This week the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs recognized and thanked the River Cities Public Transit drivers that have assisted the Department. Drivers recognized were part of the team that provided transportation to veterans, guests, and families attending the Memorial Day programs at the South Dakota Veterans Cemetery.

Deputy Secretary Aaron Pollard and Cemetery Director Erin Brown thanked the drivers for their dedication and support to the Cemetery and their programs, but also for their continued assistance with our veterans and their families.
The South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs will be hosting a State Bridge Dedication Ceremony next month to honor U.S. Army Staff Sergeant Daniel Cuka.

The ceremony will be Saturday, August 6, 2022, at 1:00 p.m. (CT) at the Yankton High School Theater in Yankton (1801 Summit Street).

The James River Bridge on SD HWY 46 will be dedicated to SSG Cuka.

Cuka was killed on December 4, 2005, when an improvised explosive device detonated near his Humvee during convoy operations in Baghdad, Iraq while he was serving with Charlie Battery, 1-147 FA.

Naming bridges in honor of our combat veterans who died while serving their country is an initiative of Governor Kristi Noem and the South Dakota Departments of Military, Transportation, and Veterans Affairs.

“Whenever and wherever this nation has called, in times of darkness and danger, as well as in times of peace and prosperity, veterans have been there and have proudly carried the torch of liberty for all to see,” said Greg Whitlock, secretary of the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs.

“Our fallen heroes are no longer with us, but their memories live on in the hearts of their loved ones and our state,” said Whitlock. “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.”
NEW LAWS, SERVICES, AND PROGRAMS IMPACTING VETERANS

Each year the Governor, South Dakota agencies, legislators, constituents, and lobbyists review, debate, and consider hundreds of legislative issues. During the 2022 legislative session, over six hundred legislative bills and resolutions were introduced, but not all were passed.

The South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs serves as an advocate for veterans and reviews all the bills introduced and identifies those that will impact our veterans.

House Bill 1083 amended SDCL 10-4-41 to include a surviving spouse receiving dependency and indemnity compensation as a new class for a partial property tax exemption. One hundred fifty thousand dollars of the full and true value of the property is exempt from taxation. The exemption application for the $150,000 disabled veteran exemption program is due on November 1. House Bill 1083 will apply for the first time for the 2023 assessment for taxes payable in 2024.

In other recent developments that could benefit veterans, we now have a new national three-digit phone number for all mental health, substance use, and suicide crises - 988. When someone calls, chats, or texts 988, they can expect to be connected to a specialist who is trained and prepared to deliver support to anyone experiencing a crisis. Because a crisis is defined by the person or family experiencing it, the specialist will engage with the person to understand and address the person’s unique concerns.

When it comes to benefits for veterans, some federal programs can be very confusing. Did you know that the VA has changed the Southwest Asia Theater and Blue Water Navy presumptives? And did you know the VA is expanding their caregivers’ program? As always, we encourage all veterans to visit their county or tribal veterans service officers (CTVSOs) and allow them to assist in filing claims. These men and women have worn the boots, walked through trenches, conducted maneuvers, commanded troops, sustained missions, and protected our freedoms. Who better to have on your team? To locate the CTVSO nearest you visit: https://vetaffairs.sd.gov/veteransserviceofficers/locatevso.aspx.

Greg Whitlock, Secretary
South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs
SDDVA UPDATE

Last week, SDDVA field service officers, state veterans service officers, education staff, cemetery staff and administrative staff met in Sioux Falls for training opportunities and briefings on VA issues and benefits. This also provided the SDDVA team the opportunity to visit the South Dakota Veterans Cemetery.

This week, SDDVA Secretary Greg Whitlock had the opportunity to welcome all the veterans participating in the National Veterans Golden Age Games in Sioux Falls.

In his remarks to the veterans Whitlock said, “I’m in awe of every single one of the veteran participants and competitors. There is simply no group of people who know better than you what it means to serve. When veteran-athletes engage in sports, you send a powerful message to spectators, sponsors, therapists, doctors, and other veterans—to every American, in fact. That message is about the perseverance of veterans and the endurance of the human spirit—and the strength of Americans, and, therefore, America.”

He noted that veterans persevere in the most difficult missions and challenging conditions. The same mental and physical grit that made all of you proud Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, and Coastguardsmen is the same quality that makes you formidable athletes.
Saturday, July 16, South Dakota dedicated the White River Bridge on SD HWY 83 in honor of U.S. Army PFC David R. Gatton.

Gatton, whose home of entry was Harrold, enlisted in the U.S. Army and began his Vietnam tour of duty on September 11, 1966. His squad was in an ambush position on a road crossing near Phuoc Vinh when their patrol contacted a large enemy company. During the engagement, Gatton was fatally wounded by mortar fragments and died December 29, 1966.

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.
SANFORD SCHOLARSHIP NOW AVAILABLE FOR MILITARY MEMBERS AND VETERANS

Sanford Health is accepting applications for five $5,000 scholarships awarded annually to veterans, Guard/Reserve members or active duty military service members who have demonstrated leadership and commitment in their community.

The Sanford Health Military and Veteran Scholarship honors those who have furthered their own progress and enriched the lives of others, especially in service, academics and community involvement.

Apply online: Applications for Sanford Health Military and Veteran Scholarship due Sept. 30

Applicants must be a veteran, Guard/Reserve or active duty military service member and a full-time student pursing a bachelor’s, graduate or professional degree from an accredited U.S.-based institution of higher education. They must also have at least one full year of education remaining.

The scholarship is administered by the Sanford Health Department of Veterans and Military Services and was created in 2018 as part of the health system’s efforts to serve veterans and military personnel through patient care, employment opportunities and community outreach.

Sanford Health also is participating in the Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve, or ESGR, program. Sanford Health pledges to support the military services of employees and is an advocate for employee participation in the military.

For all of its efforts, Sanford Health was named one of the 2020 Secretary of Defense Employer Support Freedom Award recipients, the highest U.S. government honor to employers for support of National Guard and Reserve employees. The award recognizes employers who provide exceptional support to their guard and reserve employees.

Almost half of the U.S. military is composed of the guard and reserve. The Department of Defense shares these citizen warriors with their civilian employers, many of whom provide significant support to their employees who serve. This award recognizes employers who provide the most outstanding support for their guard and reserve employees and is presented annually by the Secretary of Defense.

Sanford Health is currently offering numerous scholarships, including the Sanford Health Equity in Education Scholarship. That scholarship is available to first-generation Americans, first-generation college students and non-traditional students of at least 25 years of age.
CRISIS LINE

New number, same 24/7 crisis support. Save the new Veterans Crisis Line number in your phone today—Dial 988 then Press 1.

VA LAUNCHES IMPROVED ACCESS TO CARE WEBSITE

Based on Veteran feedback and VA Secretary Denis McDonough’s commitment to ensuring timely access to care, the United States Department of Veterans Affairs launched an improved Access to Care website that now offers a simplified, user-friendly experience to make it easier for veterans to make informed decisions as they plan their health care appointments.

Effective July 19, veterans and the public is able to see veteran experience information for care delivered through VA facilities and will have a clearer view of average wait times, with more detailed information on available health care services and specialties.

“VA is listening to veterans, incorporating their feedback and reviewing access to care across the organization,” said Deputy Under Secretary for Health, Performing the Delegable Duties of the Under Secretary for Health Steven L. Lieberman, M.D. “As a national leader in health care access and transparency, this change in the presentation of veteran-facing information ensures veterans receive the world-class care they have earned and deserve.”

The new Access to Care website also ensures that as VA sites transition to a new electronic health record management system, veterans will have information on timeliness for care at those facilities.
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:

- Vet Center on 5020 S Broadband Ln
- 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 bicycle repair, 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

Jul 24—American Legion State Auxiliary President Homecoming—Chester School—12:00 noon (CT)
Aug 6—9—DAV National Convention—Orlando, FL
Aug 6—SSG Dan Cuka Fallen Hero Bridge Dedication—Yankton High School—1:00 pm (CT)
Aug 13—James Haider Bridge Dedication—BG Ernie Edwards Readiness Center—Watertown—10:30 am (CT)
Aug 14—19—Military Order of the Purple Heart National Convention—Rapid City
Aug 15—17—SDDVA Annual CTVSO Benefit School—Ramkota—Pierre
Aug 18—23—USS Iowa Veterans Association Reunion—Ramkota Hotel and Conference Center—Rapid City
Aug 20—PVT August 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 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 14—17—Black Hills Veterans March
Sep 17—CPL Martin Fluegel 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—Rapid City
UPCOMING EVENTS

Oct 1—PVT Frederic Schroeder Bridge Dedication—VFW—Madison—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 15—Midwest Honor Flight Fifth Annual Hangar Dance—SD Military Heritage Alliance—(1600 W. Russell Street)—Sioux Falls—7:00 pm (CT)
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 Bridge Dedication—Howard High School—9:30 am (CT)
Nov 11—S2 Wayne Bridge 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

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South Dakota Department of the Military https://military.sd.gov/
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