



**DISABLED AMERICAN VETERANS  
DEPARTMENT OF SOUTH DAKOTA**

1519 W. 51st Street, Sioux Falls, SD 57105  
 Phone (605) 332-6866 Fax (605) 338-5489  
 E-Mail [admin@davsd.org](mailto:admin@davsd.org)  
[SD.dav.org](http://SD.dav.org)  
[www.dav.org](http://www.dav.org)

**TO: DEPARTMENT OFFICERS, DEC, CHAPTERS, AND AUXILIARY UNITS**  
**FROM: CHRISTINE SPEIRS, COMMANDER AND MARTY PENNOCK, ADJUTANT**  
**SUBJECT: DECEMBER 2023 DAV MONTHLY REPORT**  
**DATE: DECEMBER 1<sup>st</sup>, 2023**

**INFORMATION CONTAINED IN THIS MONTHLY REPORT IS TO BE PRESENTED AT YOUR MONTHLY MEETING EITHER BY THE DEC REPRESENTATIVE OR ADJUTANT. YOU SHOULD TRY TO HIGHLIGHT EACH OF THESE ARTICLES FOR YOUR MEMBERSHIP MEETING. YOU MAY USE ANY OF THESE ARTICLES FOR YOUR CHAPTER NEWSLETTER.**

**1. CHAPTER OFFICERS; DEC FORMS; FINANCIAL REPORTS; AND FORM 990 OR 990-N E-POSTCARD:**

Adjutant Pennock requests Chapter Officers Report to DAV Department Headquarters and DAV National within ten days after the installation of newly elected or appointed Chapter Officers through the new online process on MyDAV.org; the Annual Financial Report to DAV Department Headquarters and DAV National were due by *September 30, 2023*; and Form 990 or 990N to Department Headquarters were due *November 15, 2023*. Several Chapters were given extensions. One Chapter is delinquent on its submission of its 990. NOTE and REMINDER AGAIN – NEW process to file OERs is ONLINE only.

**2. POPULATION SUMMARY: Life membership discount running June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2023 – March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2024.**



**Population Summary**

Execution Date: 11/30/2023 1:50:27 PM

DCU No	DCU Name	Current Year					Goal			
		Goal Met	Total Trial	Total Part Life	Total Full Life	Total Paid Members	Total Members	Goal	Goal %	Goal Variance
40	Department of South Dakota		0	106	4,591	4,697	4,697	4,762	98.84%	-65
1	Arthur H Muchow #1		0	27	1,923	1,950	1,950	1,966	99.19%	-16
3	Rapid City #3		0	39	1,264	1,303	1,303	1,309	99.54%	-6
4	Coyote State #4	G	0	27	57	84	84	83	101.20%	1
6	Watertown #6		0	2	173	175	175	185	94.59%	-10
11	Northern Hills #11		0	7	373	380	380	381	99.74%	-1
13	Swanson O Connor #13	G	0	0	274	274	274	271	101.11%	3
18	Oahe #18		0	1	213	214	214	223	95.96%	-9
19	Milbank-sisseton #19		0	2	91	93	93	102	91.18%	-9
22	Brookings #22		0	1	145	146	146	155	94.19%	-9
27	Davison County #27		0	0	78	78	78	87	89.66%	-9
<b>Active</b>			<b>9</b>							
<b>At Large</b>			<b>1</b>							
<b>Merged</b>			<b>0</b>							
<b>On Hold</b>			<b>0</b>							
<b>Revoked</b>			<b>0</b>							
<b>Suspended</b>			<b>0</b>							

DAV's Life Membership Dues will increase to \$325.00 effective January 1, 2024.

Starting January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2024, and running through June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2024, the DAV Department of South Dakota approved to pay \$75.00, and each Chapter will pay \$50.00 toward each new member life application.

**3. SOUTH DAKOTA VETERANS COUNCIL:** *The next open SDVC meeting will take place January 10<sup>th</sup>, 2024*, in Pierre at the American Legion Post 8. The meeting will run from 2pm to 5pm (CST). There will be a Legislative Reception that follows from 5:30pm to 7:30pm (CST).

**4. DAV HOSPITAL TRANSPORTATION NETWORK:** The 2023 DAV Transportation Network and Columbia Trust Grant Application was submitted for an Explorer 4WD, in Winner. This has been approved and the vehicle has been delivered to the BHVAHCS. We are waiting for a credit card to be issued for the vehicle.

Bill Branum has been doing a great job getting up to speed as the Hospital Service Coordinator for the Black Hills VA Health Care System.

Contact Information is as follows

Building 148, Room A125 113 Comanche Road Ft. Meade, SD 57741 tel: (800) 743-1070 Ext. 7065  
(605) 651-1866  
(605) 430-7959  
email: [DAVRC23@gmail.com](mailto:DAVRC23@gmail.com)

**5. DAV DEPARTMENT BULLETIN DEADLINE:** *January 2024 BULLETIN will be on line only: Submittal deadline: December 10<sup>th</sup>*. Email all reports, photos, stories to: [adj@davsd.org](mailto:adj@davsd.org).

Department Officers, Chapters, Auxiliary State Officers, and Auxiliary Units who wish to place an article in DAV Department of South Dakota Quarterly Bulletin should submit them by the deadline date. The DAV Department Officers ARE RESPONSIBLE for submitting their own articles.

#### **6. 2024 MID-WINTER CONFERENCE**

*March 7-10, 2024 (Please see below regarding the 2024 Mid-Winter Conference change of dates)*

Crystal Gateway Marriott  
1700 Richmond Highway (formerly Jefferson Davis Hwy)  
Arlington, VA 22202  
Telephone: 1.800.266.9432 or 1.703.920.3230

Group Name: Disabled American Veterans

\$249 Single/Double

Registration for the Midwinter Conference is facilitated onsite by the Commanders and Adjutants Association. The price will be set by the C&A and is generally \$10-\$15 per person.

There are limited sponsorship opportunities for the DAV Midwinter Conference. Please contact the Corporate Partnership Team to discuss at: [partners@dav.org](mailto:partners@dav.org). Please note, there is no exhibitor floor at this event.

## CHANGE OF DATES NOTICE

Recently, DAV received the 2024 Congressional calendar and learned that Congress will not be in session during the dates of our normally scheduled mid-winter conference, which was scheduled to take place Feb. 25-28, 2024. Therefore, the DAV National 2024 Mid-Winter Conference has been rescheduled for March 7-10. While the new dates are an unprecedented break from the event's traditional week after Presidents Day, moving our most highly visible demonstration of DAV's dedicated advocacy will ensure you, our dedicated members and supporters, are able to meet with your elected officials face-to-face while Congress is in session.

The conference will still take place at the Crystal Gateway Marriott and include our national commander's testimony to a joint session of the House and Senate Veterans Affairs Committees on Thursday, March 7 in the Senate Dirksen Building in room SD-G50. Our opening session will take place later that day at the Crystal Gateway Marriott with various other normally scheduled workshops taking place in the days following, including our National Executive Committee and Board of Directors meetings. Please review the posted schedule for more details.

Please note that the original room block at the Crystal Gateway Marriott has been deactivated. If you made a reservation under the February dates those reservations have been cancelled and a new reservation will need to be made in the active room block reflecting the new dates. Due to hotel availability around the new dates, rooms are not available earlier than March 6 and after March 11 at the DAV rate.

**7. DAV DEPARTMENT OF SOUTH DAKOTA CONVENTION** The 2024 DAV & Auxiliary Annual Convention of Lodging and Registration is attached. The DAV Department of South Dakota 84<sup>th</sup> Annual Department and 72<sup>nd</sup> Auxiliary State Convention will be held April 26<sup>th</sup> - 27<sup>th</sup>, 2024, at The Lodge at Deadwood, SD. Service Officer Training will take place on April 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup>, 2024. Advertisement Booklet Page Attached  
Raffle tickets have distributed to Chapters.

Chapter 1 – 2000 Tickets– still pending for printing  
Chapter 3- 3000 Tickets  
Chapter 6- 1000 Tickets  
Chapter 11- 500 Tickets  
Chapter 13 – 1000 Tickets  
Chapter 18 – None Ordered  
Chapter 19 – 500 Tickets – still pending for printing  
Chapter 22 – 500 Tickets  
Chapter 27 – None Ordered

THANK YOU TO THE FOLLOWING FOR THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS!

- DAV Arthur H. Muchow Chapter 1 Sioux Falls --- \$500.00
- DAV Arthur H. Muchow Chapter 1 Sioux Falls --- \$500.00
- DAV Chapter 3 Rapid City --- \$500.00
- DAV Chapter 3 Rapid City --- \$500.00
- DAV Chapter 3 Rapid City --- \$500.00
- DAV Chapter 3 Rapid City --- \$500.00
- DAV Chapter 3 Rapid City --- \$500.00
- DAV Chapter 3 Rapid City --- \$500.00
- DAV Northern Hills Chapter 11 Sturgis --- \$250.00
- DAV Northern Hills Chapter 11 Sturgis --- \$250.00
- DAV Northern Hills Chapter 11 Sturgis --- \$250.00
- DAV Northern Hills Chapter 11 Sturgis --- \$250.00
- DAV Milbank-Sisseton Chapter 19 --- \$200.00
- Ron Lindner --- \$200.00
- DAV Watertown Chapter 6 --- \$100.00
- DAV Watertown Chapter 6 --- \$100.00
- DAV Watertown Chapter 6 --- \$100.00
- DAV Swanson O'Connor Chapter 13 Aberdeen --- \$100.00
- DAV Swanson O'Connor Chapter 13 Aberdeen --- \$100.00
- DAV Brookings Chapter 22 --- \$100.00
- Korean War Display, LLC --- \$100.00
- Gene Murphy --- \$100.00
- Dick and Cora Turnwall --- \$100.00
- Dick and Cora Turnwall --- \$100.00
- Mark Wolf --- \$100.00
- DAV Swanson O'Connor Chapter 13 Aberdeen --- \$75.00

JANUARY 1<sup>st</sup> ..... CHAPTER/DEPARTMENT SERVICE OFFICERS LISTING FOR TRAINING DUE

JANUARY 5<sup>th</sup> ..... DEPARTMENT AWARDS DUE - Attached

**8. DEC MEETING – THE AMERICAN LEGION POST 8 – MARCH 27, 2024, 12 PM - 3 PM**

**9. OTHER:**

- VA Delays Disputed Change in how it Pays for Veterans' Ambulance Trips
- What do the Coins Left on Grave Markers Mean
- Veteran Honor Guards Adapt to Aging Population
- Honoring South Dakota's Bravest
- Melissa Stockwell – April 5<sup>th</sup>, 2024 – SD Military Heritage Alliance Building
- Capitol Lake Master Plan

**10. DAV DEPARTMENT OF SOUTH DAKOTA QUARTERLY BULLETIN & MONTHLY REPORT:**

If any of the DAV and Auxiliary members would like to receive the DAV Department Quarterly Bulletin and Monthly Report, please send your e-mail address to DAV Headquarters:

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE: \_\_\_\_\_

E-MAIL: \_\_\_\_\_

You can either mail or e-mail the information to:

DAV Headquarters, 1519 W. 51st Street, Sioux Falls, SD 57105

E-mail: [admin@davsd.org](mailto:admin@davsd.org)



KEEPING OUR PROMISE TO AMERICA'S VETERANS

Department of South Dakota
DAV & Auxiliary Convention
Lodging and Registration

The DAV Department of South Dakota 84th Annual Department and 72nd Auxiliary State convention will be held 26 - 27 April 2024 at The Lodge at Deadwood

LODGING: The Lodge at Deadwood, 100 Pine Crest Lane, Deadwood, SD 57732 at phone number (877) 393-5634. YOU MUST MAKE YOUR OWN HOTEL RESERVATIONS!

Forty (40) rooms have been reserved under the name of DAV. Please mention this when making your reservations. More rooms can be added if an early turnout warrants it. Your reservation MUST BE MADE BY 31 March 2024. Room costs without taxes are listed below:

Table with 6 columns: Room Type, Tue 04/23/2024, Wed 04/24/2024, Thu 04/25/2024, Fri 04/26/2024, Sat 04/27/2024. Rows include King Walkout, King Balcony, Queen, Queen Walkout, and Presidential Suite.

REGISTRATION, LUNCHEON AND BANQUET: Prior to 31 March 2024 - \$100.00 which includes registration fee, two (2) lunches, one (1) soup and sandwich bar and one (1) Commander's Banquet. Registration cost after 31 March 2024 is \$120.00. Note: No refunds on meals after 10 April 2024.

Individual meal tickets will be sold separately. Cutoff date for meals is 31 March 2024. Any special meals must be requested at the time of registration. Forget-Me-Not luncheon is \$15.00, Awards luncheon is \$16.00, Friday night dinner is \$18.00 and Commander's Banquet is \$35.00.

Mark your meal selections here:

Forget-Me-Not Lunch
Soup & Sandwich

Awards Lunch
Commander's Banquet

Make registration check payable to:

DAV Chapter 11

Mail registration form and check to:

DAV Chapter 11
PO Box 485
Piedmont, SD 57769

Name: Chapter/Unit Number:

Address:

City: State: Zip Code:

Phone Number: E-mail Address:



KEEPING OUR PROMISE TO AMERICA'S VETERANS

- Disabled American Veterans (DAV) Northern Hills Chapter 11 will be hosting the 84<sup>th</sup> Annual Disabled American Veterans Department of South Dakota Convention and 72<sup>nd</sup> Annual Disabled American Veterans Auxiliary State Convention in Deadwood, South Dakota, April 26 to April 27, 2024.
- DAV gives veterans the best representation before Congress, the Veterans Administration and White House.
- DAV has many programs and services that they provide FREE to disabled veterans and their families throughout South Dakota and the Nation.
- DAV is asking for your support of our veterans disabled while in service by placing an advertisement in the convention program booklet.
- Advertising rates: Page size – 4.75" W x 7.75" H
- Inside Ads:
  - Inside Full Page – Full Color \$300.00
  - Inside Full Page – Black & White \$275.00
  - Inside Half Page – Black & White \$175.00
  - Inside Quarter Page – Black & White \$95.00
- Please e-mail advertisements in pdf format to - - [jaciworth1993@gmail.com](mailto:jaciworth1993@gmail.com).
- Make checks payable to DAV Chapter 11 and send it along with this form to:

Disabled American Veterans Chapter 11  
PO Box 485  
Piedmont, SD 57769

- Please return by March 15, 2024.

Name/Business: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Special Instructions: \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for supporting the Disabled American Veterans.

For questions, call 605-484-5430 (leave a message). Thank you for supporting DAV of South Dakota



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E-Mail [davsd@midconetwork.com](mailto:davsd@midconetwork.com)  
SD [dav.org](http://dav.org)  
[www.dav.org](http://www.dav.org)

November 9, 2023

DAV Department of SD Leaders:


**The deadline for the awards is January 5<sup>th</sup>, 2024 --**

We are enclosing two page form (below) you can use for the submission of an award. DAV Chapters and members should make nominations for awards such as the following:

1. Outstanding Volunteer in Your Chapter or VA Health Care System
2. Outstanding Volunteer Driver for the DAV Hospital Transportation Network
3. Outstanding Support by Individual, Group, Business, Corporation for DAV Programs and Services
4. Outstanding State or National Representative and Senator
5. Outstanding Representative and Senate Staffer
6. Outstanding Support of Veterans Recreation
7. Outstanding DAV Membership Recruiter
8. Outstanding Vet Center Employee
9. Outstanding DAV Member

These are a few recommendations for awards and encourage you to think outside the box.

We ask you to remember the Convention is in Deadwood and the DAV doesn't provide award winners with funding for travel expenses. Again, the Awards Committee welcomes nominations from throughout the state.



Martin Pennock, Adjutant  
Disabled American Veterans  
Department of South Dakota



**DAV DEPARTMENT OF SOUTH DAKOTA  
AWARDS PROGRAM**

**AWARD CATEGORY:** \_\_\_\_\_

Nominee's Name \_\_\_\_\_

Nominee's Address \_\_\_\_\_  
(street)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(city) (state) (zip code)

Phone \_\_\_\_\_  
(home) (work)

Marital Status \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Birth \_\_\_\_\_

Membership Status: Life \_\_\_\_\_ Partial Life \_\_\_\_\_ (check one)

Eligible \_\_\_\_\_ Not Eligible \_\_\_\_\_

Chapter No. \_\_\_\_\_

List Disabilities:

1) Service-connected (Attach narrative description how disabilities were incurred).

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2) Nonservice-connected

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3) How nominee overcame handicap(s): (Attach additional sheets if necessary)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Nominee's Achievements:

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Nominee's involvement with DAV and community groups:

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Other:

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Approved by (Requires at least one signature).

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Chapter Commander	Chapter Adjutant
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Submitted by:

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(Name)	(Title)
(Street)	(City, State, Zip code)
(Phone)	(E-mail)



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## DAV 2024 State Convention Raffle Tickets

**\$6,500 in Cash Prizes**

**Prizes include:**

1st Prize .....	\$ 500.00 Cash
2nd Prize .....	\$ 500.00 Cash
3rd Prize .....	\$ 500.00 Cash
4th Prize .....	\$ 500.00 Cash
5th Prize .....	\$ 500.00 Cash
6th Prize .....	\$ 500.00 Cash
7th Prize .....	\$ 500.00 Cash
8th Prize .....	\$ 500.00 Cash
9th Prize .....	\$ 250.00 Cash
10th Prize .....	\$ 250.00 Cash
11th Prize .....	\$ 250.00 Cash
12th Prize .....	\$ 250.00 Cash
13th Prize .....	\$ 200.00 Cash
14th Prize.....	\$ 200.00 Cash
15th Prize.....	\$ 100.00 Cash
16th Prize .....	\$ 100.00 Cash
17th Prize .....	\$ 100.00 Cash
18th Prize.....	\$ 100.00 Cash
19th Prize .....	\$ 100.00 Cash
20th Prize .....	\$ 100.00 Cash
21st Prize .....	\$ 100.00 Cash
22nd Prize .....	\$ 100.00 Cash
23rd Prize .....	\$ 100.00 Cash
24th Prize .....	\$ 100.00 Cash
25th Prize .....	\$ 100.00 Cash
26th Prize .....	\$ 75.00 Cash

**\$ 5.00 Per Ticket / 3 Tickets For \$10.00**

Date of Drawing: April 27<sup>th</sup>, 2024  
 Winner need not be present to win.

The Proceeds of This Ticket To Be Used For The DAV Hospital Transportation  
 Network And Service to Veterans Programs In The State Of South Dakota.  
 Thank You for Your Assistance To Our Veterans Of South Dakota.

# VA delays disputed change in how it pays for veterans' ambulance trips

By [Leo Shane III](#)

Nov 27, 12:29 PM



Emergency workers offload a patient from a helicopter at the University of Vermont Medical Center. (Wilson Ring/AP)

[Veterans Affairs officials](#) will postpone a controversial rule change regarding [ambulance service reimbursements](#) after objections from industry officials and members of Congress who worried the move could endanger some veterans living in rural areas.

Department leaders have not completely given up on the plan, but promised [lawmakers](#) on Nov. 22 that they will not implement the changes until February 2025 at the earliest. The new rules had been set to go into effect by mid-February 2024.

VA press secretary Terrence Hayes said leaders are making the reimbursement changes “to better align with the rest of the health care industry.” A VA inspector general report from 2018 found the department had been paying 60% more than typical industry rates for air ambulance services, potentially wasting taxpayer money.

In remarks at the National Press Club earlier this month, [VA Secretary Denis McDonough](#) said the goal of new reimbursement rules is not to cut costs for [emergency medical care](#) but instead to push local providers into formal contracts with VA for the services, ensuring stability and consistency in pricing.

“As near as we can tell, VA alone among all major health care systems in the country pays for each individual ambulance,” he said. “We’re just paying cash for each run.”

But industry opponents have said sharp cuts in reimbursement rates for ambulance services could severely cripple operations in rural areas, potentially even forcing the closure of some emergency response services.

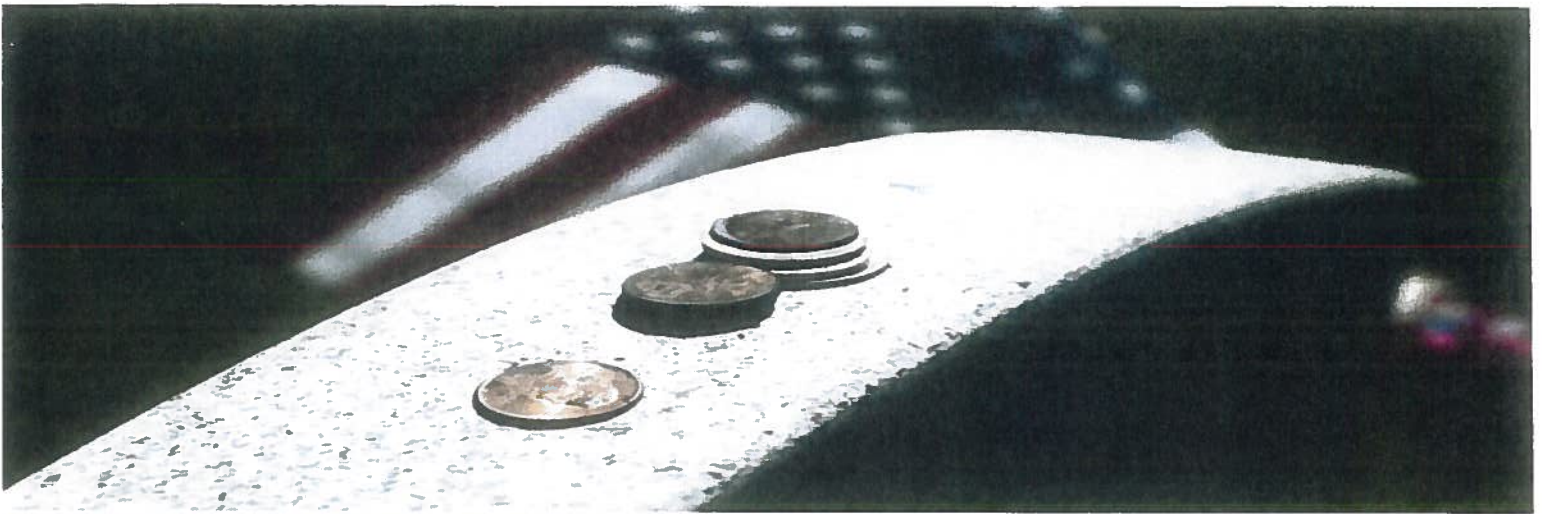
And lawmakers have decried VA's proposed fixes as too broad and possibly dangerous. In a statement, Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman Jon Tester, D-Mont., hailed the one-year delay as critical time needed to work out disagreements between VA and the emergency services companies.

"The availability of emergency air and ground transportation services in Montana and rural America can be the difference between life and death," he said. "VA's hasty implementation of its rate change for these services could have been the final straw for providers in rural America, and I'm glad to see VA answering my call and taking steps to fix this reimbursement issue."

Both the House and Senate are considering legislation on the issue. Lawmakers can now work on those proposals without a looming deadline early next year.

Ben Clayton, CEO of Life Flight Network, one of the groups involved in the lobbying efforts against the rule change, called the decision "a significant victory" for veterans.

"I look forward to working with the VA to ensure that reimbursement rates for air medical care are sustainable, protecting veteran access to this lifesaving service," he said. "Although there is still work to be done, this delay reflects a genuine effort by the VA towards a solution."



## What do the coins left on grave markers mean?

By: Julie Viragh

**H**ave you ever been in a cemetery and saw coins lying on a tombstone? All these coins have distinct meanings when left on the headstones of those who have perished, depending on their denomination. Leaving coins on the headstones of those who served in the military, especially those who died in combat, dates as far back as the Roman Empire.

**A** coin left on a headstone lets the deceased soldier's family know that someone has stopped by to pay their respect. Leaving a penny means you visited. A nickel means that you and the deceased soldier trained at boot camp together. If you served with the soldier in some capacity, you leave a dime. A quarter is significant because it means that you were there when that service member was killed.

**A**ir Force fighter pilots throw nickels into the grass at grave sites. This tradition began in the early 50's when phone calls on the public phones were only a nickel. Prior to leaving on a dangerous mission, pilots would toss a nickel into the grass so his team mates could notify the next of kin if he didn't make it back.

**S**o what happens to all the coins? According to tradition, the money left at graves in national

cemeteries and state Veterans cemeteries is collected, and the funds are put toward cemetery maintenance or paying burial costs for indigent Veterans. In the U.S., this practice became common during the Vietnam War due to the political divide in the country over the war; leaving a coin was seen as a more practical way to communicate that you had visited the grave. In general, this tradition can be traced back as far as the Roman Empire, as a way to give the deceased money for the hereafter.

**I**t is a common ritual to leave mementos on and within the final resting places of loved ones, whether it be flowers, a letter or keep-sake. Veterans also may leave very special remembrances at the graves of deceased service-members such as challenge coins. These tokens identify their bearer as members of particular units and are prioritized and cherished by those to whom they have been given.

**N**o matter what the original intention of the coin-leaver may be, it is clear that a coin left on a headstone is a symbol of remembrance and respect - a way of telling all who pass by that the person buried was loved and visited. So the next time you visit through a cemetery, bring a pocketful of pennies!

# Veteran honor guards adapt to aging population



The Custer Veterans Honor Guard boosted its numbers by combining the ranks of American Legion Post 46 and VFW Post 3442. “Six years ago, there weren’t two guys dressed the same,” said organizer Tony Gonsor. “Now everybody has a uniform and we’re all on the same page.” (Photo: Submitted)

Some South Dakota veteran honor guards are getting creative in how they maintain and grow their ranks.

**Why it matters:** Honor guards perform at funerals and on holidays such as Memorial Day and Veterans Day. It takes 14 volunteers to pull off each ceremony, with color guard, firing squad, bugler, officer of the day and commander.

**The challenge:** South Dakota ranks 22<sup>nd</sup> among U.S. states in the number of veterans per 100,000 adult residents. But the number of military veterans has declined nearly 20% since 2010, from 69,780 to 56,590, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Veterans comprise 8.3% of the state’s adult population, down from 11.4% in 2010 but still more than the national average of 6.2%.

“The average age is around 70, and a lot of them are slowing down,” said Gonsor. “We’re always trying to find younger members.”

The problem is emblematic of a larger trend in South Dakota, where the number of military veterans has declined nearly 20% since 2010, from 69,780 to 56,590, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Veterans comprise 8.3% of the state’s adult population, down from 11.4% in 2010 but still more than the national average of 6.2%.

South Dakota ranks 22<sup>nd</sup> among U.S. states in the number of veterans per 100,000 adult residents, ahead of neighboring states North Dakota (25<sup>th</sup>), Nebraska (30<sup>th</sup>), Iowa (35<sup>th</sup>) and Minnesota (41<sup>st</sup>).

## **176 WWII veterans in South Dakota**

For Gonsor, honor guard duties were traditionally filled by those who served in World War II, Korea or Vietnam, proud members of the American Legion or Veterans of Foreign Wars who faced the inevitable drumbeat of time, accelerated in some cases by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Census data show that there are 176 World War II veterans (0.3%) alive in South Dakota, compared with the Korean War (2,056; 3.6%) and Vietnam (19,363; 34.2%). Those who served in the Gulf War before Sept. 11, 2001, (15,116; 26.7%) and after 9/11 (16,317; 28.8%) make up the majority in the state.

Connie Johnson, president of the South Dakota Veterans Council, pointed to research that veterans under age 65 are more likely than their older peers to seek mental health counseling, with services increasingly available through the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs.

“A lot of older veterans were in organizations like the VFW and American Legion, and that’s where they went to find that camaraderie,” said Johnson. “In some ways, that served as mental health therapy for them. You see less of the (Gulf War veterans) in those groups because they can seek treatment and camaraderie through different levels of resources available.”

## **Military rites include 21-gun salute**

Gonsor’s first step in reviving the Custer Veterans Honor Guard was combining the ranks of Custer Post 46 and VFW Post 3442. That increased the number of volunteers available to perform military ceremonies such as the playing of taps, flag presentations and the 21-gun salute.

Still, there were growing pains as the squad – ranging in age from 47 to 85 – accepted requests to appear at sites throughout the southern Black Hills, as many as three funerals a month in addition to special ceremonies.

“Six years ago, there weren’t two guys dressed the same,” Gonsor said of the squad. “Now everybody has a uniform and we’re all on the same page most of the time. A lot of the ceremonial weapons were showing their age for a while and would sometimes misfire. But now we’ve got a good set of rifles, the same type used in World War II.”

The Custer Veterans Honor Guard boosted its numbers by combining the ranks of American Legion Post 46 and VFW Post 3442. “Six years ago, there weren’t two guys dressed the same,” said organizer Tony Gonsor. “Now everybody has a uniform and we’re all on the same page.”  
(Photo: Submitted)



It takes 14 volunteers to pull off each ceremony, with color guard, firing squad, bugler, officer of the day and commander. One of the more notable recent events was the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of D-Day on June 6, 2019, at the 1881 Courthouse Museum in Custer.

Among the World War II veterans honored at that event was Harold Stickney of Custer, who served in 41 missions as an engineer gunner on a B-24 in the U.S. Air Force. Stickney was a member of American Legion Post 46 and served as mayor of Custer.

### **Burn pit legislation passed by Congress, but challenges await veterans needing care**

Combat veterans in South Dakota are encouraged by new legislation in Congress to expand treatment and benefits for soldiers exposed to toxic burn pits during deployment overseas, but questions remain...

South Dakota News Watch Stu Whitney



This year, Gonsor's crew will perform a military salute on Veterans Day at Custer Veterans Park.

The honor guard suspended operations for a year during the pandemic and is still trying to meet the demand of military burials. The state Department of Health estimates that 3,281 people died from COVID-19 in South Dakota, with the elderly most at risk.

"Once we started back up, we were busy just about every weekend," Gonsor said. "With the cremation process, a lot of (veterans) were sitting on the shelf waiting to be buried. We're close to getting caught up."



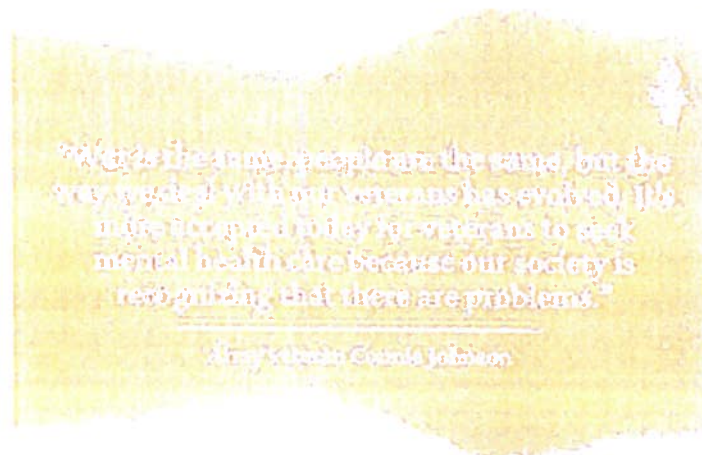
Connie Johnson, president of the South Dakota Veterans Council, said that paying tribute to those who served their country should be prioritized. "No matter where you go, there's someone whose life has been affected by the service," she said. (Photo: Submitted)

### **'How can we help them?'**

Connie Johnson served in the Army from 2002-05, spending 11 months in northern Iraq during the Second Gulf War. She received a Purple Heart for injuries suffered when her 101st Military Police Company convoy was struck by a roadside bomb.

She was able to return to duty but dealt with nerve damage and post-traumatic stress disorder after returning to South Dakota, with scars on her neck as a remnant of war.

Her [South Dakota Veterans Council](#) role keeps her active in advocating for former soldiers, with the recognition of changing times and shifting needs. In South Dakota, 12.4% of military veterans are female, according to Census data, compared to 7.7% in 2010.



More than one-third of all veterans in the state are under the age of 55. A recent study by the Rand Corp. showed that post-9/11 veterans are more diverse and educated than their older cohorts but also more likely to meet the criteria for serious psychological distress.

“As society changes, veterans change,” said Johnson, noting the protests and resentment that many Vietnam veterans faced upon returning home. “War is the same, people are the same, but the way we deal with our veterans has evolved. It's more accepted today for veterans to seek mental health care because our society is recognizing that there are problems. There's more willingness to say, ‘How can we help them?’”

### **Suicide rate for vets higher than civilians**

In 2020, the suicide rate for veterans was 57% higher than for non-veteran adults, according to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. Earlier this year, the Sioux Falls VA Medical Center campus was expanded with a mental health outpatient clinic focused on substance abuse, vocational rehabilitation and suicide prevention services.

Some veterans still find solace and support in groups such as the American Legion and VFW, while others take a more personalized approach.

“I love the civic duty and being around that atmosphere,” said Johnson, a South Dakota State University alum who serves as the school's coordinator of veteran affairs. “Other people do not. They don't like talking about their experiences or being reminded of them. Or maybe they prefer to do it behind closed doors with a counselor. It's about figuring out what works best.”

Gonsor was drafted into the Army in 1969 and served 14 months in Vietnam as a combat engineer and gunner. Part of his inspiration for the honor guard comes from his late father, a World War II veteran.

“I went to the VSO (Veterans Service Officer) to inquire about military rites and was told they would take care of it,” said Gonsor. “On the day of the funeral, we went to the cemetery and there was no military presence there. I vowed to myself that I would never let that happen again.”

Part of that means finding younger honor guard members, with Custer County a good place to recruit. It ranks first among South Dakota counties in percentage of adults who are military veterans (15.2%), followed by Fall River (14.1%), Meade (13.2%), Pennington (11.9%) and Day (11.7%).



Richard Bierle (right) and his wife Kristen (left) are members of American Legion Post 46 who joined the Custer Veteran Honor Guard. Their son, Brandon (center), a Custer High School senior, has served as a flag bearer in the color guard and will soon be trained as a member of the firing squad. (Photo: Submitted)

### **Honor guard finds new members**

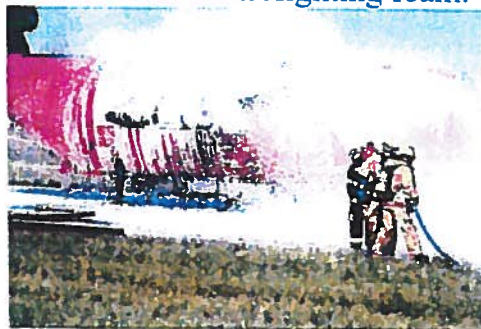
Helping with the youth movement is Richard Bierle and his wife, Kristen, who are members of American Legion Post 46. In August 2023, Kristen became the first female member of the honor guard by helping to provide military honors at the funeral of a Custer veteran.

Their son, Brandon, a senior at Custer High School, has served as a flag bearer in the color guard and will soon be trained as a member of the firing squad, bringing youthful energy to the corps at a time when it's much needed.

That's a source of satisfaction for Johnson, who doesn't believe the dwindling number of veterans in South Dakota should impact the legacies of those who came before.

### **Illnesses related to firefighting foam latest burden for South Dakota veterans**

Military veterans who served at Ellsworth Air Force Base near Rapid City and at Joe Foss Field Air National Guard Station in Sioux Falls are part of new national class-action lawsuits seeking damages due to exposure to toxic chemicals in firefighting foam.



To help do that, she started the Freedom Acres initiative in which she puts on her uniform upon request and delivers flowers to the gravesites of veterans whose families want to memorialize their service.

"I feel like we need to continue to have these remembrances," she said. "No matter where you go, there's someone whose life has been affected by the service. Whether it's at a funeral or Veterans Day or Memorial Day, these things are worth acknowledging."

As for Gonsor, his future plans were made clear to his fellow honor guard veterans.

"I'm going to end up in the national cemetery up in Sturgis – that's my next move," he said. "I told the guys that it would be an honor for them to bury me."

# Honoring South Dakota's bravest

Your favorite South Dakota veterans in your words

THE DAKOTA SCOUT

NOV 11

Ahead of Veterans Day, *The Dakota Scout* queried readers about their favorite South Dakota veterans. The response was enthusiastic. Not surprisingly, many readers chose a family member as their favorite veteran. Here are their stories.



My favorite veterans are my dad and three of his brothers who all served during World War II. Emerson R. Gross, the first World War II casualty from Lake County and my namesake, was the uncle I never knew – thus my middle name of Emerson.

Emerson left SDSU to join the Army Air Corps, the predecessor of the Air Force, and be a fighter pilot. I would like to read a few sentences from a book my grandmother, Emerson's mom, wrote in 1982.

“Elwood (grandpa) and I were named township leaders to assist in problems that might arise from the war. The day of June 2, 1942, we attended a meeting at the courthouse in the afternoon. I had washed cloths in the morning and the lines were full of them. We hadn't been home long until we saw our mailman and his wife drive into the yard. He handed us a telegram which stated that Emerson was killed in a plane crash that morning. It just couldn't be true. There it was, though, in the telegram. He was on a flight and had engine trouble. He tried to make it to a landing field instead of bailing out, as he could have, but the plane would have fallen on a schoolyard full of children. As it was, he lost altitude and couldn't get out. What a tragedy for our family.”

Randy Gross, Elkton



My dad is Army, my uncle Jim is Navy, and their dad Wally Huff, the former Woodbury County Attorney, was also Navy. But if you think I am going to punt from my favorite Navy veteran, my wife Tracy, you are sorely mistaken.

She enlisted against parental wishes just out of her local high school, Chariton High School, in Chariton Iowa, where she was born and raised. She went fresh out of school into boot camp out in Jacksonville, Florida, and then her first assignment was to be stationed with the first group of women that were being integrated into active military service, on of all things an aircraft carrier, the USS Lexington. Not even a month into that service, there was a training accident which killed her bunk mate and boot camp friend Lisa Mayo, along with the pilot and two others.

Tracy served honorably and was discharged 6 years later, serving another 6 years in the Naval Reserves, drilling in Des Moines, Iowa until we were married and moved to South Dakota.

Steve Huff, Yankton

My father (passed away May 1997) John Riswold from Baltic, S.D. World War II, 7th Calvary Infantry 1943-1945 Pacific Theatre. A great American and father!

Upon returning from the war he helped his dad on his farm by Baltic, and also was store manager of C & E Department store in Dell Rapids. Got married in January 1946. In 1950 he started working at the John Morrell meat packing plant for 26 years and also farming operation until 1964. He was an active church member at East Nidaros Lutheran, Baltic. He played amateur baseball and was on the 1942 Renner state championship team.

Dennis Riswold, Chandler, Arizona

My favorite South Dakota veteran is my husband, Mike Mehlhaff, Jr. While he did not have to go overseas, he served Active Duty at Fort Lewis in Washington for four years. He then went on to serve in the South Dakota National Guards. He left the guards after 4 years but has continued to support local veterans through the Post 8 Legion in Pierre serving on their board and currently serving as a lobbyist for the South Dakota American Legion.

Terri Mehlhaff, Pierre

Being a public servant isn't a new concept for Monica Serling-Swank. In 1982 she became a member of the U.S. Navy and held a Petty Officer 3rd Class role while



stationed at NavCamEastPac in Wahiawa, HI. Here she served as a Cryptologic Technician Administrator before moving around the country and eventually meeting her wife Lynn, in New York.

Monica and Lynn were married in a civil union in Connecticut in June 2006. Following that year, they moved back to South Dakota — a state which approved a state constitutional ban on same-sex marriage and civil unions in 2006.

Since moving back, Monica has devoted countless hours to a multitude of causes including Sioux Falls Pride. In her volunteer role, she made it a point to ensure everyone in South Dakota had access to the same freedoms and respect we all deserve.

In 2014, Monica's public service took the form of signing on to South Dakota's marriage lawsuit. This solidified her stake in a fight that would later secure a win by way of the Supreme Court ruling in Obergefell v. Hodges on June 26, 2015.

Adam Dale Jorgensen, Sioux Falls



David Mavity, a beloved veteran, dedicated over 20 years to the U.S. Army, achieving the prestigious rank of Sergeant Major in the Chemical Corps. His extensive service spanned not only across multiple U.S. bases but also in Germany and Panama, showcasing his commitment to defending our nation. Beyond his military accolades, David shines as an outstanding father, grandfather, and

husband, embodying a deep love for his family. His astonishing intelligence and intellectual curiosity have inspired many, fostering a lifelong pursuit of knowledge. Remarkably, David's unwavering friendship with me has endured for over 60 years, a testament to his loyalty and character.

Greg LaFollette, Sioux Falls

Bill Peters, my husband. He enlisted in 1966. He graduated from helicopter school and was sent to Vietnam in 1967 as a W2 Warrant Officer. He flew over 1,300 hours that year of which 600 were combat assault time. He returned to the USA in June 1968 and became a flight instructor. His military honors include National Defense service medal, Army Aviator badge, Good Conduct medal, Vietnam Service medal, Vietnam Campaign medal, Army Commendation medal and 35 air medals! He was honorably discharged. He then joined the Sioux Falls Fire Rescue and became a captain during his 23 years of service. He then owned his own business and served on many boards in our local community. After retirement is now serving in leadership with the South Dakota American Legion. A LIFE of SERVICE to others.

Sue Peters, Sioux Falls



My favorite South Dakota veteran is my grandfather, Emil Carlson, who served during W.W. I. He never talked to me about it but I have many artifacts that tell his story and I use them to share that story with my students. When I grew up in Rosholt, S.D., there was a good chance that on any visit to town (population 406) I would cross paths with a Vietnam vet, W.W. II vet, and W.W. I vet.

That is not the world my students live in and sometime they are unfairly characterized as not knowing or caring. I try to give them a chance. Being able to put those items in their hands and tell the story of a soldier who grew up on an island in a lake that served as a border for South Dakota and enlisted in Pig's Point, VA, gives them a chance to understand and appreciate what it might have meant to be a veteran.

When my grandfather was married years later the minister was Rex Johnson. Rex served in W.W.I also and was severely injured in a battle in France. After the combat ceased a wagon arrived to pick up wounded and administer aid. They walked past Rex and said, "This one's dead," and moved on. After rounds were made, the soldier driving the wagon said, "We have room for one more." Rex sat up and said, "I'll take that!"

Left for dead, a South Dakota soldier who help me get to where I am today by uniting my grandparents in matrimony.

Lee Carlson, St. James Minnesota

George O. Johnson, from Irene, S.D., was a W.W. II combat infantry man in Company C, 317<sup>th</sup> Regiment, 80<sup>th</sup> "Blue Ridge" Division. Following their landing on the Normandy coast they fought and largely walked their way across France. In the early morning hours of Sept. 5, 1944 while attempting to cross the Moselle River in eastern France, George was wounded by shrapnel fractures to his leg and ankle from German shells. This was George's longest day. That day he lay still in the high grass on the river bank. Other soldiers littered the river bank awaiting the cover of darkness which would allow rescue. It was a day of morphine and tourniquets until he was evacuated to an aid station and subsequently to a field hospital for his initial surgery to save his leg. Three days later he was flown to England for further surgery/treatments, then on to Halloran Army Hospital in New York and finally to Winter General Hospital in Topeka, Kansas. Following numerous surgeries over his 13 month hospital stay, he was discharged from the hospital and Army in September 1945. He would carry German shrapnel in his body the rest of his life. He earned a Purple Heart, which is quietly put away and rarely talked about. George subsequently became a lawyer, and lived his life in Sioux Falls with his family. He died in June 2022.

Phil Johnson, Sioux Falls



John Waldron, born Aug. 24, 1900 in Fort Pierre, was of Oglala Sioux heritage on his mother's side. He led a squadron of torpedo bombers, taking off the USS Hornett aircraft carrier, into the Battle of Midway. Waldron is credited with using his "Sioux Indian instincts" to actually find the Japanese aircraft carriers the morning of battle, June 4, 1942. Once airborne, he diverted from directions given by superior officers. He led the entire American attack force to the proper location. Waldron, along with 28 of the 30 flyers of his squadron, perished when their planes were shot down by the fast-flying Japanese Zeros. Waldron was a graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy, class of 1924. He studied law and was admitted to the bar, but never practiced. In recognition of his gallant service, the Naval Destroyer, USS Waldron carries his name and the bridge over the Missouri river (connecting Fort Pierre and Pierre) was named in his honor.

Roger Baron, Rapid City



I would like to nominate a local, all volunteer non-profit organization that takes deployed and service-connected disabled veterans on fishing and hunting trips around the region. This includes open water fishing, ice fishing, pheasant hunts, and combo upland/waterfowl hunts. Resort lodging, meals, guides, boats, snow bears, equipment, ammo, bait, and most importantly camaraderie, are all provided free of charge to the veteran. Nature heals and these trips are precious to us vets. My nomination is the non-profit Warriors Never Give Up (WNGU) based out of Sioux Falls. WNGU has taken hundreds of veterans and active duty military on healing adventures at no cost to us vets. I salute WNGU for their efforts to bring some level of peace to our Nation's warriors. AIRBORNE! ALL THE WAY!

James B. Stengle, Yankton

Service-connected disabled veteran

# MELISSA STOCKWELL

*Veteran. Paralympian. Author. Mom.*

**FRIDAY**  
**April 5 2024**

**VETAID**

HELD AT: THE ALLIANCE  
1600 W. RUSSELL ST  
SIOUX FALLS, SD 57104

## *The Power of Choice*

The Inspiring Story of Melissa Stockwell, an Army Veteran and Paralympic Athlete  
Melissa Stockwell served as a Second Lieutenant in the US Army, and was deployed to Baghdad, Iraq in March 2004. Sadly, just three weeks into her deployment, a roadside bomb hit her Humvee causing the loss of her left leg above the knee. After undergoing several surgeries to recover from multiple infections, Melissa was honorably discharged from the Army. As the first female soldier to lose a limb in active combat, she was awarded both The Bronze Star Medal and the Purple Heart.

Despite the tragic incident, Melissa turned to sports for recovery. She made history in April 2008 by becoming the first Iraqi War Veteran to qualify for the Beijing Paralympics. She then shifted her focus to Paratriathlon and went on to become a three-time World Champion. Her talent and hard work led her to win the Paralympic Bronze Medal at the Paralympic Games in Rio de Janeiro on September 11, 2016.



John M. Bliss Post 628



*the* **ALLIANCE**  
South Dakota Military Heritage Alliance, Inc.

*Proceeds benefit local Veterans Support Programs*

# MELISSA STOCKWELL

Melissa, an ex-U.S. Army officer, two-time Paralympic triathlete and swimmer, will be the Keynote Speaker on April 5th, 2024. This event will be hosted at The Alliance and is a joint effort between the John M. Bliss VFW Post 628, Arthur H. Muchow DAV Chapter 1, and the Women of the Armed Forces. We are thrilled to have her grace the stage and share her incredible story.

## Supporting Our Veterans with Your Generous Donations

At VFW Post 628, DAV Chapter 1 and WOTAF, our commitment lies in making a positive impact with our local veteran and civilian community. Our mission is made possible thanks to the kindness and generosity of people like you. We would appreciate any monetary donations you can provide. Join us in continuing the tradition of supporting our veterans.



**SILVER**

**\$3750**

Includes a suite for up to 10 people,  
10 signed books, 10 Meet & Greet passes  
Taco Bar



**GOLD**

**\$5000**

**EXCLUSIVE PRIMARY DONOR\***

Suite for up to 10 people,  
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10 Meet & Greet passes  
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20 Drink Tickets



**BRONZE**

**\$500**

Includes a table for up to 6 people,  
2 signed books,  
Meat & cheese tray

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone #: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact: \_\_\_\_\_

### Level of Donation

- Gold
- Silver
- Bronze
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

Checks written to:

VFW Post 628  
Attn: Stockwell Event  
1700 W Russell St  
Sioux Falls, SD 57104  
605-338-0869

\*Exclusive Primary Donor. Will have top billing and sole branding in their business category.

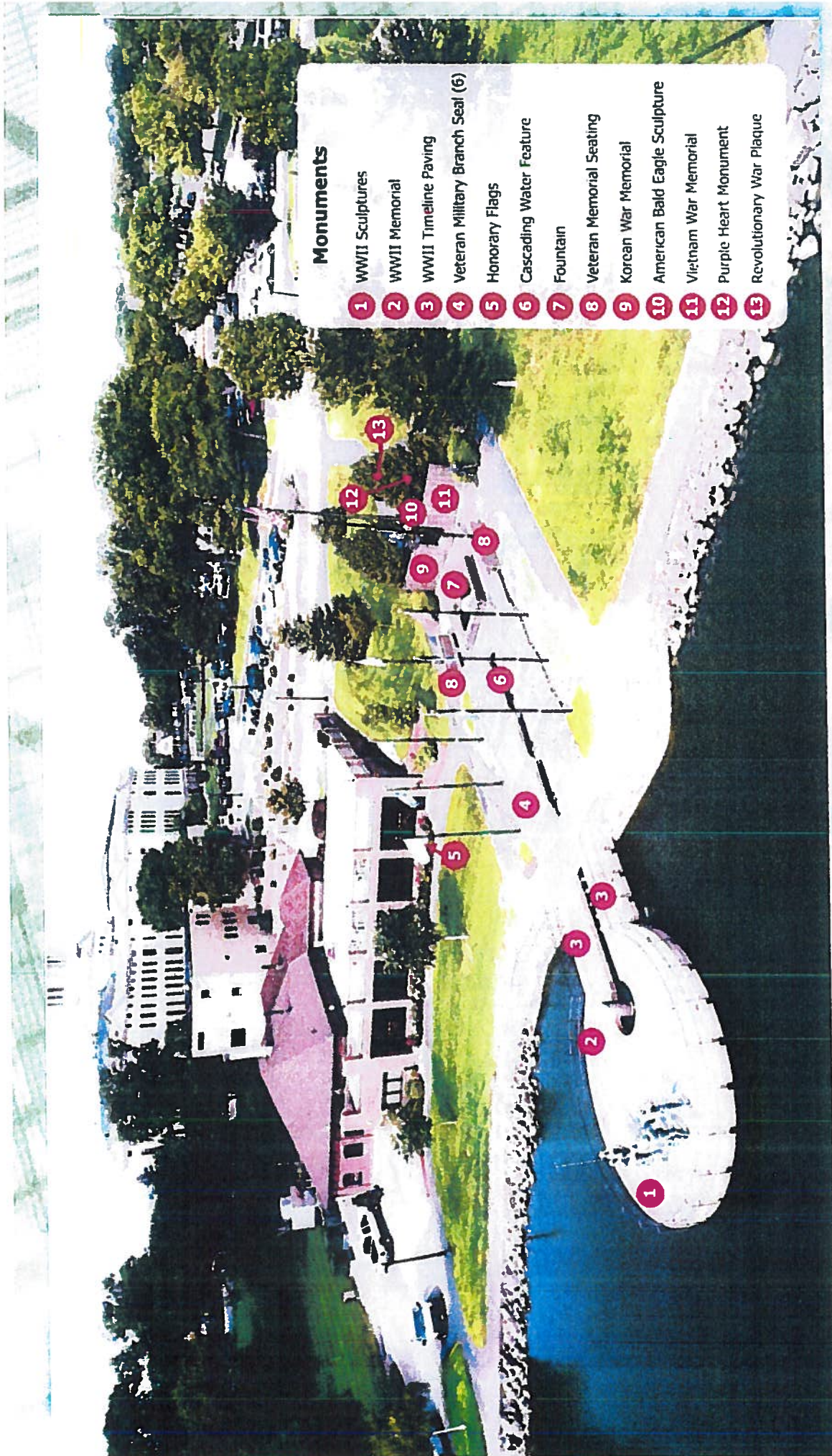
**Thank you for supporting your local veterans!**

Depending on a person's individual tax situation, your gift may be fully tax deductible. John M Bliss Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 628 in Sioux Falls is a 501(c) (4) organization. IRS Form W9 available upon request



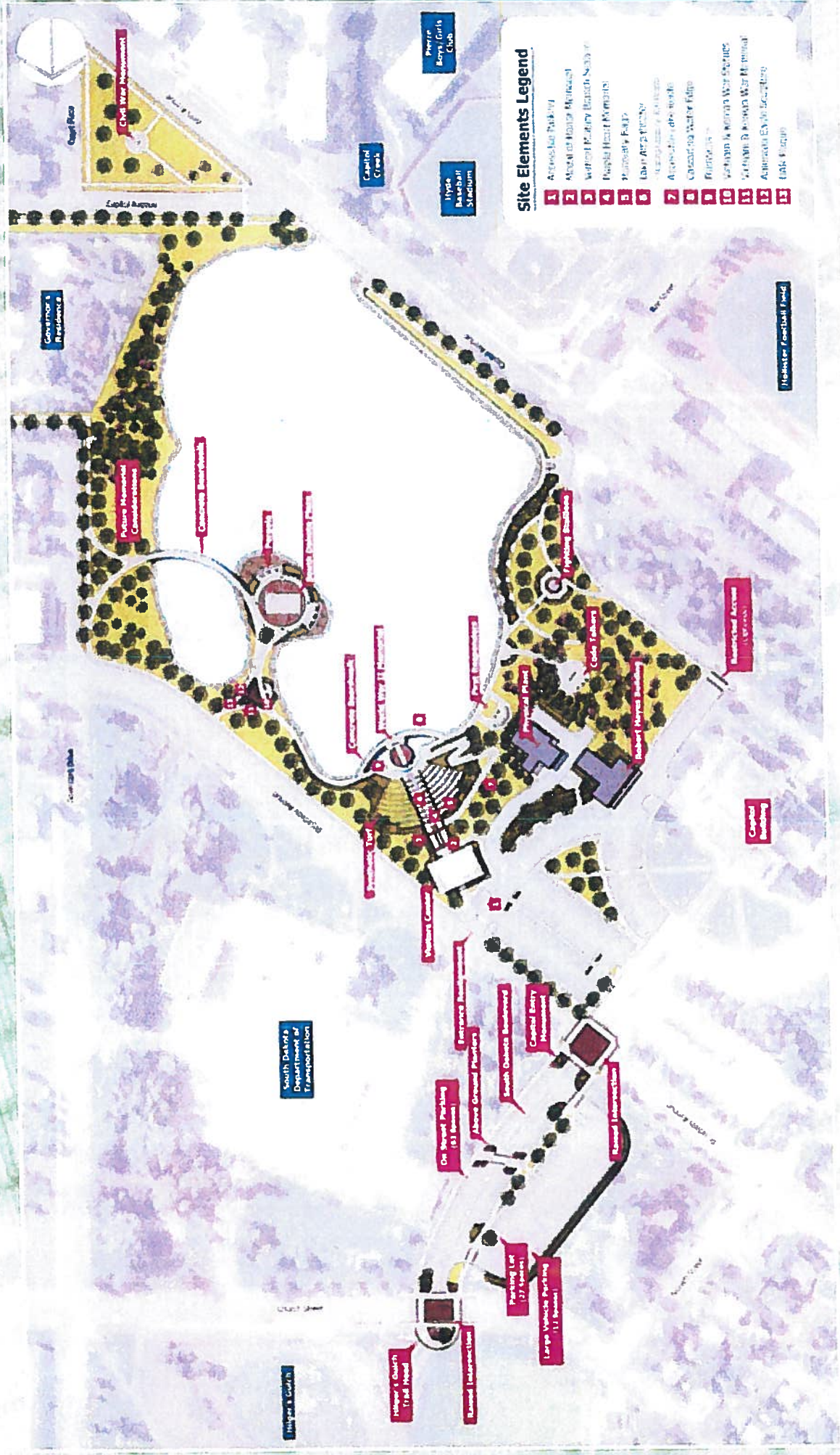
# Capitol Lake Master Plan





### Monuments

- 1 WWII Sculptures
- 2 WWII Memorial
- 3 WWII Timeline Paving
- 4 Veteran Military Branch Seal (6)
- 5 Honorary Flags
- 6 Cascading Water Feature
- 7 Fountain
- 8 Veteran Memorial Seating
- 9 Korean War Memorial
- 10 American Bald Eagle Sculpture
- 11 Vietnam War Memorial
- 12 Purple Heart Monument
- 13 Revolutionary War Plaque



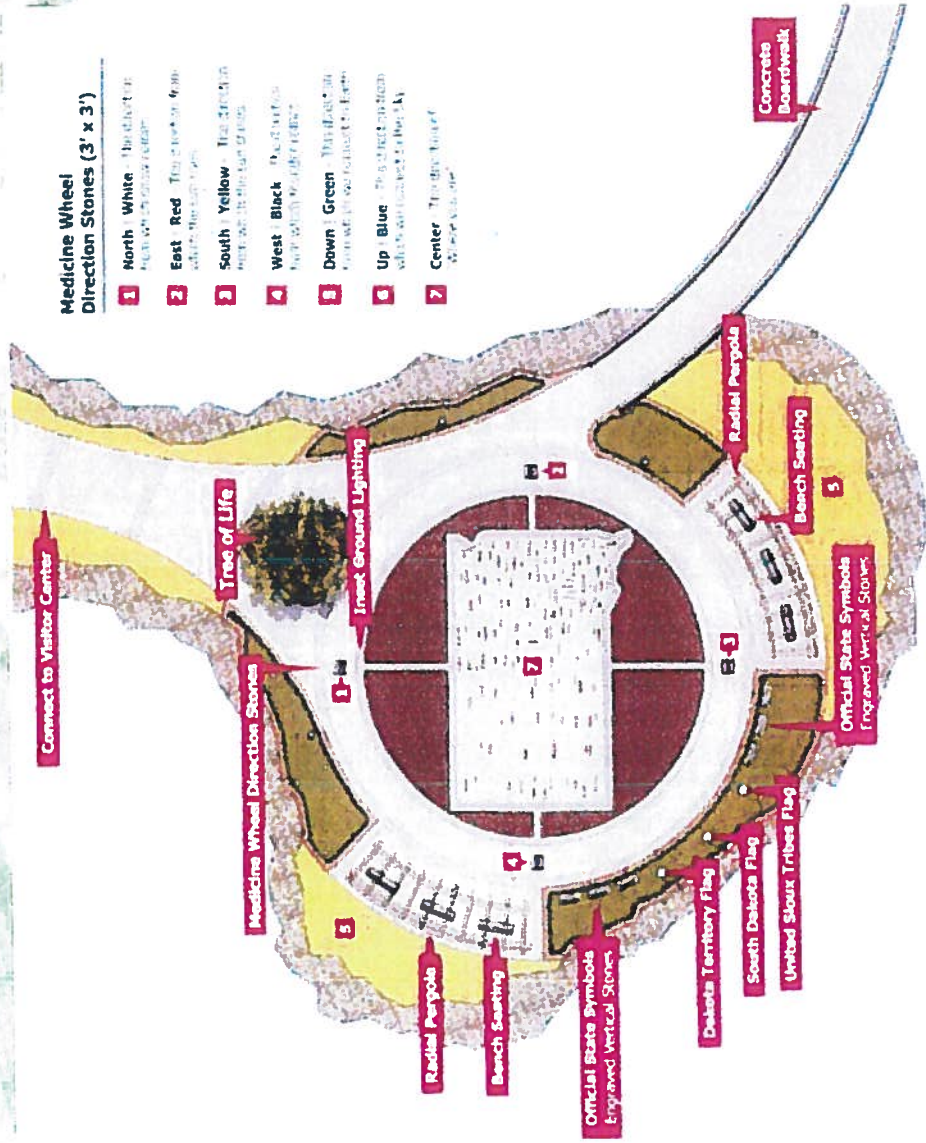
### Site Elements Legend

- 1 Accessible Parking
- 2 Accessible Housing
- 3 Accessible Public Restrooms
- 4 People's Heart Monument
- 5 Publicly Accessible
- 6 East Side Parking
- 7 Accessible Office Building
- 8 Accessible Water Filtration
- 9 Accessible Water Filtration
- 10 Accessible Water Filtration
- 11 Accessible Water Filtration
- 12 Accessible Water Filtration
- 13 East Parking





# Capito



## Medicine Wheel Direction Stones (3' x 3')

- 1 North White** - Directional stone with white background
- 2 East Red** - Directional stone with red background
- 3 South Yellow** - Directional stone with yellow background
- 4 West Black** - Directional stone with black background
- 5 Down Green** - Directional stone with green background
- 6 Up Blue** - Directional stone with blue background
- 7 Center** - Directional stone with white background