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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. 16, 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 staff and our county and tribal veterans services officers counsel and assist veterans and their dependents,” said Greg Whitlock, secretary of the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs. “Regardless of service era, our team and our partners take an all-inclusive approach to ensure all veterans have access to their benefits. Their diligence makes filing claims for our veterans and family members as seamless as possible. These award winners are the best of the best. They care for every person that walks through their doors.”

Dan Cullen, veterans service officer for Fall River County, was awarded the 2021 Partner of the Year award. He was acknowledged for his success in winning appeals for veterans, 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.

Todd Rose, veterans service officer for Codington County, received the 2021 New County Veterans Service Officer of the Year award. Todd was recognized for his desire to acquire and absorb information to assist his veterans and for his outstanding ability to communicate with veterans and their families.

Jerry Lemme, SDDVA state veterans service officer in the SDDVA Sioux Falls Claims Office, was awarded the SDDVA 2021 Outstanding Department Staffer of the Year award. Lemme was recognized for his outstanding ability to communicate with veterans and their families, his mentorship and his strong leadership and work ethic.

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Aaron Pollard, SDDVA Deputy Secretary, was named the 2021 South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs Outstanding Leader, Mentor, Advocate of the Year. Pollard was recognized for his sense of responsibility, ownership, and his dependability. Pollard was the leading force in creating the vision for the new state veterans cemetery and for executing the project from start to finish.

River Cities Public Transit, based out of Pierre, was presented the 2021 SDDVA Partner of the Year Award. RCPT was acknowledged for their cooperation, dedication, commitment, and for improving transportation services for our veterans.

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.)