On Saturday, August 6, South Dakota dedicated the James River Bridge on SD HWY 46 in honor of U.S. Army SSG Daniel Cuka.

SSG Cuka enlisted in the South Dakota National Guard in 1996 and was deployed to Iraq in 2005. He was killed on December 4, 2005, when an IED detonated near his Humvee during convoy operations in Baghdad.

Naming this South Dakota bridge in honor of SSG Cuka gives us an opportunity of remembrance, reflection, respect, and gratitude. Dedicating this bridge is a small token to honor Dan, and to reinforce that he will not be forgotten.

The men and women whose names do, or will appear, on South Dakota bridges to honor them were American soldiers, sailors, airmen, marines, and coast guardsmen who served during troubled times. Their sacrifices need to be remembered.
SOUTH DAKOTA TO DEDICATE PRIVATE AUGUST E. OTTO, JR. BRIDGE

The South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs will be hosting a State Bridge Dedication Ceremony this month to honor U.S. Army Private August E. Otto, Jr.

The ceremony will be held Saturday, August 20, 2022, at 11:00 a.m. (CT) at the Claire City Community Hall in Claire City (255 Feeney Avenue).

The Little Minnesota River Bridge on SD HWY 106 will be dedicated to PVT Otto.

Otto was drafted into the Army in 1942 and sent overseas to the North American area of the Attu Islands (Aleutian Islands of Alaska). Otto was killed in action at Attu Island on May 18, 1943.

MOAA FOUNDATION CRISIS RELIEF FUND

FEMA earlier this month declared a Major Disaster Designation for six South Dakota counties (Butte, Haakon, Jackson, Jones, McPherson and Spink) in connection with the June severe storms and straight-line winds across the state.

The Black Hills Chapter of the Military Officers Association of America (MOAA) has been notified that the MOAA Foundation Crisis Relief Fund is working to provide small grants – up to $500 – to servicemembers, veterans, and their families in affected South Dakota counties who are experiencing extreme financial hardship as a result of this crisis.

The links below provide information about the Crisis Relief Fund along with an Application Form. Please note that the application link also provides an option for printing out the application in a .PDF format.

MOAA Foundation Crisis Relief Fund
CRF Application

Questions re this fund can be directed to: CDR Larry Miller, President of the Black Hills Chapter-MOAA (605-484-8442).
Saturday, August 13, South Dakota dedicated the Big Sioux River Bridge on HWY 212 in honor of U.S. Army SGT James Haider.

Haider was killed on June 9, 1969, as the result of fatal fragment wounds he received when his unit came under intense enemy mortar attack near the village of Nuoc Dang (approximately 32 miles south of Quang Ngai City in Quang Ngai Province, Republic of South Vietnam).

This fallen hero is no longer with us, but his memories live on in the hearts of his loved ones and our state. Naming our South Dakota bridges in honor of our fallen gives 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.
PIERRE ELKS LODGE 1953 RECEIVES SDDVA PARTNER OF THE YEAR AWARD

Pierre Elks Lodge 1953 has been named the 2022 South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs Partner of the Year. Lodge 1953 was recognized at SDDVA’s annual benefit conference Monday, August 15, in Pierre.

“Pierre Elks Lodge 1953 has a legacy of dedication, commitment, and building partnerships within their community and within the state,” said Secretary Greg Whitlock of the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs. “For over thirty years, they and their community partners have coordinated a community-wide holiday gift giving program for veterans. This program ensures that veterans at the Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home and the VA Black Hills in Hot Springs have a holiday to remember. The Lodge surveys the veterans and the facilities to determine their needs and works to gather these items and deliver them to the veterans in time for Christmas.

The Lodge also supports the VABHCS Community Based Outpatient Clinic in Pierre, hosts an annual Flag Day program to educate the community about the history of the American Flag, provides assistance to homeless veterans, and supports the community military honoring banner program.

“This award is a testament to the power and collaboration of a great partner,” said Whitlock. “As long as we continue to work together and support each other, we will continue to do amazing things for our veterans.”
Matt Pillar of Madison has been named the 2022 South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs New Veterans Service Officer of the Year. Pillar was recognized by his peers at SDDVA’s annual benefit conference Monday, August 15, in Pierre.

Pillar, county veterans service officer for Lake County, was recognized for his aspiration to gain and grasp information to assist his veterans and for his outstanding ability to communicate with veterans and their families.

“As a new veterans service officer, he pushes to achieve new goals, focus on understanding the entire VA process, accept new challenges, and find direct solutions,” said Greg Whitlock, secretary of the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs.

Pillar’s office serves over 900 veterans in Lake County.

The South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs and its partners assist South Dakota veterans in receiving over $867 million in annual benefits. The Department’s mission is to provide comprehensive care to veterans and their families regarding healthcare, education, disability benefits, long-term care, and burial honors. Visit the Department online at: https://vetaffairs.sd.gov or find us on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.

Pictured left to right: Secretary Greg Whitlock and Matt Pillar
JERI SMITH NAMED SDDVA 2022 OUTSTANDING ADVOCATE OF THE YEAR

Jeri Smith of Pierre has been named the 2022 South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs Outstanding Leader, Mentor, Advocate of the Year. Smith was recognized by her peers at SDDVA’s annual benefit conference Monday, August 15, in Pierre.

Smith joined the SDDVA team in 2015. She manages SDDVA’s bonus program, military funeral honor reimbursement program, headstone setting fee reimbursement program, and provides accounting expertise for the Department.

“Her sense of pride in assisting veterans and our partners, her reliability, ethics, teamwork, and passion are just a few of her outstanding qualities,” said Greg Whitlock, secretary of the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs. “She has a great sense of responsibility, ownership, and dependability, and is eager to assist our team in understanding the accounting program and process for submitting their paperwork timely and accurately.

Pictured left to right: SDDVA Secretary Greg Whitlock, SDDVA Deputy Secretary Aaron Pollard, and Jeri Smith.
Shannon Phillips receives 2022 SDDVA Outstanding Department Staffer of the Year award

Shannon Phillips of Hartford has been named the 2022 South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs Outstanding Department Staffer of the Year. Phillips was recognized by her peers at SDDVA’s annual benefit conference Monday, August 15, in Pierre.

Phillips joined the SDDVA team in 2018 and serves as a state veterans service officer in the SDDVA Claims Office in Sioux Falls.

“Shannon is great at networking with veterans and their families, staff, and county and tribal veterans service officers,” said Greg Whitlock, secretary of the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs. “She stays informed on all of the ever-changing federal rules and regulations and shares her knowledge with all partners within the Department. She exemplifies integrity, knowledge, and motivation; a work ethic that is highly desirable and appreciated in our network.”

Pictured left to right: SDDVA Secretary Greg Whitlock, SDDVA Deputy Secretary Aaron Pollard, Shannon Phillips, and SDDVA Program Manager Brett Dickerson.
Lee Borries of Rapid City has been named the 2022 South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs “Outstanding Veterans Service Officer of the Year.” Borries was recognized by his peers at SDDVA’s annual benefit conference Monday, August 15, in Pierre.

Borries, veterans service officer for Pennington County, was acknowledged for his advocacy for veterans, his ability to build relationships with partners within the veteran network, and his willingness to mentor new members of the team.

“Lee is dedicated to enhancing the lives of our veterans by securing their benefits in a timely manner,” said Greg Whitlock, secretary of the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs. “He strives to achieve the best outcome for veterans and their families.”

Borries’ office serves over 12,335 veterans in Pennington County, as well as numerous veterans visiting the VA Black Hills Health Care System.
Lisa Rogers is the newest member of the SDDVA team. She serves as a state veterans service officer in our claims office in Sioux Falls. Lisa is a Navy veteran that recently moved to South Dakota from Colorado. Please join us in welcoming Lisa to South Dakota and the SDDVA network.

SDDVA Secretary Greg Whitlock recognized SDDVA's Education Program Manager Shane Olivier this week for 25 years of service to the state of South Dakota.

Shane works with veterans and their families to obtain their education benefits.

South Dakota Medal of Honor recipient Michael J. Fitzmaurice and his wife Patty stopped by for a visit with our veterans at the State Veterans Home this week.

This week, SDDVA hosted our annual CTVSO Benefit Training Conference for all county and tribal veterans service officers. In addition to the training conference, attendees had the opportunity to meet with numerous vendors about the services and programs they provide for veterans and their families. Sam Boshard was elected secretary/treasurer and David Huss was elected District II representative for the South Dakota Veterans Service Officers Association.

Special thanks to our partners, Sanford Health and Keystone Treatment Center for their sponsorship of the vendor night.
Dakota Dunes Caregiver Support Group

Family Caregivers have invaluable knowledge, information and perspective on the joys and challenges of providing care for an ill or injured Veteran. Caregivers trust the advice and guidance they receive from others who have walked in their shoes.

The Dakota Dunes Caregiver Support Group is designed to facilitate and support Caregivers connecting with others who feel stressed, overwhelmed or alone in their role.

Registration is required.

Number of participants is limited dependent on space and COVID-19 restrictions.

Future Dates Include:
- September 7, 2022 1:00-2:00 p.m.
- November 16, 2022 1:00-2:00 p.m.
- March 8, 2023 1:00-2:00 p.m.
- June 14, 2023 1:00-2:00 p.m.

Location:
Dakota Dunes VA Community Outpatient Clinic
380 W Anchor Drive, Dakota Dunes, SD 57049

Call Jennifer Evans at 605-336-3230 ext. 7803 to register.
VETERANS STAND DOWN

Friday Sept. 23, 2022
9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
SD Military Heritage Alliance
1600 W. Russell St.
Sioux Falls, SD

TRANSPORTATION AVAILABLE
Shuttle service will be every 1/2 hour starting at
8:00 a.m. until 12:00 p.m. from the following locations:

- Volunteers of America (VOA) Veteran Outreach Ctr. @ 14th & Cliff
- Sioux Falls VA Health Care System on 22nd and Western
- Bishop Dudley Hospitality House
- Union Gospel Mission

On-the-spot help including clothing,
community housing referral, medical & dental treatment,
readjustment counseling, Women Veteran services and much more!
Brunch will be served from 10:00 a.m. to 11:45 p.m.
For more information call: (605)-330-4552
UPCOMING EVENTS

Aug 18—23—USS Iowa Veterans Association Reunion—Ramkota Hotel and Conference Center—Rapid City
Aug 20—PVT August E. Otto Bridge Dedication—Claire City Community Hall—11:00 am (CT)
Aug 22—The Barrel House Day of Giving fundraiser for Midwest Honor Flight—Sioux Falls
Aug 27—Midwest Honor Flight Mission 11 Welcome Home Ceremony—Sioux Falls Convention Center Arena—9:30 pm (CT)
Sep 1—Veterans Day at the South Dakota State Fair—Huron
Sep 2—RED Day at the State Fair—Group Photo at the Freedom Stage in Huron at 1:45 pm (CT)
Sep 1—5—South Dakota State Fair—Huron
Sep 3—727th/DAV Poker Run—Swiftel Center (824 32nd Avenue)—Brookings—10:00 am (CT)
Sep 5—Labor Day
Sep 9—11—PVA Annual Trapshoot—Crooks Gun Club
Sep 10—Midwest Honor Flight Mission 12 Welcome Home Ceremony—Sioux Falls Convention Center Arena—9:30 pm (CT)
Sep 10—Heroes Helping with Horsepower Military Appreciation Event—W. Main Street—Ethan—Festivities begin at 8:00 am (CT)
Sep 12—PVA Doug Brown Memorial Hunt—Howard
Sep 14—17—Black Hills Veterans March
Sep 17—CPL Martin Fluegel Fallen Hero Bridge Dedication—McCook Central High School—Salem—1:00 pm (CT)
Sep 23—Veterans Stand Down—SD Military Heritage Alliance (1600 W. Russell)—Sioux Falls—9:00 am (CT)
Sep 28—South Dakota Veterans Council Meeting—American Legion—Rapid City—9:00 am—noon (MT)
UPCOMING EVENTS

Oct 1—PVT Frederic Schroeder Fallen Hero Bridge Dedication—Madison City Armory—1:00 pm (CT)
Oct 1—Midwest Honor Flight Mission 13 Welcome Home Ceremony—Sioux Falls Convention Center Arena—9:30 pm (CT)
Oct 3—BHNC Unaccompanied Veterans Memorial Service—(20901 Pleasant Valley Dr)—Sturgis—9:00 am (MT)
Oct 10—Native American Day
Oct 21—PVA Dueling Pianos Fundraiser—SD Military Heritage Alliance—(1600 W. Russell Street)—Sioux Falls—7:00 pm (CT)
Nov 5—We’ve Got Your Six Veterans Appreciation Fair—Sturgis Community Center—(1401 Lazelle Street)—Sturgis—11:00 am—2:00 pm (MT)
Nov 11—Veterans Day
Nov 11—Capt Tommy Callies Fallen Hero Bridge Dedication—Howard High School—9:30 am (CT)
Nov 11—S2 Wayne Bridge Fallen Hero Bridge Dedication—Wagner High School—2:00 pm (CT)
Nov 16—South Dakota Veterans Council Meeting—Pierre
Nov 24—Thanksgiving Day
Dec 6—Governor’s Budget Address
Dec 17—Wreaths Across America Wreath Laying Ceremony at South Dakota Veterans Cemetery—Sioux Falls—11:00 am (CT)
Dec 25—Christmas

2023 Events

Jan 10—Governor’s State of the State Address
Jan 11—South Dakota Veterans Council Meeting
Feb 10—12—American Legion Mid-Winter Conference—Huron
Mar 22—South Dakota Veterans Council Meeting
May 17—South Dakota Veterans Council Meeting
Jun 8—11—American Legion State Conference—Oacoma
Jul 19—South Dakota Veterans Council Meeting

2024 Events

Feb 16—18—American Legion Mid-Winter Conference—Deadwood
Jun 20—23—American Legion State Conference—Pierre

2025 Events

Feb 14—16—American Legion Mid-Winter Conference—Oacoma
Jun 19—22—American Legion State Conference—Huron