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### **SDDVA Secretary Whitlock's April Column – South Dakota's Commitment to our Veterans is Older than even our State.**

South Dakota's Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home in Hot Springs has served veterans since before statehood and has a long and interesting history. In February of 1889, the Dakota Territorial Legislature met and while in session, they passed a bill establishing the Dakota Soldiers' Home to provide care for veterans.

The Dakota Territory was the first of all territories to provide such a resource for veterans. Nine days after South Dakota became a state, the cornerstone was placed in the original Dakota Soldiers' Home building.

Over the past 132 years, the names and the design for the Home have changed, but South Dakota's commitment to take care of our veterans has not! Throughout the history of the Home, emphasis has always been placed on providing the highest level of care for South Dakota's veterans. Our Home has been "home" to over 4,700 residents since its opening.

It is our privilege to serve South Dakota's veterans and we take that responsibility very seriously. Residents can enjoy our beautiful grounds, the gardens, the resident library and media center, chapel, beauty/barber shop, bistro, transportation services, complete medical services, physical therapy, social services, spiritual guidance, and extensive recreational programming and events.

Next Thursday, (April 14) at 8:00 pm (CT), South Dakota Public Broadcasting will air a documentary on the Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home on their "*Dakota Life*" program. We encourage everyone to watch this program and learn more about South Dakota's great custom of taking care of our veterans. The doors to the Home opened in 1990 and have never closed.

We extend an invitation to each of you to visit South Dakota's veteran's home. You will be proud, as we are, that such a place exists. For more information, please contact our Admissions Specialist Lisa Woeppel at 605-745-5127 (Ext. 1500115) or email her at: [lisa.woepfel@state.sd.us](mailto:lisa.woepfel@state.sd.us).

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We have had numerous inquiries about how the proposed federal VA closures and downsizings will affect our Home. These proposals **will not** impact the care of our veterans at the Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home. South Dakota has a legacy of taking care of our veterans and that will not end because of the actions of the VA, the President, or Congress.

Missions and visions have changed over the past 132 years, but the one thing that has not changed is the dedication and commitment of South Dakota in providing the highest level of care to our heroes. As veterans age and different era veterans become residents, we are prepared to meet those challenges. We continue to expand and introduce new programs designed to best meet the current, ongoing, and upcoming needs of all veterans. Caring for and maximizing the overall health, welfare, and quality of life of South Dakota veterans has been, and will always be, our top priority.

Greg Whitlock, Secretary  
South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs