

NEWSLETTER

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



SDDVA HOSTS WHAT'S BREWING EVENT IN IPSWICH

The South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs (SDDVA), in partnership with Edmunds County Veterans Service Officer Barb Schafer, hosted a "Coffee and Conversation" event in Ipswich. These gatherings are part of the Department's "What's Brewing" program—an outreach effort to connect directly with veterans, hear their stories, and provide updates on services and benefits available to them.

SDDVA utilizes these platforms to share updates on benefits, services, and resources available to veterans. Veterans issues have included: VA staff cuts, wait times for claims decisions, VSO roles, PACT Act, claims consultants, C&P exams, trav-

el distance for exams, and veterans transportation services.

We have additional What's Brewing events scheduled for DeSmet, Wessington Springs, and Yankton.



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SD TO DEDICATE BRIDGE IN HONOR OF PFC FRED D. LARSON

The South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs will be hosting a State Bridge Dedication Ceremony to honor U.S. Army Private First-Class Fred D. Larson.

The ceremony will be Saturday, July 12, 2025, at 2:30 p.m. (CT) at the Pollock Community Center in Pollock (916 F. Ave).

This dedication is part of the Fallen Heroes Bridge Dedication Program, which was launched during the Noem-Rhoden Administration and expanded under Governor Rhoden. In partnership with the South Dakota Departments of Military, Transportation, and Veterans Affairs, this program creates visible and enduring tributes that connect communities to their history and remind future generations of the cost of freedom.

"It is an honor to recognize the brave men and women who gave their lives for our freedom," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Jeremiah Schneider. "The Fallen



Hero Bridge Dedication program ensures their sacrifice is remembered every day. These dedications serve as lasting symbols of gratitude and respect, connecting our communities to the legacy of those who served."

The SD10 bridge over Lake Pocasse, just east of Pollock, will be dedicated as the PFC Fred D. Larson Bridge. Larson was born on June 22, 1949, and raised in Pollock, South Dakota. Larson was drafted into the U.S. Army on August 19, 1969, and deployed to Vietnam on January 15, 1970, as part of the 6th Battalion, 11th Artillery, C Battery. On April 24, 1970—his mother's 55th birthday—he was killed in action near Lang Dong Ban in Quang Ngai Province, South Vietnam, while bravely volunteering to search a suspected enemy dwelling, where he triggered a land mine.

"As we honor their memory, we also reaffirm our commitment to support veterans and their families in every way possible," continued Schneider. "Through these bridges, their stories remain a vital part of South Dakota's heritage and a constant reminder of the freedoms we cherish."

A DAY ON THE LAKE FOR OUR VETERANS

Veterans at the Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home recently enjoyed a well-deserved day out on the lake, casting their lines and soaking up the fresh air and sunshine. Spending time outdoors, sharing stories, and reeling in a few good catches was good for the soul and a reminder of the simple joys of nature.

A big thank you goes out to the dedicated staff who made this special outing possible. Their planning and support help create moments that lift spirits and bring smiles to the faces of our veterans.





SGT KATIE CRAMER RECOGNIZED

The 147th Army Band is proud to recognize Sgt. Katie Cramer for receiving the Military Outstanding Volunteer Service Medal, an honor reserved for service members whose volunteer efforts make a substantial, sustained impact in their communities.

Sgt. Cramer was selected for this rare award due to her continued leadership in organizing and delivering essential services to vulnerable populations in La Crosse, Wisconsin, and beyond. From 2020 to 2023, she led multiple large-scale community outreach efforts, including founding Hearts in the Park, an initiative that raised thousands of dollars and mobilized local resources to support individuals experiencing homelessness. Her efforts have connected people with critical medical care, housing assistance, behavioral health support, and basic necessities.

In addition to coordinating multiple community events, Sgt.
Cramer's commitment to service extended to the national stage. In 2022, she was flown to Indianapo-



lis, Indiana to speak at the 50th Annual Jefferson Awards ceremony, where she represented the state of Wisconsin and was honored for her public service. While there, she helped package nearly 3,000 meals and organized essential supplies to provide support during the national baby formula shortage.

Outside of her military service, Sgt. Cramer is a Registered Nurse whose experiences at the bedside have deeply shaped her desire to serve. Inspired by her patients, she is currently pursuing a Doctor of Nursing Practice in Nurse Anesthesia through Mayo Clinic, furthering her ability to care for those in need at the highest clinical level.

Sgt. Cramer's dedication to selfless service and community advocacy exemplifies the highest values of the Army. Her work is a powerful reminder of the impact one Soldier can have, both in Uniform and in the Civilian world.

CONNECTING WITH VETERANS IN CHAMBERLAIN

SDDVA Field Service Officer Kevin
Bowen and County
Veterans Service
Officer Tim Thomas
(serving Brule, Buffalo, Jones, and Lyman
Counties) hosted a
booth last Friday,
June 27, at River City
Friday Nights in
Chamberlain.

Set up right on Chamberlain's main street, the event offered visitors food and clothing vendors, live music, and games for all ages.





Kevin and Tim had the opportunity to visit with several veterans who stopped by to talk about benefits, share their stories, or express their gratitude for help with claims.

Many veterans took the time to compliment Tim on the great work he's doing for local veterans and their families — a true testament to the dedication of our field and county service officers across South Dakota.

HOLIDAY MESSAGE FROM SECRETARY SCHNEIDER

As Independence Day approaches, I am filled with deep gratitude and pride for the remarkable men and women who have served and continue to serve our great nation. The Fourth of July is a time when we come together as Americans to celebrate the birth of our country, reflect on our shared values, and honor the sacrifices that have secured our freedom. Here in South Dakota, we hold a special place in our hearts for our veterans and their families, whose unwavering dedication has shaped the very fabric of our society.

The story of America is one of courage, resilience, and hope. From the earliest days of our



nation, brave individuals have stepped forward to defend the principles of liberty and justice. Our veterans—past and present—are the living embodiment of these ideals. They have answered the call to serve, often at great personal cost, so that we may enjoy the blessings of freedom and independence. Their service reminds us that the rights we celebrate on the Fourth of July were hard-won and must never be taken for granted.

On this day of national celebration, I encourage all South Dakotans to pause and reflect on the true meaning of Independence Day. As we gather for parades, fireworks, and family barbecues, let us remember the men and women in uniform who have stood watch over our nation, both at home and abroad. Let us honor the families who have supported them, and the communities that have welcomed them home. Their sacrifices are the foundation upon which our freedoms rest.

To our veterans, I offer my deepest thanks. Your courage, commitment, and sense of duty inspire us all. You have given so much to ensure that the promise of

America endures for future generations. To the families of those who serve, your strength and support are equally vital, and we are forever grateful for your sacrifices.

As Secretary of the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs, I am committed to ensuring that our veterans receive the respect, care, and opportunities they have so rightfully earned. We are here to serve you, just as you have served our country. Together, let us continue to build a community where all veterans feel valued, supported, and empowered.

This Independence Day, may we come together in unity, gratitude, and hope. Let us celebrate the freedoms we cherish, honor those who have defended them, and look forward to a future filled with peace, opportunity, and promise. Happy Fourth of July, South Dakota. God bless our veterans, their families, and the United States of America.

HOLIDAY MESSAGE FROM MAJ. GEN. MORRELL

As we approach the Fourth of July, we pause not just to enjoy the fireworks, parades, and barbecues, but to reflect on the enduring spirit that defines our nation and our service. Nearly 250 years ago, a group of farmers, tradesmen, and ordinary citizens stood together and declared that they believed in something extraordinary; liberty, justice, and a government by the people. Their fight began with militias, the very roots of today's National Guard. We are

the direct descendants of those who believed that freedom was a shared responsibility.

From Lexington and Concord to wildfires and floods, and deployments all over the world, our National Guard stands in the gap between tyranny and liberty, not for glory or personal gain, but for each other, our families and for the communities we call home, upholding the same ideals that lit the first sparks of American independence.

We carry forward a CULTURE of selfless service. Our MISSION is rapidly evolving, but our commitment remains the same. We are a COMMUNITY, bound not just by uniforms, but by values, purpose, and the people we serve alongside.

This week, take a moment to celebrate what makes this country worth defending. Laugh with your family. Cheer on your neighbors. Be grateful for the freedoms we enjoy and for the generations that have



defended it. And know that you are part of that proud legacy.

Wishing you and your families a safe and joyful Independence Day."

HONORING OUR UNACCOMPANIED VETERANS

The Black Hills National Cemetery will hold its quarterly Military Honors Ceremony for Unaccompanied veterans on Monday, July 7, 2025, at 9:00 a.m. MDT at the cemetery's Committal Shelter near the main flagpole (20901 Pleasant Valley Driver) in Sturgis.

This special ceremony ensures that veterans interred at the cemetery over the past quarter, who did not receive Military Funeral Honors at the time of burial, are properly honored for their service and sacrifice. The U.S. Army National Guard and the Sturgis Volunteer Honor Guard Post 33 will perform the honors.

Community members, veterans, and their families are invited to attend and pay tribute to these heroes.

Earlier this week, on Wednesday, July 2, the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs laid to rest six unaccompanied veterans at the South Dakota Veterans Cemetery in Sioux Falls, ensuring they, too, received the honor and respect they earned through their service.







Presented by the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs

Join us for coffee, camaraderie, and conversation!

- Connect with fellow Veterans
- Ask questions about benefits and services
- Learn about local support and resources
- Share your story and voice your concerns
- Wednesday, July 9, 2025
- 10:00 A.M.
- **Q** El Riad Shrine, 510 S Phillips Ave, Sioux Falls, SD 57104

Complimentary coffee and refreshments provided Open to all Veterans and family members

Voices for Veterans — Because Your Story Matters

For more info, contact;
Dave Denson-(605) 940-9622
dave.denson@state.sd.us



Veterans,
See
What's
Brewing!



We invite all veterans to join us for a "Veterans Coffee and Networking."

Free coffee and treats while you chat with new and old friends alike and learn more about veterans benefits from the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs.



Friday—July 11, 2025
10:00 am (MT)
Harding County Court House Library
(408 Ramsland Street—Buffalo)



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!

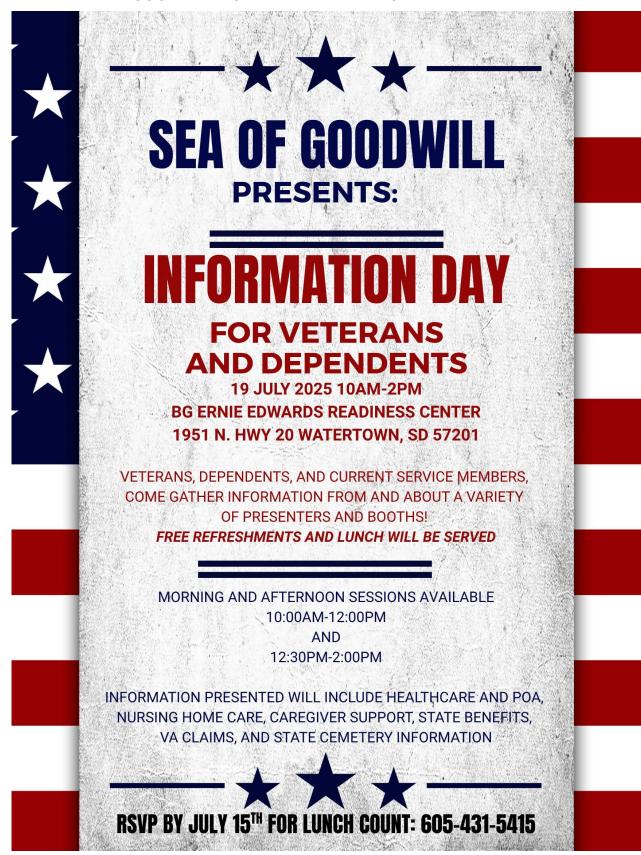
Tickets Available at the Door!

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





UPCOMING EVENTS

- Jul 4—State Offices Closed—Fourth of July
- Jul 9—SDDVA What's Brewing—El Riad Shrine (510 S. Phillips Avenue)—Sioux Falls—10:00 am (CT)
- Jul 11—SDDVA What's Brewing—Harding County Courthouse (408 Ransland Street)—Buffalo—10:00 am (MT)
- Jul 12—FHBD—PFC Fred Larson—Community Center (916 F. Avenue)—Pollock—2:30 pm (CT)
- Jul 13—SDNG SAPR 5K—Memorial Park—Rapid City—10:00 am (MT)
- Jul 14—Black Hills Tee it up for the Troops Tournament—Arrowhead Country Club—Rapid City
- Jul 16—SD Veterans Council Meeting—Mitchell VFW Post—(215 N. Main Street)—Mitchell—1:00 pm (CT)
- Jul 18—FHBD—SP4 Thomas Zeigler—American Legion Post 169 (133 W. 3rd Street)—Winner—2:00 pm (CT)
- 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)
- Jul 26—FHBD—S/SGT Ervin Rieck—Community Hall (11 W. Main Street)—Warner—2:00 pm (CT)
- Jul 28—SDDVA What's Brewing—The Ward's Store—(127 Calumet Avenue SE)—De Smet—10:00 am (CT)
- Jul 29—SDDVA What's Brewing—VFW Post 791—(209 Cedar Street)—Yankton—10:00 am (CT)
- Jul 30—Rosebud Sioux Tribe Veterans Stand Down—Sinte Gleska Multipurpose Building—(White Horse Blvd.)—Antelope—9:00 am—2:00 pm (CT)
- Jul 30—SDDVA What's Brewing—Jerauld County Court House Day Room—(205 Wallace Avenue S)—Wessington Springs—10:00 am (CT)
- Aug 1—FHBD—PFC Mark Shields—Community Center—(1021 Central Circle)—Fort Thompson—1:00 pm (CT)
- Aug 2—FHBD—PFC Ronald Dexter—4-H Grounds (517 Flynn Drive)—Milbank—11:00 am (CT)
- Aug 4-5—Your Journey Matters 2025 Behavioral Health Conference—Sioux Falls Sheraton Convention Center
- Aug 7—Purple Heart Day
- Aug 9—FHBD—1LT Larry Barbee—American Legion Post 92—(612 Main Street)—Redfield—2:00 pm (CT)
- 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
- Aug 13—DAV Golf Tournament—Prairie Green Golf Course—Sioux Falls
- Aug 13—Sioux Falls VA Show and Shine Car Show—Sioux Falls VA—(2501 W. 22nd Street)—5:00—8:00 pm (CT)
- Aug 14—FHBD—CPL Henry Kluess—VFW Post 2118—(520 Main Avenue)—Brookings—10:00 am (CT)
- Aug 20—South Dakota Veterans Council Meeting—Virtual—1:00 pm (CT)
- Aug 21—Cheyenne River Veterans Stand Down—Eagle Butte Vet Center Building—Eagle Butte—10:00 am (MT)
- Aug 27-Sep 1—South Dakota State Fair
- Aug 28—Veterans Day at the South Dakota State Fair
- Aug 30—FHBD—SP5 Richard Miller—Silo Market—(120 Main Street)—Plankinton—1:00 pm (CT)
- Sep 1—State Offices Closed—Labor Day
- Sep 9-12—SDDVA Annual CTVSO Benefit School
- Sep 16—SD Veterans Council Meeting—Yankton VFW Post—(209 S. Cedar Street)—Yankton—1:00 pm (CT)
- Sep 17—FHBD—PVT Elmer Albertson—Harding County School—(12474 Tipperary Street)—Buffalo—2:30 pm (MT)
- Sep 18—FHBD—PFC Peter Ommen—(243 Central Main Street)—Central City—1:00 pm (MT)
- Sep 19—POW/MIA Day
- Sep 20—FHBD—PVT Frank Holcombe—American Legion Post 43—(921 Main Street)—Centerville—10:00 am (CT)

UPCOMING EVENTS

- Sep 23—Midwest Honor Flight Mission 27
- Sep 25—Rapid City Veterans Stand Down—DoubleTree by Hilton Rapid City Downtown Convention Center— (505 N. 5th Street)—Rapid City—10:00 am (MT)
- Oct 3—FHBD—SGT Dirk Abbas—Event Center—(1203 3rd Street)—Britton—2:00 pm (CT)
- Oct 7—Midwest Honor Flight Mission 28
- Oct 8—FHBD—PVT Leroy Goosen—(location and time to be determined)
- Oct 13—State Offices Closed—Native American Day
- Oct 15—SD Veterans Council Meeting—Virtual—1:00 pm (CT)
- Oct 18—Derr Gala—Monument Lacroix Fall—Rapid City—5:00 pm (MT)
- Oct 18—4th Annual Midwest Honor Flight Fundraiser—South Dakota Military Heritage Alliance—(1600 W. Russell Street)—Sioux Falls—7:00 pm (CT)
- 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 8—Day County Veterans Banquet—Webster Armory—5:00 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 11—Regional FHBD—SD Military Heritage Alliance—(1600 W. Russell Street)—Sioux Falls—2:00 pm (CT)
- Nov 19—SD Veterans Council Meeting—DAV Headquarters (1519 W. 51st Street)—Sioux Falls—9:00 am (CT)
- 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 2—Governor's Budget Address—SD State Capitol—1:00 pm (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

2026

- Jan 13—South Dakota Legislative Session Opens
- Jan 13—Governor's State of the State Address—SD State Capitol—1:00 pm (CT)
- Jan 14—SD Veterans Council Meeting—American Legion Post 8—(520 S. Pierre Street)—Pierre—2:00 pm (CT)
- Jan 14—South Dakota Veterans Council Legislative Reception—American Legion Post 8—(520 S. Pierre Street)— Pierre—5:30 pm—7:30 pm (CT)
- June 10-14—State VFW Convention—Mitchell
- July 18-19—Sioux Falls Air Show

Phone: 605-773-8242

Sep 15-18—SDDVA Annual CTVSO Benefit School

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