



NEWSLETTER

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



THEY PROTECTED YOU—HELP US PROTECT THEM

The Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home (Home) is taking preventive measures to ensure continued care for our residents in a safe and healthy environment.

It is in the best interest of our residents to limit visitors. All activities provided by outside volunteer groups have been cancelled until further notice.

“We are asking people to be understanding and will work with families to ensure they can still see their loved ones through video conferencing options like Skype,” said Brad Richardson, superintendent for the Home. “Requests to see family members will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis, and decisions will be made based on what’s good for the resident and the Home as a whole.”

Before entrance to the Home is permitted, visitors will be surveyed about their health and recent travels as well as having their temperatures taken.

“Family members, staff, volunteers, visitors, and vendors have been notified of the steps we are taking to raise awareness and work in preventing the COVID-19 from getting into our Home,” said Greg Whitlock, secretary of the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs.

“We are also focusing on maintaining a healthy workforce so we can continue to provide the excellent service our heroes deserve,” said Richardson.

Guidance is evolving, and we have designated multiple individuals within our organization to review information distributed by the South Dakota Department of Health and CDC frequently in order to share updated information with our partners and take appropriate action.

Questions regarding the Home’s procedures can be directed to the Home at 605-745-5127 x1500116. Public information can be found on the South Dakota Department of Health’s website: <https://doh.sd.gov/news/coronavirus.aspx>.

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TRANSPORTATION OPTIONS FOR VETERANS

Getting to and from medical appointments can be a great challenge for veterans in South Dakota. No one knew that better than Royce Loesch, past commander of American Legion Post 20 in Fort Pierre.

Loesch was aware of the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Highly Rural Transportation grants and in 2015 decided to make application for, and was awarded, a grant for veterans transportation in Stanley County. Loesch's "leave no veteran behind" attitude kept him focused and before he knew it, he and his team had applied for grants for 35 counties in South Dakota.

The VA awards Highly Rural Transportation Grants (HRT) to states and service organizations to assist veterans who live in highly rural areas, with their transportation needs to and from the VA medical centers, community-based outpatient clinics, VA Community Care facilities, and/or other approved medical appointments. The VA defines highly rural as less than seven people per square mile.

Free transportation is available to veterans living in the following counties Aurora, Bennett, Buffalo, Butte, Campbell, Clark, Corson, Custer, Day, Dewey, Edmunds, Fall River, Faulk, Gregory, Haakon, Hand, Harding, Hyde, Jackson, Jerauld, Jones, Kingsbury, Lyman, Marshall, McPherson, Mellette, Miner, Perkins, Potter, Sanborn, Spink, Stanley, Sully, Tripp, and Ziebach. Partners are currently working to get Todd and Oglala Lakota included in this program.

Veterans in the highly rural counties in eastern South Dakota can contact River Cities Public Transit (605.945.2360) to schedule their transportation to medical appointments. Veterans in highly rural counties in western South Dakota should contact Prairie Hills Transit (605.642.6668).

What is unique about this transportation program is that veterans travel free, vehicles are wheelchair accessible, family members can travel with veteran to medical appointments for free, and the program is locally supported.



Although, the HRT Grants don't benefit all our veterans, there are other resources available to assist veterans. Additional resources for veteran transportation to medical appointments can be found on our website at: <https://vetaffairs.sd.gov/resources/Transportation.pdf>.

Wars, conflicts, and battles have been fought throughout the years and continue today. It is important that we complete our promise to take care of the men and women who served, including assisting with transportation to and from medical appointments.

PRESERVING OUR VETERANS TOWN

The Hot Springs VA and the entire community have been providing care to America's veterans for more than 110 years, earning it the nickname "The Veterans Town." This facility was the first – and only – original National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers that was built for short-term medical needs and not a long-term veterans' home. It is renowned for its successful post-traumatic stress disorder and substance abuse treatment facility nestled in the tranquility of our Black Hills. There is no community so dedicated to making certain The Veterans Town delivers the services our heroes have earned.

Many of you know that in 2011, the Obama administration announced a reorganization proposal that included plans to close the doors of the VA hospital in Hot Springs. In addition to a total disregard for stakeholder grievances, this announcement was met with considerable controversy because it was supported by very suspect data.

While representing you in Congress, I partnered with many South Dakota veterans to battle the VA to keep the facility open. We fought hard to show the facts, including hosting a Congressional hearing in Hot Springs.

Despite the overwhelming evidence that our Hot Springs VA is one of the best in the nation, the facility and community have been forced to wait for new leadership in Washington to revisit the 2011 decision. That means for nearly a decade, there has been a persistent cloud of uncertainty surrounding The Veterans Town — recruitment and retention have suffered, urgent care hours have been reduced, and an overreliance on short-term contractors has been necessary.

In August of last year, President Trump made a promise that his administration would be "committed to taking care of every warrior that returns home as a veteran," and VA Secretary Wilkie has said we must put veterans at the center of their healthcare decisions.

In early March – after years of persistent requests – Secretary Wilkie visited Hot Springs, and we FINALLY have a commitment to keep Hot Springs open and to revisit the record of decision.

This has been a long time coming, but I'm thankful to President Trump and Secretary Wilkie for keeping their promises and advocating for those who've served.

The Hot Springs community is so special and so unique. The care they provide our nation's veterans is unmatched, and I'm committed to doing all that I can to preserve our Veterans Town and ensure they can serve heroes in this way for another century to come.



NOMINATIONS FOR FALLEN HEROES BRIDGE DEDICATIONS DUE APRIL 10

The South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs is now accepting nominations for South Dakota's new "Fallen Heroes Bridge Dedication" program. The first South Dakota state bridge was dedicated in November of 2019.

South Dakota plans to dedicate six state bridges a year in honor of fallen heroes that died while serving in combat. More than 3,000 South Dakotans have made the ultimate sacrifice.

"Our fallen heroes are no longer with us, but their memory lives on in the hearts of their loved ones and our state," said Greg Whitlock, Secretary of the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs. "Naming our South Dakota bridges in honor of our fallen will give us an opportunity of remembrance, reflection, and respect – for honoring the men and women who gave their lives in service to this nation. They cherished liberty and loved freedom enough to lay down their lives to preserve our way of life."

Nominations are due by April 10 to the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs with all supporting documentation attached. The simple, online form is available at:

<https://vetaffairs.sd.gov/resources/Fallen%20Hero%20Bridge%20Dedications/SDDOM%20SDDVA%20Bridge%20Naming%20Applicaton.pdf>.

Nominators are encouraged to indicate their preferred state bridge site for their respective hero.

To view the list of South Dakota casualties by county, visit:

<https://vetaffairs.sd.gov/resources/War%20Casualties%20y%20County.aspx>.

GUARD UNIT RETURNS HOME FROM DEPLOYMENT

Seven soldiers with the South Dakota Army National Guard's Detachment 2, 174th Cyber Protection Team arrived home last week after completing a deployment to the U.S. Capital region.

The Rapid City-based unit returned after a 14-month deployment where they supported defensive cyber operations to protect the nation's cyber infrastructure and addressing emerging cyber threats.

The soldiers are part of a nearly 40-member team and includes detachments in North Dakota, Utah, and Colorado.

A welcome home ceremony for the unit is scheduled for April 5 at 1 p.m. in Rapid City at Camp Rapid's Joint Force Headquarters (Bldg. 420).

2020 CENSUS MAILINGS

Ninety-five percent or about 143 million households in the country will receive an initial invitation to respond to the 2020 Census in their mailboxes between March 12 and 20. The U.S. Census Bureau released informational copies today of the invitations, the enclosed materials, and the subsequent reminders households will receive over the course of the following weeks. These materials can help the public know what to expect and avoid potential scams.



The following link provides copies of what the 2020 Census materials will look like:
<https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-kits/2020/2020-census-mailings.html>

The questionnaire can be found at: <https://my2020census.gov/>.

NATIONAL SOCIAL WORKER MONTH

March is National Social Worker Month and it's our opportunity to recognize the dedication and empathy social workers across the country deliver while providing services to children and adults in need. Social workers are advocates, advisors, counselors, and facilitators in schools, clinics, businesses, and government offices.



Special "thank you" to our social workers at the Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home—Anita Baysden, Amanda Shafer, and Terese DeBoer.

In their roles, they provide support to our veterans and their families.

USD TO CONSTRUCT MONUMENT TO HONOR USD'S MOH RECIPIENTS

An outdoor monument to honor USD's veterans of past, present and future could be completed by next Fall. The Patriot's Plaza will be a 6,300 square foot tribute to USD's three Congressional Medal of Honor Recipients — Captain Arlo L. Olson, Captain Joe Foss and Colonel George "Bud" Day — located in the greenspace between the Beacom School of Business, the law school and Al Neuharth Media Center.

The memorial will consist of three monuments dedicated to the Medal of Honor recipients, additional donor memorials, military insignias on columns, two flagpoles with the U.S., P.O.W., South Dakota and USD flags and benches for sitting.

The location for the Plaza is symbolic in itself, surrounded by Beacom — a symbol for capitalism, the law school — a symbol for the rule of law Americans follow, and Al Neuharth Media Center — a symbol for the country's freedom of speech.



(story courtesy of "The Volante")

UPCOMING EVENTS

- Mar 13—VABHHCS VSO Congressional Forum—VFW Post 1273—Rapid City—10:00 am (MT)
 Mar 24—Culvers Day of Giving for Midwest Honor Flight
 Mar 25—SD Veterans Council Meeting—PVA Headquarters—Sioux Falls—10:00 am (CT)
 Mar 27-29—SD Vietnam and Era Veterans Reunion—Dakota Sioux Casino—Watertown
 Mar 30—SWO Vietnam Veterans Celebration—Dakota Magic Casino—11:30 am—1:30 pm (CT)
 Apr 3—Code Talker Medal Presentation—Wakpa Sica Reconciliation Center—Ft. Pierre—11:00 am (CT)
 Apr 5—Welcome Home for Detachment 2, 174th Cyber Protection Team—Camp Rapid JFHQ—Bldg 420—Rapid City—
 1:00 pm (MT)
 Apr 10-13 State Offices closed
 Apr 17—Purple Up day in South Dakota
 Apr 21—KELOLAND Career Expo—Rushmore Mall—Rapid City—11:00 am—4:00 pm (MT)
 Apr 26—Midwest Honor Flight Pancake Feed Fundraiser—Forster Community Center—Rock Rapids, IA—10:00 (CT)
 Apr 30—Weight of Honor Presentation—Froiland Science Complex—Augustana University—Sioux Falls—6:00 pm (CT)
 May 8—VABHHCS VSO Congressional Forum—Domiciliary Auditorium—Hot Springs VAMC—10:00 am (MT)
 May 12—8th Annual WWII Veterans Luncheon—TREA Building—Rapid City—11:00 am (MT)
 May 15-17—DAV State Convention—Brookings
 May 19—SDDVA Mini Conference—Rapid City—10:00 am—2:00 pm (MT)
 May 20—SDDVA Mini Conference—Pierre—10:00 am—2:00 pm (CT)
 May 21—SDDDVA Mini Conference—Sioux Falls—10:00 am—2:00 pm (CT)
 May 21-22—PVA Annual Fishing Tournament—Chamberlain
 May 25—MJFSVH Memorial Day Car Show—MJFSVH Campus—Hot Springs—11:30 am—3:00 pm (MT)
 May 25—State Offices closed for Memorial Day
 May 30—Midwest Honor Flight—Mission 7
 Jun 2—Midwest Honor Flight—Mission 8
 June 3-7—VFW State Convention—Aberdeen
 Jun 18-21—American Legion State Convention—Huron
 Jul 10—VABHHCS VSO Congressional Forum—Bldg. 145—Room 108—Fort Meade VAMC—10:00 am (MT)
 Aug 22—Midwest Honor Flight—Mission 9
 Aug 24-27—SDDVA Annual Benefit School—Ramkota Conference Center—Pierre
 Sep 3—Veterans Day at the SD State Fair
 Sep 3-7—SD State Fair
 Sep 11—VABHHCS VSO Congressional Forum—VFW Post 1273—Rapid City—10:00 am (MT)
 Sep 19—Midwest Honor Flight—Mission 10
 Oct 26-30—National Summit on Women Veterans Issues (more information coming)
 Nov 13—VABHHCS VSO Congressional Forum—Domiciliary Auditorium—Hot Springs VAMC—10:00 am (MT)

Audry Ricketts, Public Information Officer
 South Dakota Department of the Military <http://military.sd.gov>
 South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs <http://vetaffairs.sd.gov>
 Soldiers and Sailors Building - 425 E Capitol Avenue
 Pierre, SD 57501
 Phone: 605-773-8242
 E-mail address: audry.ricketts@state.sd.us

