



South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs  
Soldiers and Sailors Building  
425 E. Capitol Avenue  
Pierre, SD 57501  
Phone: 605-773-8242  
Fax: 605-773-5380  
<http://vetaffairs.sd.gov>

**FOR RELEASE:** Tuesday, August 25, 2020

**For more information, contact:** Audry Ricketts at 605-773-8242 or [audry.ricketts@state.sd.us](mailto:audry.ricketts@state.sd.us) (South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs)

### **Leaders Recognized for their Service to South Dakota's Veterans**

PIERRE, S.D. – County and tribal veterans' service officers (CTVSO) and staff from the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs (SDDVA) were recognized for their dedication to serving veterans and veterans' families at an awards program Monday, Aug. 24, in Pierre.

The annual event, organized by the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs, was held in conjunction with the veterans' benefits training conference for CTVSOs.

"Our County and Tribal Veterans Services officers serve as counselors, ministers, lawyers, fellow veterans and much more," said Greg Whitlock, Secretary of the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs. "Veterans' needs vary from mental to physical health needs. These award winners are the best of the best. They care for each and every person that walks through their doors."

Kathy Schlecht, veterans service claims assistant for Brown County, was awarded the 2020 Partner of the Year award. Kathy was recognized for her compassion, commitment, knowledge and professionalism when assisting South Dakota's veterans.

Geri Opsal, tribal veterans service officer for Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate, received the 2020 Outreach of the Year award for being instrumental in recognizing veterans of all eras, contacting veterans wherever she goes and thanking them for their services.

Kathy Richardson, veterans service officer for Minnehaha County, received the 2020 County Veterans Service Officer of the Year award. Kathy was recognized for her outstanding commitment to enhance the lives of veterans by securing their benefits in a timely fashion and submitting flawless claims.

Hannah Mulder, SDDVA claims examiner was awarded the SDDVA 2020 Employee of the Year award. Mulder was recognized for his commitment to the Department's partners and our veterans.

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As John Quincy Adams said, “If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader.”

“It was truly an honor to recognize these great leaders,” said Whitlock. Our trailblazers know how to use whatever’s at hand and make the best of any situation.”

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(Photos available upon request)