



# NEWSLETTER

**SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS**

**SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF THE MILITARY**



## NATIONAL NURSES WEEK

This week is National Nurses Week and it affords us a great opportunity to extend our deepest gratitude and heartfelt thanks to the incredible nursing staff at the Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home.

Every day, our nurses embody the spirit of compassion, dedication, and service as they care for the veterans who have selflessly served our nation. Their tireless work ensures that our residents receive not only the best in medical care, but also the dignity, respect, and personal attention they so richly deserve.

From the early morning hours to the late-night shifts, our nurses are the backbone of this home — offering comfort during difficult times, celebrating small and big victories, and standing by our veterans with unwavering commitment.

To all our RNs, LPNs, CNAs, and nursing aides: thank you for your professionalism, your empathy, and your enduring passion for caring for those who once wore the uniform. You make a difference every single day, and your work does not go unnoticed.

During this National Nurses Week, we honor you, we celebrate you, and we thank you for all you do for our veterans and their families. You are true heroes in scrubs, and we are proud to have you as part of the Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home family.

Let's all take a moment this week to show our appreciation — whether with a kind word, a note of thanks, or a simple smile — for the outstanding nursing staff who make this home a place of care, compassion, and community.

Thank you, nurses, for your service to those who served.

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# VA SURVIVOR BENEFIT REFORMS

The United States Department of Veterans Affairs announced a three-pronged approach to eliminate barriers and streamline the process for how eligible survivors and dependents of deceased veterans and servicemembers apply for and receive VA benefits and services.

Specific improvements include:

- Starting this month, the VA's Office of Survivors Assistance will be moved from the Veterans Benefits Administration to the Office of the VA Secretary. In 2021, the Biden administration moved OSA from the Office of the VA Secretary to the Veterans Benefits Administration, creating a siloed system at odds with the intent of the Veterans' Benefits Improvement Act of 2008. Starting this month, the VA will reverse this decision and move OSA to the Office of the VA Secretary, where a staff of five full-time employees will advise the Secretary on all matters related to the policies, programs and legislative issues affecting survivors and dependents.
- Starting this month, the VA will create a "white-glove" survivor outreach team to guide and assist eligible survivors throughout their Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) claims process. The VA notes that under previous administrations, there were gaps in the survivor claims system and no defined outreach process for VA employees to gather information from survivors navigating the benefit process. The "White-Glove" Survivor Outreach Team will begin operations in May 2025 and consist of a team based out of the Philadelphia VA Regional Benefit Office. This team will receive specialized training and guide and assist eligible survivors throughout every step of the DIC claims process with the goal of getting to "yes" on DIC claims decisions for eligible survivors.
- Starting immediately, the VA will begin work to identify areas where automation can be used to make the DIC claims process easier to navigate for survivors. The VA now automates more than 1,000 DIC claims payments or adjustments per day and is in the process of ongoing enhancements to increase automation that will expedite survivors' claims and improve their experience. The VA will also be identifying additional areas where automation can be used to make all benefits delivery processes easier to navigate for eligible surviving dependents.

"The last thing survivors need in their time of grief is frustrating red tape and bureaucracy. That's why we are creating a better system to more quickly and effectively provide survivors the services, support and compassion they've earned," said VA Secretary Doug Collins.

# MIDWEST HONOR FLIGHT MISSION 24

On Mission 24 of the Midwest Honor Flight, a group of veterans took an unforgettable journey of remembrance, reflection, and honor — thanks to the generous sponsorship of the Lyon County Riverboat Foundation.

Among the dedicated team of guardians accompanying the veterans were South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs (SDDVA) Field Service Officer Will Huffmon and Claims Examiner Misty Litwiller, who were proud to serve and support these honored heroes.

The Midwest Honor Flight provides veterans, especially those from WWII, Korea, and Vietnam, with an all-expenses-paid trip to Washington, D.C. to visit the memorials built in their honor. Mission 24 was no exception, delivering an experience filled with emotion, gratitude, and camaraderie.

Will and Misty described the trip as a “*great honor*” and were moved by the chance to assist veterans on this meaningful excursion. The day was packed with special moments — from solemn visits at the memorials to heartfelt welcomes from supporters and family upon return.

SDDVA is proud to have representatives like Will and Misty serving not only in their day-to-day roles but also in these once-in-a-lifetime opportunities to give back to those who have served our country.

To all the veterans of Mission 24: thank you for your service and sacrifice. We are honored to stand beside you.



# SD BEHAVIORAL HEALTH CONFERENCE

The South Dakota Department of Social Services, Division of Behavioral Health, has announced that registration is now open for the First Annual “Your Journey Matters” Conference — a premier event dedicated to advancing behavioral health in our communities.

This exciting conference will feature a lineup of renowned speakers, including:

- Dr. Kim Gorgens – board-professor, certified rehabilitation psychologist, and expert in traumatic brain injuries
- Dr. David Jobes – professor, clinician, and internationally recognized expert in suicidology
- Jamie Tworkowski – New York Times bestselling author and founder of “To Write Love on Her Arms”.

In addition, attendees will benefit from expert presentations on prevention, treatment, recovery supports, burnout, compassion fatigue, and the unique challenges faced by at-risk populations in South Dakota when it comes to behavioral health.

Registration is open now through July 21 or until capacity is reached. [Click here to register now!](#)

For additional details, visit: <https://sdbehavioralhealth.gov/conference>. Share this opportunity with your colleagues!





# **STANDING ROCK SIOUX TRIBE VETERANS STAND DOWN**

**THURSDAY, MAY 22, 2025**

**GRAND RIVER CASINO & RESORT**

**1000 HRS - 1400 HRS  
(10AM - 2PM CST)**

**LUNCH WILL BE PROVIDED**

**RESOURCE FAIR AND OUTREACH EVENT FOR VETERANS.**

**VA PROGRAMS AND VA BENEFITS STAFF  
WILL BE AVAILABLE TO ANSWER QUESTIONS.**

**PLEASE BRING A COPY OF YOUR DD FORM 214, DEPENDENT  
INFORMATION AND IDENTIFICATION TO THE EVENT.  
DOCUMENTATION IS NEEDED SO  
WE CAN FULLY SERVE YOU AND YOUR NEEDS.**

## **SERVICES OFFERED**

**CLOTHING  
LEGAL ASSISTANCE  
READJUSTMENT COUNSELING**

**EMPLOYMENT SERVICES  
VA BENEFITS  
HOUSING REFERRALS**

**MUCH MORE!**

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# VETERANS, SEE WHAT'S BREWING!

The South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs (SDDVA), in partnership with our county veterans service officers, recently hosted "Coffee and Conversation" events in Pierre and Sturgis. 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.

All veterans are encouraged to attend. For those unable to make it, the SDDVA remains just

a call or click away. Reach the Department at 605.333.6869 or locate their county or tribal Veterans Service Officer at: <https://vetaffairs.sd.gov/veteransserviceofficers/locatevso.aspx>

Upcoming events are as follows:

May 14	American Legion Post 4	Mobridge	1:00 pm (CT)
May 16	American Legion Post 311	Piedmont	10:00 am (MT)
May 21	Kool Beans Coffee	Brookings	11:00 am (CT)
May 22	Community Club	Chamberlain	1:00 pm (CT)
May 29	James Valley Community Center	Mitchell	10:00 am (CT)
June 13	BHSU Joy Center	Spearfish	1:00 pm (MT)
June 26	FEM Electric	Ipswich	1:00 pm (CT)
July 11	Harding County Courthouse	Buffalo	10:00 am (MT)





# Sales or Property Tax Refund for Senior Citizens & Citizens with Disabilities

**Deadline to  
Apply:  
July 1st**



**Apply here:**

<https://sddor.seamlessdocs.com/f/2050>

For questions about eligibility requirements and income limitations, or to get a paper copy of the application, please call: 1 (800) 829-9188 (Ext. 1) or visit our website at:

<https://dor.sd.gov/individuals/taxes/property-tax/relief-programs/>



# ARTIST DONATES PRINTS TO STATE VETERANS HOME

We are proud to announce that artist Galen Wallum, a resident at the Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home, has generously donated two of his Vietnam-themed artwork pieces to the Home. These powerful works pay tribute to the courage, sacrifice, and enduring stories of our Vietnam Veterans.

Galen's heartfelt donation is more than just art — it's a lasting reminder of the bravery of those who served, and a meaningful gesture of respect for our heroes. His pieces will now grace the halls of the Veterans Home, offering daily inspiration and recognition to the residents who understand their meaning best.

Thank you, Galen, for using your remarkable talent to honor those who gave so much. Your contribution ensures that the stories and sacrifices of Vietnam Veterans will continue to be remembered and appreciated for years to come.





# DAY COUNTY VETERANS BUILD FISHING RODS

Fifteen Day County veterans recently gathered for a unique and hands-on experience at the “Veterans: Build Your Own Fishing Rod” class, hosted by the Day County Veterans Service Office (VSO). Thanks to a partnership with South Dakota Game, Fish & Parks, five skilled instructors guided the veterans through the process of crafting their own fishing rods — with all materials and equipment provided free of charge.

Day County VSO Jeff Nelson shared, “This event is one of our Day County Veteran outreach programs that helps us live up to our motto: ‘Day County Family of Veterans.’ Our outreach efforts aim to boost our office’s visibility in the local veteran community, with the ultimate goal of bringing more veterans through our doors so we can connect them with potential benefits, resources, and healthcare solutions. Plus, it gives us a chance to get to know our veterans — and for them to get to know each other — while enjoying camaraderie and esprit de corps.”

The class was so popular that, unfortunately, some interested veterans had to be turned away due to the 15-person cap. Nelson noted, “With this much interest, we plan on hosting the event annually to give more of our vets the chance to participate.”

Looking ahead, future classes will offer veterans even more customization options, allowing them to choose the type of fishing rod they want to build — whether it’s a spinning rod, baitcasting rod, or ice fishing rod — as well as selecting their preferred rod color, action, and power of the graphite blank.



Nelson added, “It’s always awesome when we can bring our veterans together, and they’re already asking when we’re going to do it again!”

This successful event not only provided veterans with a new skill and a custom-made fishing rod but also strengthened the bonds within the Day County veteran community — a true win for everyone involved.

HOT SPRINGS CHAMBER OF COMMERCE PRESENTS

# Salute TO VALOR

*Join us  
as we Remember  
those whose Sacrifice  
gives us our  
Freedom*

THE VETERANS TOWN • HOT SPRINGS, SD

**MAY 23-26, 2025**

**FRI** - Wine Walk & Play • 4:30-7pm  
**FREE Live Music** • 8pm

**SAT** - **FREE Admission at Pioneer Museum** • 9am-5pm  
**Patriotic Parade** • 1pm  
**FREE Movie (Top Gun)** • 2pm  
**Car Show** • 2-5pm  
**Rocky Mountain Oyster Feed** • 6pm  
**FREE Live Music** • 7:30pm

**SUN** - **Community Picnic** • 11am-1pm  
**Military Trivia** • 5-7pm  
**FREE Live Music** • 7pm

**MON** - **Stars, Stripes & Steps** • 8-11am  
**Memorial Program at the  
State Veterans Home** • 10-11:30am

**ACTIVITIES ALL WEEKEND LONG!**

FOR MORE INFORMATION: Scan the QR Code or visit the event page  
at <https://hotsprings-sd.com/events/salute-to-valor-festival>



# SALUTE TO VALOR EVENTS

## Salute to Valor Festival Schedule of Events

May 23 – 26, 2025

### FRIDAY, MAY 23, 2025

- |              |   |
|--------------|---|
| 1:30 pm      | Place Flags at State Veterans Home Cemetery – Michael J Fitzmaurice<br>South Dakota Veterans Home and volunteers (meet at cemetery)   |
| 4:30 to 7 pm | Wine Walk and Play—A Wall of Honor will be up throughout Memorial Week-<br>end located in downtown Hot Springs. Attendees are encouraged to bring lami-<br>nated pictures of their Active-Duty Military and Veterans or tie on a ribbon<br>with their name (Ribbons and markers provided during the weekend). |
| 8 pm         | 309'ers Band at 309 General Restaurant and Bar  |

### SATURDAY, MAY 24, 2025

- |              |  |
|--------------|--|
| 9 a.m.       | Place Flags at Hot Springs National Cemetery – American Legion Auxiliary<br>and volunteers (meet at cemetery – Hot Springs VA Medical Center)<br>Place Flags at Evergreen Cemetery – Sons of American Legion and volunteers<br>(meet at cemetery – Evans St and Cemetery Rd) |
| 9 am to 5 pm | Military Days at Fall River Pioneer Museum (Free – Donations accepted)   |
| 1 pm         | Salute to Valor Parade (Start behind Evans Plunge – access via Cold Brook Ave<br>off Battle Mountain Ave)  |
| 2 to 5 pm    | Car Show and Shine supported by Southern Hills Drag Racing   |
| 2 pm         | Top Gun will be showing at Hot Springs Theatre – Free Admission  |
| 6 pm         | Rocky Mountain Oyster Feed – American Legion   |
| 7:30 pm      | Music from the Williams and Wright Experience Band – American Legion   |

### SUNDAY, MAY 25, 2025

- |               |  |
|---------------|--|
| 10 am to 4 pm | Games/Activities – Centennial Park                           |
| 11 am to 1 pm | Patriotic Picnic - Centennial Park                           |
| 5 to 7 pm     | Military Trivia - 309 General Restaurant and Bar             |
| 7 to 9 pm     | Music from Bobby Joe Holman - 309 General Restaurant and Bar |

### MONDAY, MAY 26, 2025 – MEMORIAL DAY

- |                |   |
|----------------|---|
| 8 to 11 am     | Stars, Stripes, and Steps Climb (5K and 10K)  |
| 10 to 11:30 am | Memorial Day Veteran's Program – Michael J Fitzmaurice South Dakota Vet-<br>erans Home (At Mueller Center only IF inclement weather.) |





*A Day to Remember and Honor  
SDDVA Memorial Day Program  
South Dakota Veterans Cemetery  
Monday—May 26, 2025*

*12:00 Noon*



*25965 477th Avenue  
Sioux Falls*

# UPCOMING EVENTS

May 9—Military Spouse Appreciation Day  
May 14—SDDVA What's Brewing—American Legion Post 4 (120 S. Main Street)—Mobridge—1:00 pm (CT)  
May 16—SDDVA What's Brewing—American Legion Post 311 (101 Pine Street)—Piedmont—10:00 am (MT)  
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 21—SDDVA What's Brewing—Kool Beans Coffee (225 Main Avenue)—Brookings—11:00 am (CT)  
May 22—Standing Rock Sioux Tribe Veterans Stand Down—Grand River Casino—Mobridge—10:00am (CT)  
May 22—SDDVA What's Brewing—Community Club (112 N. Main Street)—Chamberlain—1:00 pm (CT)  
May 26—State Offices Closed—Memorial Day  
May 26—SDDVA Memorial Day Program at State Veterans Cemetery—12:00 noon (CT)  
May 29—SDDVA What's Brewing—James Valley Community Center (300 W. 1st Avenue)—Mitchell—10:00 am (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 6—Pine Ridge Veterans Stand Down—Pine Ridge Pow Wow Grounds—10:00am (MT)  
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 13—SDDVA What's Brewing—BHSU Joy Center (1351 S. Joe Street)—Spearfish—1:00 pm (MT)  
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 26—SDDVA What's Brewing—FEM Electric (800 5th Avenue)—Ipswich—1:00 pm (CT)  
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 11—SDDVA What's Brewing—Harding County Courthouse (408 Ransland Street)—Buffalo—10:00 pm (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 19—Veterans Information Day—BG Ernie Edwards Readiness Center—(1951 N. HWY 20)—Watertown—10:00 am—2:00 pm (CT)  
Jul 24—Rosebud Sioux Tribe Veterans Stand Down—Sinte Gleska Multipurpose Building—Antelope—10:00am (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)  
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—1:00 pm (CT)  
Aug 21—Cheyenne River Veterans Stand Down—Eagle Butte Vet Center Building—Eagle Butte—10:00am (MT)  
Aug 27-Sep 1—South Dakota State Fair  
Aug 28—Veterans Day at the South Dakota State Fair

(continued)

# UPCOMING EVENTS

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 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  
Sep 25—Rapid City Veterans Stand Down—DoubleTree by Hilton Rapid City Downtown Convention Center—  
(505 N. 5th Street)—Rapid City—10:00am (MT)  
Oct 13—State Offices Closed—Native American Day  
Oct 15—SD Veterans Council Meeting—Virtual—1:00 pm (CT)  
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—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—South Dakota 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)  
Sep 15-18—SDDVA Annual CTVSO Benefit School

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