



# NEWSLETTER

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



## MIDWEST HONOR FLIGHT MISSIONS 24, 25, AND 26

Midwest Honor Flight has announced that they will be flying three times this spring! Learn more information about each of their respective flights by visiting the links below:

Lyon County Riverboat Foundation Mission 24 scheduled for May 6, 2025:

<https://www.midwesthonorflight.org/mission24>.

Seed for Success Mission 25 scheduled for May 20, 2025:

<https://www.midwesthonorflight.org/mission25>.

And the first flight from SUX since 2010 scheduled for June 3, 2025:

<https://www.midwesthonorflight.org/sux>.

Visit [Midwest Honor Flight](#) to find out more about their missions, to apply for a flight, to serve as a guardian, or to attend any of their upcoming events.

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**LYON COUNTY**  
**RIVERBOAT**  
**FOUNDATION**

**MISSION 24**  
**06 MAY 2025**

**Seed FOR SUCCESS**  
*foundation*

**MISSION 25**  
**20 MAY 2025**

**FLY**  
**SUX**

**MISSION 26**  
**03 JUN 2025**

# 2025 VETERANS BENEFITS GUIDE IS NOW AVAILABLE

The United States Department of Veterans Affairs has released the “[2025 VA Federal Benefits Guide for Veterans, Dependents, Survivors, and Caregivers.](#)”

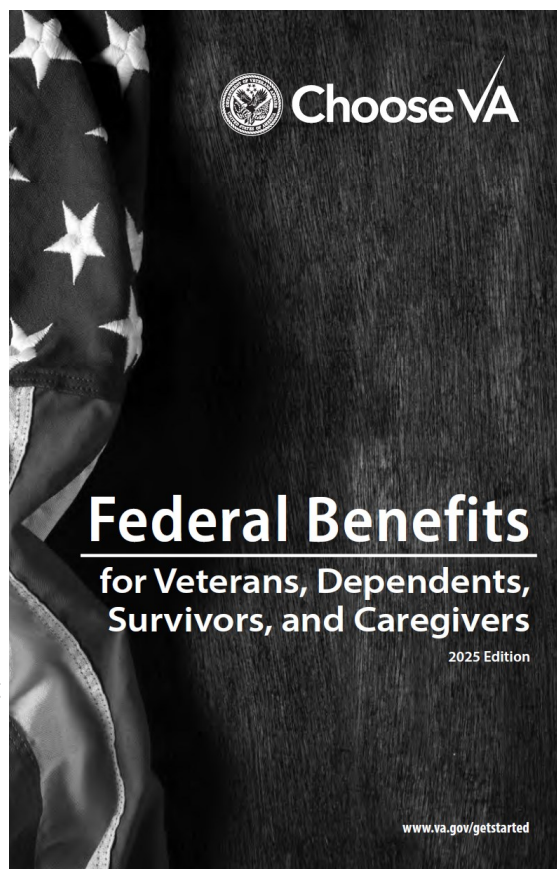
Veterans are encouraged to check out this handy reference guide to learn more. The handbook contains a comprehensive listing of VA programs, including phone numbers and websites for easy reference. The annual Federal Benefits Guide hosts a wealth of information on most VA benefits and services, including:

- Compensation.
- Life insurance.
- Pension and fiduciary services.
- Education benefits.
- Economic development and employment.
- Home loan guaranty programs and housing assistance.
- Mental health resources.

The handbook is designed to help veterans, service members and their families understand the full scope of VA resources available to them to help them make the most of life after service. It provides details on eligibility requirements for each benefit, and because VA serves different generations of veterans, it also outlines the qualification guidelines for distinct periods of service to clarify eligibility for veterans with service spanning both peace and wartime periods.

The VA Federal Benefits Guide can be accessed at the [VA's website](#), or at [SDDVA's website](#) providing instant and convenient access to the wealth of information it contains.

The information in this guide is validated by the VA as of Oct. 10, 2024. For the most up-to-date information, veterans and family members should visit [www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov), or go to the specific links provided in this publication to access information on the program that they're interested in, as regulations, payments and eligibility requirements are subject to change. You can also call SDDVA at 605-333-6869 Monday through Friday to speak with a state veterans service officer.



# MESSAGE FROM SFVAHC SYSTEM

Sioux Falls VA Health Care System shares this message—the My HealtheVet sign-in option will be removed after January 31, 2025, and DS Logon after September 30, 2025.

My HealtheVet will still be available, but this change is due to a federal mandate.

To assist with the transition, the Sioux Falls Connected Health Team will have a Modern Sign-in help table at the main entrance of the Sioux Falls VA.

For other clinics, please check with the CBOC front desk. Dates and times are weather permitting.

## VA SIGN-IN CHANGES

- The My HealtheVet user id and password will be removed after January 31st, 2025, and the DS Logon will be removed after September 30th, 2025.
- An ID.me or Login.gov account will be required to sign into VA websites starting in 2025.
- VA websites will also require multifactor authentication (MFA) as an added layer of protection for your account.



To aid Veterans and their Caregivers with secure login for MyHealtheVet, a "Help Desk" will be available at specified locations and times.

<b>January 24</b>	<b>Sioux Falls</b>	<b>8:30 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.</b>
<b>January 27</b>	<b>Sioux City</b>	<b>8:45 a.m. - 2:15 p.m.</b>
<b>January 24</b>	<b>Sioux Falls</b>	<b>8:30 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.</b>



**?**  
**FOR ANY  
QUESTIONS, CALL  
605-336-3230  
EXT: 6440**

# SDDVA MONTHLY MESSAGE

As we welcome a new year, it's a time for reflection and setting new goals, often centered around self-improvement, health, and family. However, one aspect of life that often gets overlooked is planning for the future—particularly in terms of end-of-life arrangements. For veterans and their families, this planning is critical, not just for peace of mind but for accessing the benefits that veterans have earned through their service to our country.

One essential area of planning that veterans and their families should focus on is pre-need burial benefits. These benefits are available through the United States and South Dakota Departments of Veterans Affairs and can help alleviate the financial burden of funeral and burial costs. Pre-need planning ensures that these benefits are secured in advance, making it easier for loved ones to navigate a difficult time.

Pre-need planning is the process of arranging your burial, funeral, and related services ahead of time. For veterans, the benefits available through the VA include burial in a national, state, or tribal cemetery, financial assistance for funeral expenses, and even a headstone or marker, among other services.

It's also crucial to ensure that all relevant documents are collected and stored in a safe and

accessible place. These include discharge papers (DD-214), VA identification, and proof of military service. Keeping copies of these documents in an organized manner will expedite the process when burial benefits are needed.

Veterans should discuss and record their preferred burial locations, funeral service providers, and any specific wishes for their ceremony.

Having open, ongoing discussions about these important topics will help ensure that everything is in order when the time comes. While it can be a difficult subject to discuss, having these conversations can ultimately provide peace of mind, knowing that the future is planned for in a way that aligns with both the veteran's wishes and their family's needs.

This New Year, one meaningful resolution is to act on pre-need planning for burial benefits. Veterans and their loved ones can rest assured knowing that when the time comes, they have a clear plan, and the appropriate resources and benefits are in place.

We encourage all veterans and their families to connect with their local county or tribal veterans service offices for assistance or reach out to the staff at the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs at 605-333-6869. Our team is here to help you learn more about the benefits available to you.



# PRESIDENT TRUMP APPOINTS NEW VA TEAM

The United States Department of Veterans Affairs has announced several President Trump administration political appointees.

**Chris Syrek** will serve as chief of staff. Syrek rejoins VA after serving as deputy chief of staff during the first Trump administration. In this role, he oversaw significant reforms, including the successful implementation of the VA MISSION Act, the implementation of the VA Accountability and Whistleblower Protection Act and a historic reduction in the backlog of disability and compensation claims.

**Cheryl Mason** will serve as senior advisor to the secretary. Mason rejoins the VA after serving as chair of the Board of Veterans Appeals during the first Trump administration. In this role she implemented technology and change management strategies, achieving a 95% increase in decision output and a 92% quality measure. She also played a crucial role in reducing the backlog of legacy appeals from 472,000 to 96,000 cases, an 80% decrease over five years. Mason is also a military spouse and published author.

**Lynda Davis** will serve as the chief officer with VA's Veterans Experience Office. She previously served in this role during the first Trump administration. In that role, she led the team that hard-wired VA's Customer Experience framework, increased veteran's trust, implemented department-wide VSignals surveys for real-time customer feedback, launched the White House VA Hotline and published the CX Cookbook, which has become a whole-of-government model for government application of CX.

**Karen Brazell** will serve as senior advisor to the secretary. She returns to the VA after previously serving in the Office of Enterprise Integration and as principal executive director and chief acquisition officer for VA's Office of Acquisition, Logistics, and Construction during the first Trump administration. In the latter role, she oversaw acquisition processes, contract administration and supply chain management, managing a budget over \$30 billion and supervising more than 1,700 employees.

**Curt Cashour** will serve as senior advisor to the secretary. He returns to the VA after serving as press secretary and later deputy assistant secretary for the Office of Public and Intergovernmental Affairs in the first Trump administration. In the latter role, he led all of the VA's major communication initiatives, including media relations, internal communications, and public outreach. Previously, Cashour served as communications director for the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, where he spearheaded communication efforts that helped lead to the passage of landmark VA reform legislation, the Veterans Access, Choice and Accountability Act. Cashour is an Iraq War Veteran and Bronze Star Medal recipient.

(continued)

# TRUMP APPOINTEES (CONTINUED)

**Lavin Gartland** will serve as senior advisor to the secretary and VA White House liaison. With extensive expertise in government affairs, political strategy, fundraising, and public relations, she focuses on health care, education, technology, transportation, and organizational effectiveness. Her achievements include advising states on the allocation of over \$100 million in federal COVID-19 funding, supporting those most impacted by the pandemic, and raising more than \$10 million for clients, including local, state, and federal entities, political action committees, and organizations across Georgia and nationally.

**Danielle Runyan** will serve as senior advisor to the Office of General Counsel. She comes to the VA from the First Liberty Institute in Texas where she held the position of chair for both the Military Practice Group and the Public Arena Practice Group, as well as serving as senior counsel. In this capacity, she advanced both class-action and individual religious liberty litigation within federal and state courts.

**John Bartrum** will serve as senior advisor to the assistant secretary for management. He joins the VA from Brightstar Innovations Group, where he held the position of chief executive officer. In this capacity, he provided strategic counsel and delivered public presentations on matters pertaining to public policy, health care, government finance, defense, and leadership to clients in both the public and private sectors. Additionally, he was accountable for the overall leadership, strategic vision, and daily operations of the organization.

**Morgan Ackley** will serve as director of Media Affairs for the Office of Public Affairs. She previously served as communications director for the Georgia Senate Republican Caucus, where she developed social media and communications strategies, managed platforms, and crafted press materials for the state senators. In August 2024, she became the Georgia communications director for the Donald Trump for President Campaign, focusing on building relationships with journalists and organizing media events to promote President Trump's agenda.

This VA announcements follow a [Jan. 20 White House announcement](#) naming Todd Hunter as acting secretary of Veterans Affairs.



PRESIDENTIAL ACTIONS

## **MJFSVH UPDATE**

Please join us in welcoming Kimberly Parks, or “Kim” as she prefers to be called, to the Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home team as our new nurse manager.

Kim is excited and honored to be part of a team that cares for the heroes who have given so much in service to our country. With her husband Phil having three brothers who are veterans, Kim understands deeply the value of supporting those who have served.

Though new to Hot Springs, Kim is looking forward to exploring the beauty of the Black Hills. Before moving to the area, Kim spent much of her nursing career in Texas, working in CVICU, ICU, and BioPharma.

Kim and Phil are proud parents to a sweet English Creme Golden Retriever who, despite his failure in service dog training (he’s just too social!), is the perfect fit for their family. They also have four grown children and five wonderful granddaughters, all still living in Texas.

In 2022, Kim followed the call of the Black Hills and moved here, a decision that would lead her to not only a new chapter in her career but also to a whirlwind romance with Phil. They were married in June 2023 and love spending time together in the kitchen, coming up with new recipes to try.



## **SCHUMACHER APPOINTED TO THIRD JUDICIAL COURT**

The South Dakota Supreme Court has appointed Gary W. Schumacher as a magistrate judge for the Third Judicial Circuit. Schumacher will take the bench on March 3, 2025.

Schumacher received a bachelor of science degree in civil engineering from South Dakota State University in 1987 and his juris doctor from the University of South Dakota School of Law in 1998. He practiced law at the Wilkinson & Wilkinson law firm from 1998 to the present, was Kingsbury County deputy state’s attorney from 1998 to 2008, Hamlin County state’s attorney from 2012 to 2016 and deputy state’s attorney from 2016 to the present, Kingsbury County state’s attorney from 2021 to the present, and the Kingsbury County veteran services officer from 2012 to the present.

Schumacher also served in the South Dakota Army National Guard and the U.S. Army Reserves from 1982 to 2017 with deployments to Desert Shield/Desert Storm in 1990 to 1991 and Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan in 2004 to 2005 and 2010 to 2011. He retired at the rank of colonel in 2017.

As a magistrate judge, Schumacher will hear cases in Beadle and Codington counties and handle Beadle County Drug & DUI Court.

# TOUR OF HONOR

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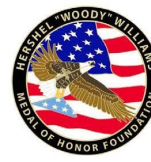


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**Sign up today at [www.tourofhonor.com](http://www.tourofhonor.com)**

**Benefiting:**







**Come Celebrate Unity and Self-Sacrifice  
As Veterans Observe The**

# **Four Chaplains Memorial Service**

**To be held at the  
American Legion Post 15  
1700 W. Russell Street  
Sioux Falls, SD**

**Sunday February 2, 2025  
at 2:00 PM**

**PUBLIC IS INVITED!**

**Sponsored by  
American Legion Post 15  
and Singing Legionnaires**

# 2025 UPCOMING EVENTS

- Feb 2—Four Chaplains Memorial Service—American Legion Post 15—(1700 W. Russell Street)—Sioux Falls—  
2:00 pm (CT)
- Feb 3-7—NVS Virtual Basic Training for New Accredited Representatives
- 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
- 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 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 6-8—SDDVA Mini Conferences
- 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
- 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 10—MWHF Day of Sweetness—Chick-Fil-A—(4005 W. 41st Street)—Sioux Falls—6:30 am—10:00 pm (CT)
- Jun 14—MWHF Pans 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
- 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)
- 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 21-25—NVS Accredited Representative Skill Training—Annapolis, MD
- Sep 21-26—NVS Basic for New Accredited Representatives—Annapolis, MD

# UPCOMING EVENTS

Oct 13—State Offices Closed—Native American Day

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 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 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



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>

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