



South Dakota Department of the Military  
 South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs



## STATE VETERANS HOME EXCEEDING INSPECTIONS

The Regional Office of the Department of Health recently completed an on-site review/survey of the Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home. This survey is done to verify the facility is in compliance with federal participation requirements for nursing homes participating in the Medicare and/or Medicaid programs.

Brad Richardson, superintendent for the State Veterans Home was very pleased with the results — zero deficiencies.

“This was a collaborative effort amongst team mates, where they supported and completed one another,” said Richardson. “We bonded together and supported one another, as alone we can do so little however, jointly we can overcome mountains.”

Richardson said, “Stand Proud South Dakota, this group of dedicated professionals went well above the established VA standards to ensure our veterans have a HOME they can be proud of.”

In March, the United States Department of Veterans Affairs conducted their review and zero deficiencies were discovered as well

“What a team we have cultivated,” said SDDVA Secretary Larry Zimmerman. “They work to achieve the best in everything!”



### *Inside this issue:*

Civil War Veteran Honored	2
Sen. Rounds Introduces PTSD Legislation	2
139th Sharpens Warfighter Skills	3
SDDVA Outreach	4
Sen. Thune Introduces Veterans COLA Legislation	5
Black Hills Job Fair	6
SDNG Names NCO and Soldier of the Year	7
SDNG Warrant Officer of the Year	8
SDNG Lieutenant of the Year	9
Upcoming Events	10



## 139TH SOLDIERS SHARPEN WARFIGHTER SKILLS

Members of the South Dakota Army National Guard's 139th Brigade Support Battalion completed a spring field training exercise at Camp Ripley, March 31-April 3, where they trained on basic soldier skills and conducted weapons qualification.

About 320 soldiers from the battalion participated in the training, which included the Headquarters Company and Companies A and B of the 139th, the 115th Signal Company and 235th Military Police Company.

The event gave junior and senior soldiers a chance to gain experience and sharpen their warfighting skills with assigned weapons systems and confidence-building courses.

The weapons training included the M2 .50 caliber machine gun, MK19 grenade launcher, M240B machine gun and M16 rifle. The soldiers sent rounds down range from foxholes to Humvee mounted positions and engaged targets to hone their marksmanship skills.

In addition to the weapons training, the soldiers negotiated several confidence-building courses to test their operating, communication and team work skills. This included rappelling down a 40 ft. tower, applying their problem solving skills during the Leader Reaction Course, clearing buildings at the Military Operations in Urban Terrain site, and pushing their physical limits on the obstacle course.

The training exercise was not only beneficial for the unit members – unit recruiters brought in prospective recruits to watch and participate in the training. The exercise gave them a chance to see the quality, real-world training soldiers conduct.

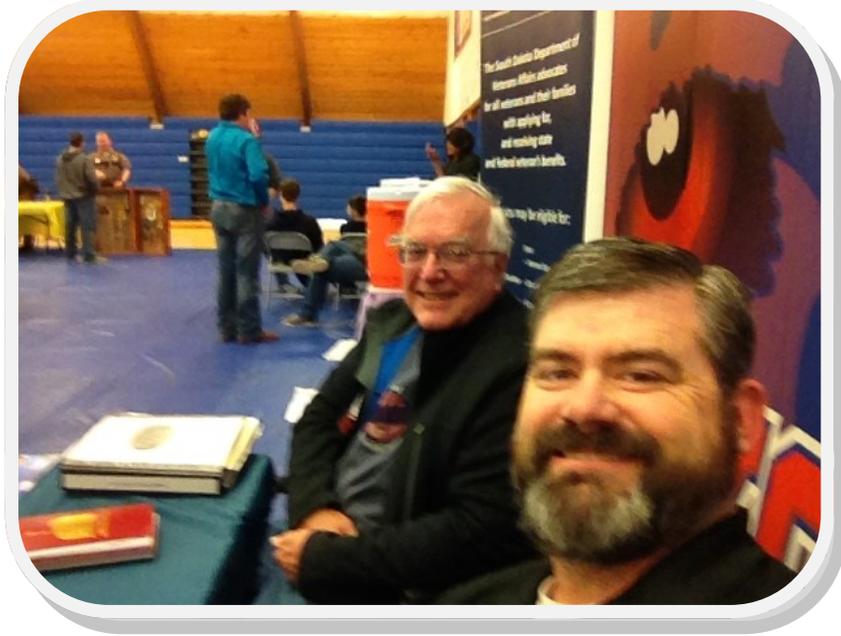


# BOWEN ESCALATES OUTREACH EVENTS

SDDVA Field Officer Kevin Bowen has had a very busy month with outreach events. He started with Stand Downs in Mission and Kyle, followed by a funeral/estate planning meeting in Platte, a health fair in Jones County, and a veterans benefit briefing at Dakota Wesleyan University.

These outreach events afford the Department to work with our County and Tribal Veterans Service Officers, our veterans, and their families.

Along the way, Bowen also had the opportunity to present some of the Korean Ambassador Peace Medals.



# THUNE, SCHATZ INTRODUCE BILL TO MAKE ANNUAL VETERAN COLA AUTOMATIC

U.S. Sens. John Thune (R-S.D.) and Brian Schatz (D-Hawai'i) introduced the Veterans' Disability Compensation Automatic Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) Act, bipartisan legislation that would require the federal government to provide disabled veterans with an automatic COLA in years when there is an increase in benefits payable under title II of the Social Security Act, which sets the requirements for disability insurance benefits.

"While I wish it didn't take an act of Congress to provide our disabled veterans with the peace of mind they deserve, I'm glad we're taking this important step and making this COLA permanent," said Thune.

"These brave men and women have given so much for the defense of our country, and passing this legislation is the least we can do to honor their sacrifice."

"Our veterans have served our nation courageously, and we have an obligation to make sure their benefits cover all their needs," said



Schatz. "For too long, Congress has had to reauthorize these increases year after year, leaving disabled veterans waiting and wondering if the benefits they receive will cover all their disability-related expenses. It's time to give these veterans and their families the security of knowing they will always be able to depend on the benefits they have earned."

The veterans' COLA is usually, but not automatically, enacted each year and is already anticipated in the Congressional Budget Office's baseline, which means this bill is budget neutral and will provide disabled veterans much-needed certainty from year to year.

Thune introduced similar legislation in 2008, and while the bill was included in a larger legislative package that the Senate unanimously approved, it was later blocked in the House of Representatives.



**MARK YOUR CALENDAR!**

# BLACK HILLS VETERANS JOB FAIR

**June 29**

**11:00AM—4:00PM**

James Kjerstad Events Center

Central States Fair Grounds

915 Centre Street

Rapid City, SD 57701

**Connect with local and national employers!**

Register today at: <https://blackhillsveteransjobfair.eventbrite.com>



Scan QR Code to register

Early entry to Job Fair and preparation class available only to those who pre-register.

Childcare services will not be available at the Job Fair or Preparation Class.



## Job Fair Preparation Class:

**June 22**

**9:00AM—10:00AM**

Dept. of Labor, 2330 N. Maple Ave.

Rapid City, SD 57701

Event Contact: Scott MacDonald, [scott.macdonald.ctr@mail.mil](mailto:scott.macdonald.ctr@mail.mil), (605) 737-6011



## SD ARMY NATIONAL GUARD NAMES SOLDIER, NCO OF THE YEAR

The South Dakota Army National Guard brought four of their top enlisted Soldiers and four noncommissioned officers to the Black Hills, April 20-22, to compete in the state's Best Warrior Competition, which names the Soldier and Non-Commissioned Officer of the Year, respectively.

After the three-day competition, Staff Sgt. Bjorn Henstein, Joint Force Headquarters, was named the 2016 SDARNG Non-Commissioned Officer of the Year and Spc. Trent Miller, 200th Engineer Company, the 2016 SDARNG Soldier of the Year.

The Best Warrior Competition tests each competitor's Army knowledge, skills and abilities while adding the additional pressure of competition.

The Soldiers and NCOs were given a very brief welcome from State Command Sgt. James Hoekman, the SDNG's senior enlisted leader, and a drill floor lined with command sergeants major before shouts of "Gas! Gas! Gas!" officially kicked off the Best Warrior Competition.

Once in their full chemical and biological protective suits with their masks on, competitors move to a Firearms Training Simulator where they engage targets with the M16 rifle. Moments later, competitors are handed a 50-question test as they board a bus to the outdoor firing range at West Camp Rapid to qualify on the M16 and M9 pistol.

Testing would continue on events ranging from building firing positions to conducting an ambush to a late-night obstacle course.

The following day began with the Army Physical Fitness Test, followed by lanes testing their abilities to evaluate and treat a casualty, request medical evacuation, a timed five-mile ruck march, a land navigation course and a final event testing their familiarization with three weapons systems.

The third day placed competitors in front of a board of sergeants major who quizzed them on a wide array of Army knowledge before scores were tallied and winners announced at a National Guard Association conference in Rapid City.

Henstein and Miller will move on to the Region 6 Best Warrior Competition next month, where they will represent the SDARNG against Soldiers from Alaska, Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming and North Dakota.

Henstein's fellow competitors in the Non-Commissioned Officer category were: Sgt. Shawn Hulbert, 740th Transportation Company; Staff Sgt. Seth Fredrickson, Battery B, 1st Battalion, 147th Field Artillery; and Staff Sgt. Steven Zubko, 2nd Battalion, 196th Regiment (Regional Training Institute).

Joining Miller in the Soldier of the Year competition were: Spc. Cory Mergen, Company C, 1st Battalion, 189th Aviation Regiment; Spc. Rebekah McLaughlin, 147th Army Band; and Spc. Garrett Welsh, Detachment 1, 235th Military Police Company.



(L to R) Bjorn Henstein and Trent Miller

## NORRIS NAMED SD GUARD WARRANT OFFICER OF THE YEAR

The South Dakota National Guard named a Rapid City woman as the 2016 recipient of the Chief Warrant Officer 4 Michael F. O'Connor Award, naming her the SDNG's Warrant Officer of the Year.

Chief Warrant Officer 4 Sandra Norris, who currently serves as G1 mobilization officer for Joint Force Headquarters in Rapid City, was selected as the most exceptional warrant officer after competing against warrant officers from several of the SDARNG's major commands.

The award was presented by the National Guard Association of South Dakota during its annual officers' conference in Rapid City, April 23.

"It is a great honor to be considered and selected among such an outstanding group of warrant officers throughout the state," said Norris.

Norris, who has 31 years of military service, is the senior human resources officer in the headquarters' personnel section and responsible for coordinating and facilitating all personnel requirements related to mobilizing and demobilizing soldiers in the state.

"CW4 Norris is a true professional and has been an invaluable member of this organization for over 30 years," said Maj. Clint Shepherd, detachment commander for Joint Force Headquarters. "She is an extremely proficient and versatile leader with the ability to manage multiple tasks."

In addition to her full-time responsibilities, Norris also volunteers much of her free time to local organizations. She serves as the supervisory committee chair for Minuteman Federal Credit Union, member of the Southwest and Stevens Parent/Teacher Association, and volunteers for the Rushmore Thunder Hockey and the Black Hills Rapids Soccer Club.

"Norris is a caring and compassionate leader who willingly gives of her time," said Col. John Weber, deputy chief of staff for personnel, JFHQ. "She is active in her community and fosters positive relationships between the community and the SDARNG."

"What I love most about serving in the National Guard is the ability to help people," said Norris. "There is nothing quite as rewarding as taking care of soldiers."

Other warrant officers representing their major command for this year's award competition were Warrant Officer Jason Bestgen, 109th Regional Support Group, and Chief Warrant Officer 2 Brent Simon, 196th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade.

The CW4 Michael F. O'Connor Award was established in 2000 to recognize the most outstanding South Dakota Army National Guard Warrant Officer of the past year. Criterion for the award is based on exceptional qualities of technical knowledge, leadership, dedication and initiative.



## ARMSTRONG NAMED SD GUARD LIEUTENANT OF THE YEAR

The South Dakota National Guard announced a Springfield man as the 2016 recipient of the Lt. Col. John J. Steele Award, naming him the SDNG's Lieutenant of the Year.

First Lt. Alan Armstrong, who currently serves as the executive officer in the 200th Engineer Company in Pierre, was selected as the most exceptional lieutenant after competing against lieutenants from several of the SDNG's major commands.

The award was presented by the National Guard Association of South Dakota at its annual officers' conference in Rapid City, April 23.

"It was an honor to even compete for this award," said Armstrong. "This award is a direct reflection of the training and mentoring from my leaders and the support I have received along the way from my family."

Armstrong, who has more than 12 years of service in the military - six of those years as a member of the South Dakota Army National Guard - first enlisted in the active duty Army as an indirect fire infantryman with Company B, 1st Battalion, 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment in Fort Bragg, North Carolina. After transferring to the SDARNG in 2009, he enrolled in the Officer Candidate School program and received his commission as a second lieutenant in August 2012.

He served as a platoon leader (2012-2014) in the 211th Engineer Company in both Madison and De Smet before moving to his current position.

In addition to his responsibilities in the National Guard, Armstrong not only ranches near Springfield for himself but assists some neighbors with their ranching and farming operations. He is also employed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources Conservation Service as a soil conservationist.

Armstrong is an active member in his local church, the American Legion Post 132, and volunteers his time at various community events.

"The support my wife and I receive from our National Guard family is beyond remarkable," said Armstrong. "I am proud to be a member of such a great organization. I look forward to many more years of service with the soldiers I have the privilege to lead and serve with."

Other officers representing their major command for this year's award competition were 1st Lt. Joshua Nelson, 114th Fighter Wing, and 1st Lt. Terry Berndt, 109th Regional Support Group.

The Lt. Col. John J. Steele Award was established in 1968 to annually recognize the most outstanding lieutenant in the South Dakota National Guard. Selection is based on exceptional qualities of leadership, values and performance.



# Upcoming Events

- May 5—Vietnam War Memorial Exhibit Dedication—Custer County Court House Museum (411 W. Mount Rushmore Road) - Custer—10:00 am (MT)
- May 10—SDDVA Mini Conference—Rapid City—TREA—1981 Centre Street
- May 11—SDDVA Mini Conference Pierre—American Legion Post 8—520 S. Pierre Street
- May 12—SDDVA Mini Conference—Brookings—City/County Building—520 3rd Street—Suite 300
- May 13—Improving Combat Veteran Care Conference—University Center—Sioux Falls—8:00 am (CT)
- May 14—South Dakota Vietnam Veterans of America Meeting/Election—Post 8 American Legion—Pierre (election at 11:00 am (CT) and meeting at 1:00 pm (CT))
- May 14—2nd Annual PVA Poker Run and Concert—Sanford Pentagon—Sioux Falls
- May 14—Armed Forces Day—Brookings VFW Post (520 Main Avenue) 10:00 am—4:00 pm (CT)
- May 17—WWII Veterans Luncheon—TREA (1981 Centre Street—Rapid City) 11:00 am (MT)
- May 18-19—SDCMF Symposium—Black Hills State University Center—Rapid City
- May 23—Town Hall and Ceremony to Honor Vietnam Veterans—Rapid City VFW (420 Main St) 4:00 pm (MT)
- Jun. 9-12—VFW State Convention—The Lodge at Deadwood
- Jun. 14—Vietnam War Veterans Recognition—Custer Jr./Sr. High School (1645 Wildcat Lane) - 9:30 am (MT)
- Jun. 14—Vietnam War Veterans Recognition—Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home (2500 Minnekahta Avenue) - Hot Springs - 1:30 pm (MT)
- Jun. 16-19—American Legion State Convention—Ramkota—Watertown
- Jun. 29—Black Hills Veterans Job Fair—Central States Fair Grounds (915 Centre Street) - 11:00 am (MT)
- Jul. 1—Buffalo Chip Annual Flag Raising Ceremony—West Gate Entrance off Ft. Meade Way—6:00 pm (MT)
- Jul. 11—BHNC Unaccompanied Veterans Memorial Service—9:00 am (MT)
- Jul. 23-24—Sioux Falls Air Show
- Aug. 22-25—SDDVA Annual Benefits School—Pierre Ramkota
- Oct. 3—BHNC Unaccompanied Veterans Memorial Service—9:00 am (MT)

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