.92/HR + \$5.00/HR

SHIFT DIFFERENTIALS  
\$5.00 NIGHT / \$1.50 WEEKEND / \$1.00 PM

REWARDING CAREER  
UNBEATABLE BENEFITS



 [BHR.SD.GOV/WORKFORUS/](http://BHR.SD.GOV/WORKFORUS/)

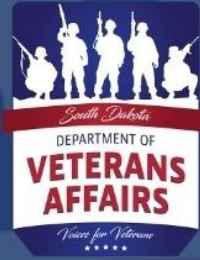


Hot Springs, South Dakota



Veterans Affairs

# OUR RN'S PROVIDE COMPASSIONATE CARE FOR SD HEROES



The MJF State Veterans Home is dedicated to hiring compassionate RNs who provide personalized support that enhances our heroes' quality of life in a household-type environment.



Comfort of Home



Tailored Care Plans



Support for Families



Companionship

## Up to \$44.14 per hour



Hot Springs,  
South Dakota

**LEARN MORE!** →



(605) 745-5127

[BHR.SD.GOV/WORKFORUS/](https://BHR.SD.GOV/WORKFORUS/)



# 2024 UPCOMING EVENTS

- Nov 22—SD Veterans Council Legislative Round Table—American Legion Post 22—(818 E. St Patrick Street)—Rapid City—11:00 am (MT)
- Nov 23—SD Veterans Council Legislative Round Table—American Legion Post 8—(520 S. Pierre Street)—Pierre—11:00 am (CT)
- Nov 28-29—State Offices Closed
- Dec 3—Governor’s Budget Address—1:00 pm
- Dec 14—Wreaths Across America Wreath Laying Ceremony at South Dakota Veterans Cemetery—Sioux Falls—11:00 am (CT)
- Dec 23-25—State Offices Closed

## SOUTH DAKOTA VETERANS CEMETERY WREATHS ACROSS AMERICA

JOIN US SATURDAY  
DECEMBER 14, 2024, AT 11:00 AM  
AS WE LAY REMEMBRANCE WREATHS ON THE  
GRAVES OF OUR VETERANS.  
THERE IS NO BETTER TIME TO EXPRESS OUR  
APPRECIATION THAN DURING THE HUSTLE AND  
BUSTLE OF THE HOLIDAY SEASON.



# 2025 UPCOMING EVENTS

- Jan 1—State Offices Closed
- Jan 13—VFW State Legislative Open House—AmericInn—(312 Island Drive)—Fort Pierre—5:00—8:00 pm (CT)
- Jan 14—Governor’s State of the State Address—1:00 pm
- Jan 14—Legislative Session starts
- Jan 15—SD Veterans Council Meeting—American Legion Post 8—(520 S. Pierre Street)—Pierre—2:00 pm (CT)
- Jan 15—SDDVA/SD Veterans Council Legislative Reception—American Legion Post 8—(520 S. Pierre Street)—Pierre—5:30—7:30 pm (CT)
- Feb 6—SDNG Dining Out—Ramkota Hotel—(920 W. Sioux Avenue)—Pierre—6:00 pm (CT)
- Feb 14-16—American Legion Mid-Winter Conference—Oacoma
- Apr 27-30—VFW Proficiency Training Conference—Annapolis, MD
- May 6-8—SDDVA Mini Conferences
- Jun 19-22—VFW State Convention—Ramkota—Pierre
- Jun 19-22—American Legion State Conference—Huron
- Aug 4-5—Your Journey Matters 2025 Behavioral Health Conference—Sioux Falls Sheraton Convention Center
- Aug 9-13—National VFW Convention—Columbus, OH
- Aug 27-Sep 1—South Dakota State Fair
- Aug 28—Veterans Day at the South Dakota State Fair
- Sep 9-12—SDDVA Annual CTVSO Benefit School
- Sep 21-26—VFW National Skill Level and Basic Training Conference—Annapolis, MD
- Dec 13—Wreaths Across America Wreath Laying Ceremony at South Dakota Veterans Cemetery—Sioux Falls—11:00 am (CT)

Audry Ricketts, Public Information Officer

South Dakota Department of the Military <https://military.sd.gov/>

South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs <https://vetaffairs.sd.gov>

Soldiers and Sailors Building - 425 E Capitol Avenue

Pierre, SD 57501

Phone: 605-773-8242

E-mail address: [audry.ricketts@state.sd.us](mailto:audry.ricketts@state.sd.us)

