



NEWSLETTER

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



SDNG PRESENTS DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARDS DURING ANNUAL DINING OUT

The South Dakota National Guard presented three awards for distinguished service to retired service members, a family, and an employer during the annual SDNG Dining Out at the Ramkota Hotel and Convention Center in Pierre on Feb. 6, 2025.

The annual event reunites SDNG soldiers, airmen, legislators, and guests from across the state for a formal evening to honor the organization's history and to recognize achievements from the past year.

The awards presented include recognition of outstanding volunteerism by a SDNG family, outstanding support from a South Dakota Reserve Component employer, and a public servant for their service and support of the SDNG mission.

The event keynote speakers, South Dakota Gov. Larry Rhoden and SDNG Adjutant General, Maj. Gen. Mark Morrell provided remarks during the event and presented the awards.

The Williamson Militiaman Award recipient is Mrs. Nicole Wajer of Sioux Falls. The Williamson Militiaman Award was established in 1987 by Maj. Gen. Ronald F. Williamson. The award recognizes an individual who exemplifies the spirit of the citizen-soldier or airman as shown by their community leadership, their support of the National Guard, and the defense of the country.

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DINING OUT (CONTINUED)

Wajer has been employed by the South Dakota Air National Guard since 2008 as the Military and Family program manager. As the manager of this program her role has been pivotal in enhancing the well-being and readiness of military personnel and their families, and she has provided leadership, insight and mentoring on key issues to over 1200 service members.

While she has also worked in tandem with the Army Family Readiness offices across the state her primary focal point has been to airmen, families, and retirees for TRICARE issues. Wajer is a pillar in her community and her public service with KUDOS, the Family Volunteer Group, her seat on the executive board for the South Dakota Military Heritage Alliance and the executive board for the Red Cross

are just a few of the supporting roles for her nomination for the Williamson Militiamen Award.

Wajer is well known and a main point of contact in Sioux Falls for SDNG Airmen and their families.

Convergent Technologies was awarded the South Dakota Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR) Pro Patria Award. The Pro Patria Award is presented annually to one South Dakota employer who provides exceptional support to national defense through leadership practices and personnel policies that support employees serving in the National Guard and Reserve.

Sgt. Tucker Nicke nominated Convergent Technologies saying “Convergent’s unwavering support during my deployment was truly remarkable. From regular care packages and heartfelt messages to maintaining constant contact and even promoting me, the Sioux Falls office went above and beyond. Their commitment to me and my success exemplifies Convergent’s dedication to its core values and to supporting veterans and reservists.”

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DINING OUT (CONTINUED)

Convergent Technologies is a company that specializes in designing, installing, and servicing comprehensive solutions in security, fire alarm, life safety, and audio-visual systems for enterprise customers.

The Pro Patria Award was accepted on behalf of Convergent by Bob Peplinski who has been in the security industry for 23 years and is the General Manager for North and South Dakota.

The Adjutant General's Family Award recipient is Sgt. 1st Class Josh and Kris Neuhardt. The award recognizes family members who support their Soldiers and Airmen in a truly exemplary manner while managing family and careers during their military career.

Josh and Kris Neuhardt have been long-standing volunteers with the Child & Youth Program. The Neuhardts were thanked for their engagement, offering valuable time, talents, and service to Military Youth and Families and for their support of the organization.

The Neuhardt family has been volunteering and supporting our Soldiers and their Families since 2009. For fiscal year 2024 the Family has volunteered a combined 393 hours in support of and providing mentorship and guidance to our Child and Youth Program. They have and continue to create a positive impact that enhances our program and foster an environment that allows our youth to develop personal connections and build upon their leadership skills.

Madilyn is the daughter of Josh and Kris Neuhardt and has been a member of the National Guard Youth Council since 2023 where she has facilitated activities, provided peer support, and served as a mentor. She displayed Military values and contributed over 257 hours of volunteer service to the National Guard Child & Youth Program.

Volunteer Spouse, Kris has played an active role as a Volunteer for the National Guard Youth Program. She is always eager to assist and lend a helping hand, to include Youth Council meetings, in which she has volunteered to transport Youth Council members across the state, as well as chaperone the event and provide mentorship to the team of 15 Youth Council Military teens.



A HEARTWARMING VISIT FROM EDGEMONT SCHOOL STUDENTS

A special group of visitors from Edgemont School brightened the day of our veterans at the Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home. Kindergarten through 2nd



-grade students brought their love of reading and infectious joy to the veterans, each choosing a resident to read to. The heart-felt connection between the young students and the veterans was evident as the children eagerly shared their favorite stories, bringing laughter and smiles to the veterans.

It was a wonderful reminder that “A book is a gift you can open again and again.” We want to express our deepest thanks to Edgemont School for sending such kind-hearted students who brought happiness and companionship to our veterans.

It was a memorable visit that will surely be cherished by all who were a part of it.



A BIG THANK YOU TO THE POST 71 LEGION RIDERS

We would like to extend our heartfelt gratitude to the Legion Riders Post 71 Hot Springs for their incredibly thoughtful gift to the veterans at the Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home. Thanks to their generosity, we now have new towel and blanket warmers for our veterans, ensuring they have an added touch of comfort.

This amazing group of individuals works tirelessly to organize and host countless fundraisers, bene-



fitting not just our veterans but also many others in the community. Their dedication and hard work make such a positive difference, and we are incredibly grateful for all they do.



Let's give a big round of applause to the Legion Riders Post 71 Hot Springs for their continued support and kindness. Thank you for making a difference in the lives of our veterans!



SOUTH DAKOTA GAME, FISH AND PARKS VETERANS PROGRAMS



SOUTH DAKOTA STATE PARKS

South Dakota has over 60 state park and recreation areas that offer a variety of activities, amenities, and events. We provide several discount programs offering opportunities for all to enjoy the parks as well as accessible campsites, fishing and hunting areas, and Trackchairs[®] because we want everyone to have outdoor adventures.

DISABLED VETERAN AND PRISONER OF WAR LIFETIME STATE PARK ENTRANCE LICENSE

The Division of Parks and Recreation offers lifetime state park entrance licenses for disabled veterans who are residents of South Dakota and are deemed 100 percent total and permanent disabled or is a “K” Award recipient. Approved applicants also receive a 50-percent discount on camping fees. The application and additional information can be found at gfp.sd.gov, search “Military Park Entrance License.”

MILITARY GROUP SPECIAL EVENTS

Park entrance licenses are not required for past and present military personnel or their family and guests if participating in an approved military group event held in a state park. This includes South Dakota veterans, members of the South Dakota National Guard and military reserve units, patients of veterans’ hospitals in South Dakota and family members, and guests attending the event. To host a military event in a state park, complete the Special Event Application at gfp.sd.gov.

TRAIL USER SERVICE FEE EXEMPTIONS

The following guests who enter the George S. Mickelson Trail area for a special event hosted by their organization, are exempt from the trail fee:

- » Members and guests of a South Dakota veteran’s organization or group
- » South Dakota National Guard or military reserve unit and guests
- » Patients currently admitted to a veteran’s hospital in South Dakota and their attendants

An approved special event permit must be obtained at least five days before the event. The park manager shall issue a special free trail user pass to participants of the special event.

CHECK OUT SOUTH DAKOTA STATE PARKS

In partnership between the Department of Education and the

Department of Game, Fish and Parks, library card holders may check out a 3-day state park vehicle pass at their local participating public library. The Check Out South Dakota State Parks library park pass is valid for entry of one passenger vehicle into any South Dakota State Park, Recreation Area, or Nature Area.

View the list of participating libraries on the GFP website. Don’t see your local library listed? Contact your library to request their participation.

PARK RX

Any Healthcare provider licensed to prescribe in South Dakota can write a Park Prescription, which is redeemable for a free, 1-day pass to any South Dakota state park or a discounted annual pass for year-round activity.

Regular outdoor activity and exercise are proven to benefit both physical and mental health. We encourage all providers to sign up for the program and get all South Dakotans to work on wellness at one of our amazing state parks.

Talk to your doctor today to see if they participate in the South Dakota Park Prescription program. If not, it’s easy for them to sign up and start writing prescriptions.

The program is being administered by the South Dakota Department of Health in partnership with South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks and SDSU Extension.

ADA CAMPING

Accessible campsites (39 parks) and camping cabins are found in most state park areas. They feature accessible picnic tables, sidewalks, electricity, close parking, and are usually located near the park’s comfort station.

Campers can make reservations for accessible campsites online or through the call center by providing their ADA/Handicap Placard ID.

HUNTING AND FISHING

A reduced fee license for eligible residents and several accessibility permits are available within the South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks so that we all have access and opportunities to the great outdoors of this state.

REDUCED FEE LICENSE

Applicants for this small game and fishing license must be a resident of South Dakota and meet at least one of the following conditions:

- » Has a total disability (limited to a wheelchair and permanently physically unable to walk);
- » Provide a copy of a letter from the VA indicating they have received the “K” award, or they receive a veteran’s allotment for a total (40 percent) disability which is deemed a service-related injury and will meet eligibility as established in state law 41-6-10.2;
- » Provide a copy of your summary of benefits letter from the Social Security Administration indicating they are receiving a 40 percent Social Security disability and verification they have served on active duty in the Armed Forces or as a member of the Armed Forces Reserve or National Guard; or
- » Provide a copy of the discharge papers showing their former status as a Prisoner of War.

A veteran may provide proof at the time of application. If you do not have the verification papers in your possession, you may contact the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs (vetaffairs.sd.gov or 605.333.6869) and have them sent to you.

CROSSBOW/DRAW-LOCK PERMIT

- » Available to any person who is incapable of using a conventional bow with a minimum draw weight of 30 pounds, due to the loss of use of one or both arms, caused by birth defect, injury, disease, or who uses a wheelchair for mobility.
- » This permit is not a license. Applicants must acquire the appropriate archery license for the season and area they are hunting.

DESIGNATED SHOOTER PERMIT

Available to any person, who:

- » Is blind/visually impaired as defined by the state of South Dakota or to any person with paralysis of all four limbs.
- » This permit is not a license. Applicants must be legally licensed for the specific season hunted.

- » The permittee must be in immediate physical presence of the designated shooter and participates in the hunt.

SHOOT FROM VEHICLE PERMIT

Authorizes any individual with a qualifying disability to lawfully shoot game animals from a stationary motor vehicle. The vehicle must be pulled over to the shoulder of the road and placed in park. Individuals can not shoot across the road. This includes big game animals such as deer, antelope, elk, and turkey, and small game animals such as grouse, pheasants, partridge, rabbits, and waterfowl. The hunter will need to obtain the required state licenses for whatever species are to be hunted.

This permit is intended for use in situations where an applicant’s physical or medical condition makes it impossible or causes severe pain or physical hardship on the applicant, when walking afield while hunting.

ANGLER ASSISTANCE PERMIT

Available to a person with a valid fishing license, or who is exempt from licensing requirements, who has a physical or developmental disability that prevents them from being able to perform any of the activities associated with fishing. The permit allows another person to assist the permitted individual while fishing, in accordance with existing regulations, and without the need to possess a valid fishing license. The permit limitations or guidelines specify what a person legally can and cannot do while in possession of an Angler Assistance Permit.

Persons applying for a temporary or permanent permit shall complete this application and must have Part C of the application form completed and signed by a licensed physician, verifying the applicant’s medical condition or disability.

LEARN MORE

For more information on these permits or to obtain an application, visit gfp.sd.gov/accessibility-permits or contact GFP at 605.223.7660 or wildinfo@state.sd.us.



2025 UPCOMING EVENTS

- Feb 14-16—American Legion Mid-Winter Conference—Oacoma
- Feb 17—State Offices Closed—President’s Day
- Mar 29—Stand Up for Women Veterans Retreat—Our Savior’s Lutheran Church ELCA—(West 33rd Street)—Sioux Falls—9:00 am—2:00 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 25-26—State DAV Convention—AmericInn—Aberdeen
- Apr 27-30—VFW Proficiency Training Conference—Annapolis, MD
- 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—SDDVA Mini Conference—SD Military Heritage Alliance—(1600 W. Russell St—Heritage Room)—Sioux Falls—10:00 am—2:00 pm (CT)
- 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—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
- Aug 4-5—Your Journey Matters 2025 Behavioral Health Conference—Sioux Falls Sheraton Convention Center
- 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)

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UPCOMING EVENTS

- 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 16—South Dakota Veterans Council Meeting—Yankton VFW Post—(209 S. Cedar Street)—Yankton
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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