

NEWSLETTER

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



AMBASSADOR ANDREI MURARU'S VIST TO SOUTH DAKOTA: STRENGTHENING NATO TIES

His Excellency Andrei Muraru, the Ambassador of Romania to the United States, recently visited South Dakota, where he met with Maj. Gen. Mark Morrell, the Adjutant General of the South Dakota National Guard (SDNG). During the visit, Ambassador Muraru requested a roundtable discussion to highlight the strong and ongoing cooperation between Romania and the SDNG, a partnership rooted in their shared commitment to NATO.

Ambassador Muraru expressed his deep appreciation for the SDNG's support and the dedication of its units that have participated in numerous deployments and training missions to Romania. He emphasized the importance of this collaboration and looked forward to future opportunities to strengthen ties between Romania and the SDNG, as both continue to work together within the NATO framework.

The meeting reflected a commitment to enhancing cooperation and fostering mutual respect between the SDNG and Romania for years to come.



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MAJOR STEARNS HONORED FOR EXCEPTIONAL SERVICE IN SURINAME

Major Carl Stearns, Bilateral Affairs Officer for the South Dakota National Guard, has been awarded the prestigious Medal of Meritorious Services in the Rank of Officer for his outstanding contributions to strengthening U.S.-Suriname military relations. The ceremony took place on Friday, April 4, 2025, at Suriname's Ministry of Defense.

Brigadier General Werner Kioe A Sen, Commander of the National Army of Suriname, commended Major Stearns for his pivotal role in enhancing cooperation between the two nations' military forces. The award recognizes his leadership in a variety of joint projects, ranging from the renovation of schools to providing vital health services, all of which have had a lasting positive impact on local communities in Suriname.

This honor highlights Major Stearns' exceptional dedication to building bridges between the United States and Suriname, fostering mutual respect and collaboration in support of shared goals. His efforts continue to strengthen the ties between the two nations and their military forces.



HEARTFELT THANK YOU TO AMERICAN LEGION POST 179

A big thank you goes out to the Johnson-Peterson American Legion Post 179 from Kennebec/Reliance and their Auxiliary for hosting a fun-filled Bingo event at the Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home on Saturday. The event brought joy and excitement to the residents, who had a great time playing Bingo with their guests.

The Auxiliary members went above and beyond by baking several dozen delicious cookies, ensuring that everyone had a sweet treat to enjoy during the games. The afternoon was filled with laughter, camaraderie, and shared memories, leaving everyone with smiles and grateful hearts.



MESSAGE FROM SDDVA SECRETARY SCHNEIDER

I am honored to have begun my tenure as Secretary of the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs on March 5th. One of my foremost objectives is to visit each county veterans service office and all veteran's service organizations across our state, with the goal of strengthening our partnerships with veterans, local communities, and veteran organizations. During my first month in this role, I continue to be deeply inspired by the pride, strength, and resilience of our veterans and their families. South Dakota's military heritage is firmly rooted in the enduring foundation built by our veterans and their loved ones, and I am both proud and humbled to serve as your Secretary.

In April, we are preparing for the launch of our "What's Brewing" events across South Dakota. While the specific dates are still being finalized, they will be publicized as soon as they are confirmed. These events provide an invaluable opportunity to strengthen our network, engage in meaningful dialogue, seek answers, and enhance the services we provide. Additionally, these gatherings offer a chance to share stories, enjoy camaraderie, and engage in friendly banter, as is characteristic of the bonds shared by our brothers and sisters in arms. These events hold significant importance for the SDDVA staff, as they allow us to engage directly with veterans and gain insight into their needs. I encourage all veterans to attend these events whenever possible.



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SCHNEIDER MESSAGE

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April also marks the “Month of the Military Child.” Many of us who served in the military left behind families, including children, who experienced their own form of separation as we went off to training or into combat. This month, I urge you to take a moment to connect with your children and grandchildren. It is easy to become absorbed in the busyness of life, but it is essential to recognize the impact our deployments had on our families. Our children, too, faced their own kind of deployment, and their sacrifices should not be overlooked. Take time to engage with them, share your experiences, and continue to nurture those priceless family bonds.

I would also like to extend my warmest wishes to all Navy Chiefs on the occasion of the 132nd anniversary of the Navy Chief’s birthday. Yes, we are a seasoned group, affectionately known as “Goats,” and we may be salty, but much like all South Dakota veterans, we are deeply proud of our service. My charge for the day is this: “Passion is a powerful tool; yield that power carefully, for it carries the weight of influence.”

On April 5th, we observed Gold Star Spouses Day, a day to honor the spouses who have lost their loved ones in service to our country. This observance, which dates back to the early 20th century, began with a lapel button and later became officially recognized through a Senate resolution. Each year, we pause on this day to express our deepest gratitude and respect for the sacrifices made by Gold Star families.

Finally, I would like to extend heartfelt birthday wishes to both the Army Reserve and the Air Force Reserve. Your continued dedication to service is integral to the strength of our state and our nation. Your commitment ensures that South Dakota remains a proud and resilient community of veterans, and we are profoundly grateful for your service.

Thank you for the privilege of serving as your Secretary. It is an honor I do not take lightly, and I look forward to continuing to work alongside you to ensure that South Dakota remains a place where veterans and their families are respected, supported, and honored.

Jeremiah J. Schneider, Secretary
South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs

PURPLE UP - CELEBRATION OF RESILIENCE AND STRENGTH

Every April, in honor of the Month of the Military Child, communities across the United States come together to celebrate the strength, resilience, and sacrifices of military children. One of the key activities during this month is the "Purple Up!" campaign, a nationwide movement that encourages people to wear purple to show their support for military families and children. But what exactly is Purple Up! and why is it so significant?

Purple Up! is a day when people are encouraged to wear purple to show solidarity and appreciation for military kids. This event takes place annually in April, during the Month of the Military Child, a month dedicated to recognizing the unique challenges that children in military families face and the vital role they play in supporting their service member parents.

Purple was chosen as the color because it combines the colors of all the branches of the U.S. military. Each military branch has its own distinctive color: Army green, Marine Corps red, Navy blue, Air Force blue, and Coast Guard silver. Purple symbolizes the unity of all the branches, as military children support service members from all branches, and it embodies the collective strength and spirit of military families.

Military kids often face unique challenges that other children do not. They experience frequent moves, long deployments, and sometimes, the emotional toll of having a parent in harm's way. Despite these hardships, military children show incredible resilience and courage. They frequently adapt to new schools, make new friends, and cope with the absence of a parent. These experiences often help them grow up to be strong, independent, and empathetic individuals.

Purple Up! serves as a reminder of the contributions and sacrifices military families make for the greater good. It provides an opportunity for civilians, schools, and local communities to express their appreciation for military kids, many of whom face these challenges quietly and without fanfare. By wearing purple, people can show their support, raising awareness of the difficulties military children face while fostering a greater sense of connection and community.

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PURPLE UP (CONTINUED)

Getting involved in Purple Up! is easy and can be done in several ways:

- **Wear Purple:** The simplest and most direct way to participate is to wear purple on the designated day in support of military kids. Schools, businesses, and individuals can all take part in this show of unity.
- **Spread Awareness:** Use social media to share photos of yourself or your family wearing purple. You can also write about the importance of military children and their contributions. Hashtags like #PurpleUp, #MilitaryChild, and #MonthoftheMilitaryChild can help amplify the message.
- **Host Local Events:** Schools, local organizations, and military bases can host events to celebrate military children. These events can include assemblies, story times, or even a “Purple Up” walk or run to raise awareness.
- **Donate or Volunteer:** There are numerous organizations dedicated to supporting military children and their families, such as the National Military Family Association (NMFA) and Blue Star Families. Volunteering time or making a donation can help support these initiatives and provide vital resources to military families.

While wearing purple for a day might seem like a small gesture, it holds immense significance for military kids. It’s a visual reminder that they are seen, appreciated, and supported. In many cases, military children feel isolated due to the unique challenges they face. Purple Up! helps bridge that gap by fostering a sense of belonging and recognition.

Moreover, Purple Up! can spark important conversations in communities, schools, and workplaces about the needs of military families. It can also lead to more opportunities for civilians to support military kids in meaningful ways, such as offering mentorship, participating in volunteer programs, or simply being more understanding when a military family faces challenges.

Purple Up! is more than just a day to wear a color; it’s a celebration of the resilience and courage of military children. By participating in this event, we acknowledge the sacrifices that military families make every day, and we remind ourselves of the importance of showing support to these children who endure so much. Whether by wearing purple, spreading the word, or volunteering, every action helps military kids feel valued and appreciated. Let’s continue to show our gratitude for their strength and resilience—today and every day.



POKER RUN

Presented by the Sioux Falls Area Veterans' Council

Saturday, July 12th

Registration 8-10am

South Dakota Military Heritage Alliance,
1600 W Russell Street

Door Prizes, Raffle, Silent Auction,
Sales of Items for Mike to Sign

Coffee and Donuts Available

\$25 Per Driver, \$10 additional Rider's Hand

Winnings: 1st Place \$500,
2nd Place \$300, 3rd Place \$150

Kick Stands Up 10am

Return Gathering 1-5pm

Special Guest Mike Fitzmaurice!

VFW Post 628, 1700 W. Russell Street

Burgers, Brats, and Cash Bar

BONUS RAFFLE!

**A Limited Edition Bronze Model
of the Statue Valued at \$4,700!**

Tickets Available at the Door!

The Life-Size Bronze Michael J. Fitzmaurice Statue

created by Sioux Falls sculptor Darwin Wolf,
commissioned by the SFAVC
dedication at Sioux Falls VA Hospital

Benefiting the:

Michael J. Fitzmaurice Medal of Honor Statue Project





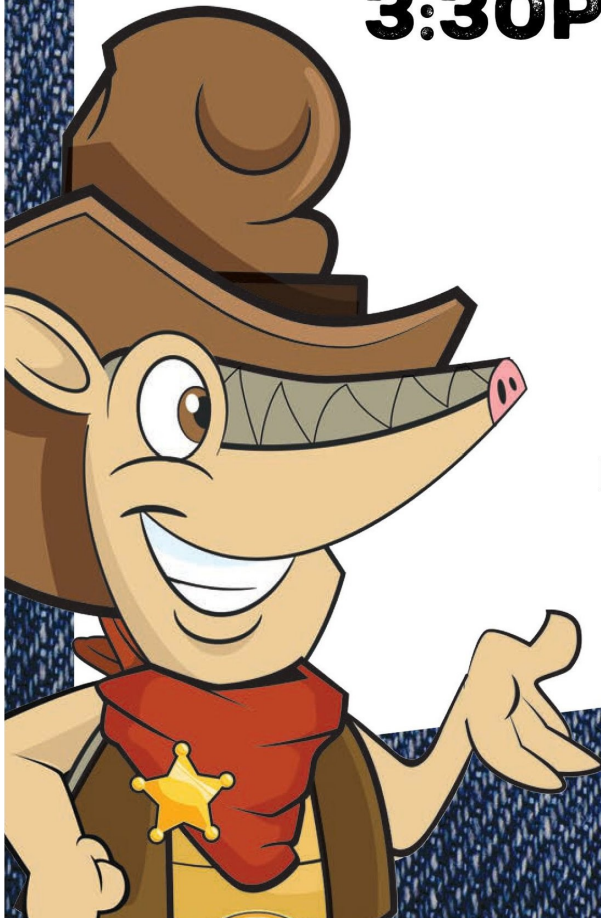
DINE TO DONATE

⇒ *Support* ⇐

MIDWEST HONOR FLIGHT

TUESDAY, APRIL 15

3:30PM-10PM



10%

DONATION NIGHT

for **Midwest Honor Flight**.

Present this flyer at the Sioux-Falls location and Texas Roadhouse will donate **10%** of your total food purchases to **Midwest Honor Flight!**

605-362-5784
4307 W. EMPIRE PLACE
SIOUX FALLS, SD

2025 UPCOMING EVENTS

- Apr 12—Pizza, Pints, and Puzzles Midwest Honor Flight Fundraiser—The Social—(301 S. Thompson Avenue)—Sioux Falls—5:30 pm (CT)
- Apr 15—Dine to Donate for Midwest Honor Flight—Texas Roadhouse—(4307 W. Empire Place)—Sioux Falls—3:30 pm—10:00 pm (CT)
- Apr 16—South Dakota Veterans Council Meeting—Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home—(2500 Minnekahta Avenue)—Hot Springs—9:00 am (MT)
- Apr 18-21—State Offices Closed
- Apr 25-26—State DAV Convention—AmericInn—Aberdeen
- Apr 27-30—VFW Proficiency Training Conference—Annapolis, MD
- May 1—Loyalty Day
- May 6—Mission 24 Midwest Honor Flight Operation Welcome Home—Sioux Falls Arena—(1201 N. West Avenue)—Sioux Falls—9:30 pm (Doors open at 7:30 pm) (CT)
- May 6—SDDVA Mini Conference—Pennington County Conference Room—(312 Kansas City St)—Rapid City—10:00 am—2:00 pm (MT)
- May 7—SDDVA Mini Conference—Post 8 American Legion—(520 S. Pierre St)—Pierre—10:00 am—2:00 pm (CT)
- May 8—Victory in Europe Day
- May 8—SDDVA Mini Conference—SD Military Heritage Alliance—(1600 W. Russell St—Heritage Room)—Sioux Falls—10:00 am—2:00 pm (CT)
- May 9—Military Spouse Appreciation Day
- May 17—Armed Forces Day
- May 20—Mission 25 Midwest Honor Flight Operation Welcome Home—Sioux Falls Arena—(1201 N. West Avenue)—Sioux Falls—9:30 pm (Doors open at 7:30 pm) (CT)
- May 26—State Offices Closed—Memorial Day
- May 26—SDDVA Memorial Day Program at State Veterans Cemetery—12:00 noon (CT)
- Jun 3—Mission 26 Midwest Honor Flight Operation Welcome Home—Hawthorne Aviation—(5815 Mitchell Street #1207)—Sioux City, IA —9:30 pm (Doors open at 7:30 pm) (CT)
- Jun 7—Rich Schild Memorial Poker Run—The Keg—Tabor—12:00 noon (CT)
- Jun 10—MWHF Day of Sweetness—Chick-Fil-A—(4005 W. 41st Street)—Sioux Falls—6:30 am—10:00 pm (CT)
- Jun 14—8th Annual MWHF Pars and Pubs—Downtown Sioux Falls—11:00 am—4:00 pm (CT)
- Jun 19—State Offices Closed—Juneteenth Day
- Jun 19-22—VFW State Convention—Ramkota—Pierre
- Jun 19-22—American Legion State Conference—Huron
- Jun 29—MWHF Honor Ride—SD Military Heritage Alliance—(1600 W. Russell Street)—Sioux Falls—1:00 pm (CT)
- Jul 4—State Offices Closed—Fourth of July
- Jul 14—Black Hills Tee it up for the Troops Tournament—Arrowhead Country Club—Rapid City
- Jul 16—South Dakota Veterans Council Meeting—Mitchell VFW Post—(215 N. Main Street)—Mitchell
- Jul 19—Veterans Information Day—BG Ernie Edwards Readiness Center—(1951 N. HWY 20)—Watertown—10:00 am—2:00 pm (CT)
- Jul 26—3rd Annual Korean War Veterans Appreciation Day—Brookings Outdoor Adventure Center—(2810 22nd Avenue S)—Brookings—9:00 am—2:00 pm (CT)

UPCOMING EVENTS

- Aug 4-5—Your Journey Matters 2025 Behavioral Health Conference—Sioux Falls Sheraton Convention Center
Aug 7—Purple Heart Day
Aug 9-13—National VFW Convention—Columbus, OH
Aug 11—Barrel House Day of Giving for Midwest Honor Flight—(4701 E. 54th Street)—Sioux Falls—11:00 am—Midnight (CT)
Aug 20—South Dakota Veterans Council Meeting—Virtual
Aug 27-Sep 1—South Dakota State Fair
Aug 28—Veterans Day at the South Dakota State Fair
Sep 1—State Offices Closed—Labor Day
Sep 9-12—SDDVA Annual CTVSO Benefit School
Sep 17—South Dakota Veterans Council Meeting—Yankton VFW Post—(209 S. Cedar Street)—Yankton
Sep 19—POW/MIA Day
Sep 21-25—NVS Accredited Representative Skill Training—Annapolis, MD
Sep 21-26—NVS Basic for New Accredited Representatives—Annapolis, MD
Oct 13—State Offices Closed—Native American Day
Oct 15—South Dakota Veterans Council Meeting—Virtual
Oct 18—4th Annual Midwest Honor Flight Fundraiser—South Dakota Military Heritage Alliance—(1600 W. Russell Street)—Sioux Falls—7:00 pm
Nov 7—MWHF Bingo—Severance Brewing—(701 N. Phillips Avenue)—Sioux Falls—7:00—9:00 pm (CT)
Nov 8—Northern Hills Veterans Appreciation Fair—Sturgis Community Center—(1401 Lazelle Street)—Sturgis—11:00 am—2:00 pm (MT)
Nov 10—Barrel House Day of Giving for the South Dakota Veterans Cemetery WAA—(4701 E. 54th Street)—Sioux Falls—11:00 am—Midnight (CT)
Nov 11—State Offices Closed—Veterans Day
Nov 19—South Dakota Veterans Council Meeting—DAV Headquarters (1519 W. 51st Street)—Sioux Falls
Nov 27—State Offices Closed—Thanksgiving
Nov 29—Side by Side MWHF Poker Run—Pilot Mikes Roadhouse—(4901 N. Ellis Road)—Sioux Falls—11:00 am (CT)
Dec 13—Wreaths Across America Wreath Laying Ceremony at South Dakota Veterans Cemetery—Sioux Falls—11:00 am (CT)
Dec 25—State Offices Closed—Christmas Day

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