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JULY 2025 • VOL. 18 - NO. 5

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The 2025-26 Board of Directors of the South Dakota Firefighters Association is pictured at Fire School in Watertown on June 13. In front from left to right are: Cherise Evans, Rapid City, Black Hills Director; Samara Erickson, Pierre, Secretary; Charlie Kludt, Viborg, President; Dave Jorgenson, Colton, Southeast Director; and Jason Mosterd, Burke, Badlands Director; Second row: Denny Gorton, Rapid City, Treasurer (retiring); Chad Baumgarten, Lemmon, Northwest Director; Mark Stoks, Aberdeen, Northeast Director; Don Ward, Belle Fourche, Vice-President; Rick George, Woonsocket, Central Director; and Rick Gustad, Platte, South Central Director. See many more photos inside this issue from fire school, plus a special tribute to 30-year board member Denny Gorton who is retiring from the board.

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The BIA Pine Ridge Agency Wildland Fire Program Helps Expand Tribal Engagement

The Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) Pine Ridge Agency has led efforts to engage the Oglala Sioux Tribe in South Dakota through hazardous fuels reduction projects.

The hazardous fuels reduction projects on the reservation not only prevent wildfires but have helped elders stay warm in the

cold months and provide community members essential items for traditional ceremonies. In 2015, the Agency launched hazardous fuels thinning projects on the Reservations through the use of the Reserved Treaty Rights Lands program. The intent of the RTRL program is to provide tribes with opportunities to operate tribally determined projects on ancestral lands, regardless of ownership, to enhance the health and resiliency of tribal natural resources as it pertains to wildland fire risk reduction.

Thinning, a method used to treat hazardous fuels, involves skilled wildland firefighters who mechanically remove overgrown vegetation, both living and dead. This overgrowth poses a significant wildfire risk due to its flammability. After completing a thinning project, firefighters often burn the remaining piles of slash and wood under close supervision. Tamara Randall, the BIA Pine Ridge Agency fire management officer, recognized that these projects could benefit the community beyond wildfire mitigation. She noted that too much wood was being burned that could be utilized by the Tribe.

Randall and Wildland Firefighter Justin Bauer, the agency's hazardous fuels reduction module lead, began collaborating with the Oglala Sioux Tribe. Bauer contacted tribal leadership within natural resources, emergency management and land management who collectively brainstormed with Bauer on how to best make use of the slash and wood from the thinning projects. As a result of these efforts, the Agency completed six thinning projects that fostered Oglala Sioux tribal engagement and supported elder needs and traditional ceremonies by providing wood to its tribal members.

Now, after a thinning project, the Oglala Sioux Tribal Emergency Management department collects the wood that would otherwise be burned. This wood is distributed as emergency firewood for tribal elders, who are the top priority. Remaining wood is then made available to community members for traditional ceremonies, such as sweats and sun dances.

As of March 2025, 18 cords of wood have been provided for the elderly, and 10 cords of wood have been provided for community members for traditional ceremonies. Bauer's hazardous fuels reduction module has completed 10 thinning projects totaling 160 acres with three thinning projects remaining.

"It's a grounding source," said Randall regarding tribal engagement. "I think sometimes we get caught up in the day to day [of working in wildland fire management]. We miss those grounding aspects of our culture. It's a reminder that it's still there."

"It's grounding for us to know that not only are we doing our job, but we're giving back to the community. It gives us a bigger purpose."

ACTION FIRE PHOTOS NEEDED!

Please send them to jeff@southdakotafirefighter.com along with information to explain the photo.



The BIA Pine Ridge Agency hazardous fuels reduction module completes a thinning project on the Oglala Sioux Reservation. Photo taken on March 18, 2025, by BIA Pine Ridge Agency Fire Management Officer Tamara Randall.

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BHE plans spark concern for communities, emergency management

By LESLIE SILVERMAN

A letter dated May 23 from Pennington County Emergency Management director Dustin Willett to the Hill City Common Council and Keystone Town Board is drawing concerns throughout the communities of Keystone and Hill City.

The letter was in response to a proposed Black Hills Energy Power Shutoff (PS) program.

Officials in both towns say they were not informed about the plan by Black Hills Energy (BHE), yet the proposed plan could shut off power to residents and tourists of the towns for multiple days. Willett summarized the plan as the de-energizing of power lines during times of low humidity and high winds.

The shut offs would occur in areas and at times BHE “deem to be at a high risk for wildfire ignitions and subsequent large fire growth,” the letter states.

Willett said, “These power shutoffs are anticipated to last for multiple days at a time due, in part, to any de-energized powerlines needing to be inspected before restoring power. BHE has said it will attempt to provide up to 72 hours of warning before a shutoff.”

Willett said his team learned about the plan since March but that the creation of the plan has not been collaborative. He was waiting for BHE to bring the plan forward to the public, and when it did not, he did, sending a letter not only to municipalities but to travel and tourism entities and Pennington County legislators. His goal was to start conversations and raise awareness about the plan.

Jennifer Altieri with BHE said a PSPS program is “a necessary and critical tool for wildfire prevention and mitigation, particularly for utilities with high fire risk areas. The goal of a PSPS program is to prevent electric facilities from becoming a source of wildfire ignition.”

Altieri said the program is not “unique to the Black Hills.” In fact, these types of programs are used in western states by multiple utility companies.

Altieri went on to say the company has met with “area fire departments and neighboring emergency response agencies throughout the BHE service territory over the last several months.” But what area fire departments BHE spoke to prior to formulating this PS is unclear.

Lynn Kendall from BHE said the company has “not had the chance to schedule meetings with Battle Creek or Hill City Volunteer Fire Departments yet.” Neither department returned calls about the matter and South Dakota Wildland Fire declined comment on the issue.

Neither the Town of Keystone nor City Hill City knew about the plan prior to receiving Willett’s letter.

Hill City city administrator Nate Anderson said the Hill City Common Council will discuss the issue at future meetings.

“The city’s position is in perfect alignment with the letter issued by Pennington County DES (Department of Emergency Services). Hill City believes BHE’s proposed plan to cut all electricity for multiple days creates a greater risk to human safety than the relatively understood risks associated with wildfire in the Black Hills. This decision leaves our community members susceptible to increased medical emergencies, loss of food and refrigeration and the loss of ability to cook, heat water, etc. Additionally, this decision would also result in tremendous economic damage to Hill City, our merchants, and the region,” said Anderson.

Hill City has installed a pair of emergency generators for its water system. It also has a generator trailer that can power one of the city wells.

“The combination of generators can maintain the public water system indefinitely but are limited by fuel supply,” Anderson said. “Additional permanent back-up generators at the primary well locations are proposed for future budget years.”

The wastewater treatment plant of the city is also prepared for an emergency, with “routine storage for 10 days of summer flows (300,000 gallons per day average) and well over a month

of routine winter flows (60,000 gallons per day average).” There is also additional emergency lagoon storage.

Anderson highlighted the importance of the current upgrades the city is making to its wastewater plant.

“Automatic pressure-reducing valves are planned for installation in late 2025 as the first phase of water system modernization. These pressure-reducing valves will further improve firefighting flows throughout the system without the need for public works to transfer water manually.”

However, he aired concerns about the current water storage capacity, saying, “The recharge rate is limited to a single well. This protects portions of the city served by municipal water, but not necessarily areas outside of city limits.”

This could cause agencies to use alternate water sources like Major or Mitchell Lakes to fight any fires.

Keystone officials said that in the summer the town could probably go for about three or four days with water, while the sewer plant could operate for three days unless there was more diesel available for the generators. It has already discussed purchasing tanks for additional diesel fuel storage.

Willett’s letter outlined many concerns about the plan such as line safety, infrastructure issues and environmental and economic consequences.

There were 15 concerns in to-

tal including some related to fire risk, public safety or informing the public. Issues such as “loss of some telecommunications and broadband data services,” the “inability to obtain pumped fuel in the affected area” and “increased risk of wildfire ignition due to increased portable generator use and hot fueling,” were stated. Willett also expressed concerns about where shut off victims might shelter. Neither the Keystone nor Hill City have city-owned property with a backup generator that could be used as a shelter if needed.

Economically, there is no telling how the BHE shut off plan may affect the two towns. Keystone does not collect property taxes and relies on its sales tax revenue to pay its employees and administer services to businesses and residents. And while Hill City is a year round community, many businesses count on the summer tourist season to generate enough revenue to keep doors open in the winter.

There is no clear indicator as to what weather might create a shut off. Willett noted that, “BHE has stated it will not be sharing the specific climatic thresholds that they will be basing their decisions on. Generally, they have referenced high winds and low humidity.”

He added, “BHE has stated that power shutoffs would have occurred multiple times over the last five years.”

Willett’s team is already spitballing ideas on how to help

communities. This will be a discussion item at the June 17 Pennington County Board of Commissioners meeting.

A document on the South Dakota Public Utility Commission (PUC) website dated June 5 and titled Wildfire Risk FAQs says the PUC “does not have authority to require or approve the plan,” nor is the PUC involved in the development or review of these plans.

The document cites South Dakota Codified Law 49-34A-2.1 and states that a “public utility may disconnect power in cases of emergency.”

PUC deputy executive director Leah Mohr stated it is the, “PUC staff’s understanding that BHE is currently in the process of gathering information from local emergency response agency officials, city and county officials, and others regarding the development of a PS plan.”

The utility’s officials will be using this feedback to understand the impact of potential shutoffs and how the plan should account for these impacts. BHE has relayed to the commission that there is no final PSPS plan at this time, and the utility’s officials will be sharing the plan with the commission once it is drafted.”

Kendall reiterated that position, saying BHE intends to discuss its wildfire mitigation plan with the South Dakota PUC sometime this month. This plan includes the PS.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Email your Upcoming Event by the 10th of the previous month (ex. Aug. 10 for the September issue) to jeff@southdakotafirefighter.com. There is no charge.

JULY 19, 2025: 7th Annual Lesterville Fire & Rescue Firehouse Rib Cook-Off, Lesterville Fire Station, 212 Main Ave. register by contacting Andy at 605-660-0212, cash prizes. Raffle tickets available, cornhole tournament with a pork loin meal available at 11 a.m. Princess Bounce House and kids water fights. Proceeds go towards firefighting protective equipment – bunker gear.

AUG. 9, 2025: Chancellor CFD’s 120th Celebration – water fights, food and fire trucks. To sign up or bring a truck, contact Jeremy at chancellorfire@hotmail.com or 605-681-6571.

SEPT. 22-24, 2025: NVFC Fall Conference and Meeting, Rapid City.

OCT. 10-12, 2025: South Dakota Firefighters Association Fall Conference, Spearfish Convention Center, Spearfish.

JUNE 11-13, 2026: 140th State Fire School, Watertown.



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U.S. Fire Administration Firefighter Fatality Notification

The following are U.S. Fire Administration Firefighter Fatality Notifications of firefighters who have died from across the United States. The South Dakota Fire Service extends its thoughts to the family and friends of these firefighters.

• **MARK RAY DRANBAUER, JR.**, 44, Baltimore, MD, died May 17, 2025. Mark was a career firefighter and currently a lieutenant with the Baltimore City Fire Department and had attained 23 years of service. On May 12, 2025, while on an aerial ladder attempting rescue during a rowhome fire, Lieutenant Mark Dranbauer, Jr. suffered a medical emergency. He fell down the ladder and was quickly rescued by other firefighters. Lieutenant Dranbauer was then taken to a hospital in critical condition where he passed away on May 17, 2025.

• **CHARLES MUDRA**, 52, Baltimore, MD, died May 16, 2025. Charles was a career firefighter with 17 years of service and an emergency vehicle driver for the Baltimore City Fire Department. Emergency Vehicle Driver Charles Mudra suffered a catastrophic medical emergency in between a skills assessment session he was participating in at the Baltimore City Fire Department training academy. Immediate advance life support measures were administered on scene and emergency Vehicle Driver Mudra was transported to a hospital where, despite all efforts, he was pronounced deceased. The cause of death has not yet been determined.

• **JAKE BRIDGES**, 20, Hickory, NC, died June 5, 2025. Jake was a career firefighter with two years of service with the Hickory Fire Department. At approximately 1:49 a.m. on June 5, Hickory Fire Department firefighters, including Firefighter Jake Bridges, were dispatched to a structure fire. The fire was extinguished, and firefighters cleared the scene at approximately 4:52 a.m.

After returning to their station, firefighters worked to get the truck back in service. At approximately 5:08 a.m., Firefighter Bridges experienced a medical emergency and was transported to a local hospital. Despite resuscitation efforts of his fellow firefighters, first responders, and medical personnel, Firefighter Bridges passed away.

• **DAVID L. WARFEL**, 57, Harrisburg, PA, died May 29, 2025. David was a forest maintenance supervisor with the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, Bureau of Forestry and had attained 25 years of career service. On Wednesday, May 28, Forest Maintenance Supervisor David L. Warfel led training exercises as part of the Wildland Fire Academy at Shippensburg University. During classroom training the following day, Forest Maintenance Supervisor Warfel reported feeling ill. Later that evening at approximately 5:45 p.m. on Thursday, May 29, he was found deceased in his quarters from a cardiac event.

• **VIOLET CARAMELLA**, 25, Asheville, NC, died June 14, 2025. Violet was a part-time (paid) firefighter with the Riceville Volunteer Fire Department with one-and-a-half years of service. Firefighter Violet Caramella was involved in a serious all-terrain vehicle accident during a fire department training exercise. Despite immediate response from fellow firefighters and emergency medical personnel, Firefighter Caramella passed away at the scene from the injuries she sustained. Two other Riceville Volunteer Fire Department members were injured and transported to the hospital for treatment. One remains in critical condition and the other is in stable condition.

SDFA OFFICER REPORTS

There is an old story that refuses to die about a sailor who was fishing with a land lover, a man who couldn't swim, who had never been around water much in his entire life. It had been a dull and uneventful day in the small boat until late in the afternoon, when the man who couldn't swim hooked a really big fish - not the ordinary kind but the kind that bends the pole over and pulls the line taut, the kind fishermen dream of, talk about - splashes out of the water, it fights and pulls on the line. The land lover was so excited about catching this big fish that as he was reeling it in, trying to get it next to the boat he got carried away a bit and leaned too far over and fell into the water. He couldn't swim, he was a little bit panic stricken, and he began to yell, "Help, save me! Help, save me!" So, the sailor just calmly reached out and was going to grab the man by the hair of the head, pull him over a little closer and get him into the boat; but as he pulled, the man's toupee came off and he slipped down under again. And he came up again yelling, "Help, save me!" So, the sailor reached down again, this time he got an arm. As he pulled on it, it came off because it was an artificial limb. The man continued to kick and thrash around, sputter and splash. The sailor reached out again, grabbed a leg and as he pulled it, you guessed it, it came off! It was an artificial leg! The man continued splashing and calling out and sputtering, and the sailor turned to him in disgust and said, "How can I help you if you won't stick together?"

Sticking together is always a "sticky point" when we are discussing mental health. Firefighters and mental health professionals for years have been as compatible as oil and water. However, if Jim Burneka is right, maybe the compatibility issue is starting to change in the First Responder world. Burneka, in an article for Fire Fighter Nation entitled "Bringing Mental Health Help Straight to the Station", makes some encouraging observations and suggestions in regards to mental health and fire service. I think he makes some strides in helping firefighters and mental health providers begin to stick together.

Burneka begins with the observation that we have come a long way in the past few years regarding the stigma of mental health. What he is referring to is that we are more open to discussing topics like PTSD, depressions, anxiety and suicide around the station. While we like to talk about these topics in the abstract, when it comes to asking for help, most firefighters, myself included, still have a long way to go, before we can say we are willing to stick together, fire service and mental health. Despite being willing to talk about previously taboo topics, many of our fellow firefighters are still trying to "tough things out" attempting to work on their issues on their own. By the time they are finally ready to seek out help or call a "May-day" they have a significant hole



Rodney Veldhuizen, Chaplain

"What I would suggest is to invite a trusted and vetted mental health professional to be present during at least one business meeting a year. Notice I said, trusted and vetted. There are a lot of mental health professionals who claim to be able to provide services to first responders, but not everyone is ready to handle what we bring to the 'table'."

they will need to climb out of. As Burneka says, we are a stubborn bunch. Before you think I am labeling everyone else, let me state for the record, that I was nearly 30 years into my fire service career, with a boat load of trauma, before I was willing to seek help. Remember, I am a mental health professional! As I have said in just once or twice before, the firefighter side of me does not trust the mental health side. I know from experience of what Burneka is referring to.

What Burneka is not saying is: "Hey team it is time to make a mental health check part of annual physical." What he suggests is inviting the mental health professional to come to the station. As most of us are volunteers and only a few of us actually hold shifts at the station, we will need to modify Burneka's suggestion to fit our firefighters. What I would suggest is to invite a trusted and vetted mental health professional to be present during at least one business meeting a year. Notice I said, trusted and vetted. There are a lot of mental health professionals who claim to be able to provide services to first responders, but not everyone is ready to handle what we bring to the "table." While I would like to have a list of trusted providers in an around the state, this one is going to be on you to seek out those people. To ask around to find out who has been helpful, who can be trusted and so on.

Let's assume you are like a region in the Black Hills (not the Southern Hills where I live, but the Northern Hills) where there is a great little agency that seems to attract some of the best therapists to deal with people like us. You then say, "Hey therapist, would you be able to come to our meeting on this night?" When they arrive you ask them to introduce themselves and give a short introduction to themselves and what they have to offer. The hope behind this kind of informal visit is to hopefully, destigmatize talking to a therapist. Invite a discussion about stressors and coping skills, maybe even screen for PTSD, depression and/or anxiety. If it is needed help with a referral for more help.

Also keep in mind these therapist visits are not evaluations for fitness for duty; they are not formal assessments or some kind of punishment. The hope is that by just meeting a mental health professional and finding out that they are real people who like to laugh and joke as much as anyone that members may feel comfortable seeking out help when they need it. Even if they are in a good place, if they need assis-

tance later that by already having met a therapist, they are going to find it easier to seek out help. I can tell you from my experience, when I wanted to talk to someone, I sought out a therapist I had met at a Critical Incident Stress Debriefing of which I was a participant. I figured if she could handle our department and what had happened, she might be able to help me.

Why would we want to do this? First of all, I know from experience that a "cold call" from the mental health professional is usually not real effective. If as a mental health professional, I am an unknown person to those I am trying to help, I will not be effective. Been there, done that, etc. If we are serious about helping maintain the members we serve with, think of this an investment in ourselves and our department. If you want to formalize this a bit more, and schedule regular times for members to meet with a mental health professional, it might need to be a budgeted item. However, remember an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. If an informal visit, or these times spent hiring a few hours of a therapist's time, to be available to visit with the membership, just might save the life of one of your members.

At the end of the day, this remains a suggestion, after all I have no authority to mandate this. I also understand that my department cannot escape the fact that I am at nearly every meeting and many of the calls we respond to. Everyone knows if they want to talk, I like to drink coffee! While not every department has this kind of access, there are mental health professionals who can and will make themselves available if we ask. I can tell you from my experience, a good therapist is invaluable when it comes to the investment in our mental health. Besides what good will it do if we keep falling apart? So, let's stick together!

CHAPLAIN RODNEY V.

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DEPARTED FIREFIGHTERS

Loren Schroedermeier 1953-2025

Loren Lee Schroedermeier, age 71, was finally able to see Jesus face to face on Tuesday, June 3, 2025, following a battle with Glioblastoma. Memorial services will be held at 10:00 AM, Tuesday, July 8, 2025, at Miller Funeral Home, Sioux Falls.

Loren was born to Don and Elaine (Viotor) Schroedermeier at Sanford Hospital on Sept. 8, 1953. He grew up on a farm outside of Davis, SD. At an early age, he learned how to drive a semi-truck while hauling corn cobs for his Dad. That started a love for the open road that he carried for the rest of his life.

Loren attended both Chancellor and Lennox High School, graduating from Lennox High in 1971. He met his wife, Glenda (Smit), and they were married in 1975. In 1977, they had their son, Jacob. In 1982, their daughter, Kathy was born. That same year, Loren became a volunteer firefighter.

Loren continued on with his career of truck driving which led him all over the country, including Canada. He loved the challenge of hauling a full bull rack in downtown Chicago in the winter. But he really loved driving in the NW and British Columbia. Loren loved the trees, mountains, and the different bodies of water

and talked about them often. Loren continued the rest of his career as a truck driver and could tell you how to get around the country, without a map...plus a few detour options along the way.

In 1994, Loren became an EMT. He served both as a volunteer firefighter and a volunteer EMT for the Chancellor and Lennox Ambulance. He spent an impressive 31 years serving his community in Chancellor.

Loren dedicated his life to Jesus in the early 90's along the Columbia River on Interstate 84 northwest of Boise ID. He never wavered in that commitment or in his faith. He loved to lead Bible school, host small Bible study groups, and also served briefly as a Deacon at Chancellor Reformed Church. In the latter years of his life, Loren found a home at The Ransom Church in Sioux Falls, SD. Over the years, Loren told many people about Jesus and walked boldly in his faith.

Loren loved hiking at Newton Hills and logged many hours of his life there. He also loved kayaking, duck hunting, target shooting, worship music, leading different groups for the Church, the open road, practical jokes, Halloween, pie, his famous hamburger soup, numerous sweets, chocolate shakes, and making "Grandpa's famous pancakes".



Loren is survived by his son, Jacob (Mindy) Schroedermeier of Harrisburg, SD; daughter, Kathy (Kellen) Hackett of Boise, ID; 6 grandchildren, including his grandson, Noah; and granddaughters, Aspen, Kinsley, Ellis, Faith, and Ariel; brother, Dan Schroedermeier; sister, Jane (Mark) Hansen; brothers-in-law, Gerald Smit and Greg (Brenda) Smit; sister-in-law, Gayla (Mike) Jorgensen; numerous nieces and nephews; as well as a host of special friends he met along the way.

He was preceded in death by his parents, Don and Elaine (Viotor) Schroedermeier, and his wife, Glenda.

Loren always said "Keep your fingers out of your mouth!", "Don't fall down", "Awesome" and "Remember Jesus loves you!"

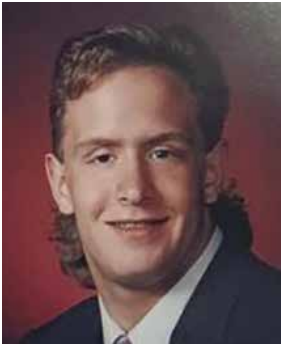
Thomas C. Feser 1973-2025

The funeral service for Thomas Feser was held Monday, June 2, 2025 at Claremont Church. Rev. Rodney Ulmer officiated the service. Interment was at Huffton Cemetery of Huffton, SD. The family asked that you please dress casual.

Visitation was held Sunday, June 1, 2025 at Olson Funeral Chapel in Britton.

Thomas C. Feser was born June 4, 1973 to Tom and Judie (Walton) Feser at Marshall County Memorial Hospital in Britton, SD. Tom attended school in Langford, graduating in the class of 1991. Following graduation, he attended North Dakota State College of Science and Northern State University before graduating from Lake Area Tech. He then moved back to Claremont and worked various jobs over the years. He was blessed with two daughters, Ashlyn and Mya.

He was involved with the Claremont Fire Department for over 35 years, including serving as Fire Chief for a number of years. He also recruited teams



to play in the Claremont Memorial Co-ed softball tournament. Tom had a huge heart and was willing to lend a helping hand to anyone in need, or make a few phone calls and get a whole group of helpers. If you met him once, you were a friend forever. In his free time, he enjoyed watching football and was a fan of WWE. He was a great cook and liked making pickles.

Tom passed away Friday, May 23, 2025 at Avera McKennan Hospital in Sioux Falls, SD, at the age of 51.

He is survived by his wife, Jess Hartberg-Feser, daughters Ashlyn and Mya Feser, step-son, Seth Weiszhaar, and his faithful furkids, Spot, Lucy, and Ranger, his sister, Tami (Doug) Svatos and brother, Jim Walton.

Preceding him in death are his father in 1979, mother in 2012, and his sister-in-law, Carrie Walton in 2014.

Condolences may be directed to the family in care of Jess Hartberg-Feser – 502 5th Ave. – Claremont, SD 57432.



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SDFA OFFICER REPORTS



Charlie Kludt, President
"A final curtain call for Denny Gorton as a member of the SDFA Board. Denny has served in the capacity of President, Past-President, Treasurer, and Secretary since 1993. He will now get to see Fire School from a different point of view. Thank you for your loyal dedication to the SDFA and the fire service of South Dakota."

Summer is coming to shine

State Fire School 2025 is in the bag. With weather that played semi-nice for the over 390 firefighters in class each day, the total attendance for the weekend was over 900 fire-

fighters, auxiliary, instructors, vendors and guests on the Lake Area Technical College campus and Watertown training grounds.

We will be back at LATC and Watertown in 2026 with many of the favorite classes and a few rotated in from the past and request list.



Left: Brayden Hanson of Ramona was the recipient of a 2025 SDFA-Auxiliary-DOT scholarship.

Below: SDFA President Charlie Kludt presented a SDFA-Auxiliary-DOT scholarship certificate to Parker Wilson of Tea during 2025 South Dakota Fire School.



School from a different point of view. Thank you for your loyal dedication to the SDFA and the fire service of South Dakota.

The forecasted summer months are for possible drought conditions in the upper plains states. Always make sure you keep yourself in proper physical condition and know your limitations. Watch out for each other.

We will keep a watchful eye on any state and Federal legislation as they may arise. Providing information and factual opinion for the state legislature summer study committees will keep the board with homework throughout the year.

Mark your calendars for the Fall Fire Conference in Spearfish on 10-12 October. Watch the SDFA websites for continued information and updates from our guest speakers. Our guest speakers are both oriented on the small town and volunteer services.

Have an enjoyable summer and, as always, Be Safe.

CHARLIE KLUDT,
President

Hello South Dakota Firefighters, the SDFA board members got together the morning after fire school and discussed how things went. We already have some surveys back that we email out to all attendees. We do read them all and we discuss all the suggestions for future schools. Please fill out the surveys and give us your suggestions so we know what is on your mind for the future.

We held a basic question and answer session before we reconvened the business meeting on Saturday. One of the longer topics was vendors at fire school. We always get the question of why the vendors leave so early. There are many reasons for this but one big reason is these people worked all week (and are still working), traveled hours to at-

tend and want some home time. We understand most of you traveled hours and worked all week also, we get that, but these vendors do this many times throughout the year. If you are wanting to spend some time talking to the vendors Thursday afternoon/evening is your best time. There are not as many people and you do not have a time crunch to get back to class. Bottom line is we have no control over when vendors arrive or depart. We can share conversations with them, and we do, but it is their decision on when they will be available.

Looking to the future we will be holding the Fall Conference October 10-12, 2025 at the Holiday Inn Spearfish-Convention Center. The fall memorial service will also be held during this con-



Don Ward, Vice President

"Looking to the future we will be holding the Fall Conference October 10-12, 2025 at the Holiday Inn Spearfish-Convention Center. The fall memorial service will also be held during this conference."

ference. Registration is not open yet but watch for that and plan to attend. We have an exciting lineup of speakers planned.

There are several Fall District Fire Schools scheduled around the state, so go to the SDFA website, click on the events tab and make plans to attend. Remember

you can attend a district school outside of your district, go meet different people and see different approaches.

Have a safe and happy summer,

DON WARD,
Vice President

SDFA OFFICER REPORTS

Thoughts from a Board Member

As I write this month's article, the 139th Annual South Dakota State Fire School is in progress. With approximately 400 firefighters and another 150 vendors, auxiliary, instructors, and Board members it is another successful fire school.

The quality of the instructors again was top notch. The instructors simply love coming to South Dakota because our firefighters want to learn. I'm told they are eager to learn. We form friendships from all over the country each year. Think you can get better training in another state or wherever? Not likely.

The cooperation from Lake

Area Technical College, Watertown Fire Department, City of Watertown, the business community, and the people is beyond words. They love having firefighters in their town because they love their firefighters. As a former Board member, I can't thank them enough. I'll try to thank some and miss some I know. First thank you is the Board of the SD Firefighters Association, your dedication to making sure there is a school each year is above and beyond. The SD Firefighters Association Auxiliary for helping so much with vendors and everything else. The vendors who take the time to show their wares. But the biggest thank you goes to you, the ones who took time from being with family, friends, and all the other

activities to come to Watertown to learn a little bit more about this thing we call firefighting. Without you it simply wouldn't happen.

As you are reading this month's digital paper, it is July. The summer is going full speed. However, don't forget to take some time to catch your breath, making sure you have your head screwed on straight when the pager goes off. Don't get sucked into the flames and regret it later. That goes for your life too.

This was a different fire school for me. It was my last fire school as a member of the Board. It is bittersweet. For the past 30 years I have been a part of this annual event as President, Past-president and secretary and/or treasurer. It has been a journey of love. Love



**Denny Gorton,
Retired Treasurer/Past President**

"This was a different fire school for me. It was my last fire school as a member of the Board. It is bittersweet. For the past 30 years I have been a part of this annual event as President, Past-president and secretary and/or treasurer. It has been a journey of love."

to do what I could to help bring high level training to each of you. Love interacting with so many of you. Love when you hear a firefighter tell you how great a class was. Love renewing old friendships and making new friends. The bottom line is simply loving being a part of this family called firefighters. I'll see you next year, but it will be from the classroom. I actually will get to take a class, I'm excited about that. Thank

you to all of you for allowing me to have a small part of this.

I'll wrap up this month's article and get it ready to send to the publisher. I'm working on an article for next month and it won't be from the point of view of a board member. But I'm not going away totally.

Take care, stay safe, hug your family.

DENNY GORTON

2025 SDFA AUXILIARY BOARD

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Greetings: Another great fire school in the books. We had over 500 registrations this year.

Many great classes, many good comments about classes students attended, great learning, great hands on classes, many more comments on they enjoyed 2025 State Fire School.

With over 5,800 firefighters in the state, the numbers of firefighters versus numbers that attended equals to about 9% of our firefighters, imagine if we got 1 more percent to come, that is about another 80 students that can learn almost everything there is about being a firefighter and making themselves the best they can be.

Another reminder, see what being a 100% department can get you and your members, insur-

ance, less registration costs to attend the school, review all these benefits you can get for being 100% member department.

Fall school will be in Yankton in September, more information to come from planning committee.

The MLFTU's had a good workout this past few months, they have traveled around the state to give your firefighters some great live fire training. If you want a trailer in your area, proceed to the SDFA website to the MLFTU icon, there you request the trailer, see what requirements are. We will review request and dates to verify the availability.

We are always looking for news articles for the newspaper, photos, information, calls you



Dave Jorgenson, Southeast Director

"With over 5,800 firefighters in the state, the numbers of firefighters versus numbers that attended equals to about 9% of our firefighters, imagine if we got 1 more percent to come, that is about another 80 students that can learn almost everything there is about being a firefighter and making themselves the best they can be."

have had, fundraisers, show everyone what you have been doing.

Be Safe- Return Home.

DAVE JORGENSEN,
SE District Director

**7th Annual
LESTERVILLE FIRE & RESCUE
FIREHOUSE**

Rib Cook-Off
Saturday July 19th, 2025

Lesterville Fire Station – 212 Main Ave

All Teams are welcome to compete for bragging rights on who can produce the best ribs.
Don't have to be a Fire Department to compete

Register for the rib cook-off by contacting Andy @ 605-660-0212.

Cash Prize for best ribs:
\$300.00 first place, \$200.00 second place, and \$100.00 third place along with trophies. Also, Best Beans trophies

Serving ribs to the public starts at 4:30pm

Raffle Tickets – CHOICE on Prizes

Rustic Outdoor Beverage Cooler
Patriotic Bench
Henry Golden Boy 22LR Lever Action Rifle

Or \$100.00 Cash
Tickets available in advance from firefighter
Tickets \$5.00 each / 5 tickets for \$25.00
Taxes not be present to WIN

Also 2 more guns will be raffled off during the event – 52 Card draw, need to be present to win
Stevens 320 Security 12GA pump Shot gun and
Mossberg Patriot .270WIN Bolt Action Rifle Package

Cornhole Tournament
\$20.00 / 2-Person Team
Registration starts at 11:30am
Tournament starts at Noon
32 Team Tournament
CASH PAYOUT

Pork Loin Meal available starting @ 11AM
Cold drinks will be available, no coolers please
Gather up the family and come on down
Princess Bounce House and kids water fights.
Proceeds go towards Firefighting Protective Equipment – Bunker Gear

**Benefits of being a
100% Department Member**

*When you pay your department dues, there are many advantages for your firefighters.
Below is just one of the many.*

INSURANCE
100% Membership provides the following:

- Basic \$10,000 of Accidental Death & Dismemberment (AD&D) insurance — 24 hrs/day
- Purchase up to \$250,000 additional AD&D
- \$10K of Line of Duty Health and AD&D, fire related health incidents, i.e. heart attack, stroke, other.

If you haven't paid your dues, it's not too late!



1993 - SDFA board

Denny Gorton retires after 30 years

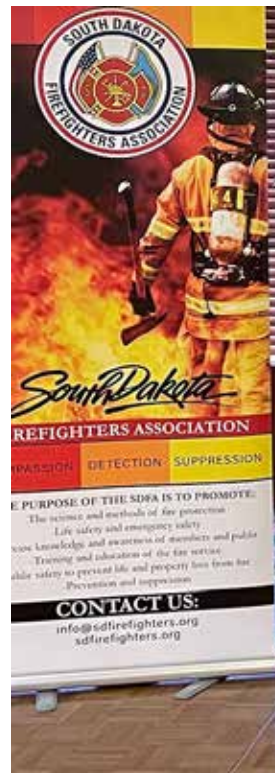
A final curtain call for Denny Gorton as a member of the SDFA Board. Denny has served in the capacity of President (1993-2014), Past-President, Treasurer and Secretary (2014-2024). He will now get to see Fire School from a different point of view. Thank you for your loyal dedication to the SDFA and the fire service of South Dakota.



2018 - Denny and Hofer Lifetime



Denny at 2025 fire school.



Above: 2025 - SDFA board with Denny

Left: Denny Gorton, Secretary/Treasurer, Past President - 2021

Tying Knots Without Tying Up the Class

By COLE KLEINWOLTERINK

During Firefighter 1 class, teaching firefighter knots is a necessary but often challenging topic to teach in a large group setting. If your experience was anything like mine, the instructor stood at the front of the classroom with a rope, demonstrating how to tie each knot. Then the students would attempt to tie the knot on their own—some grasping it quickly, others struggling and requiring individual help from the instructor. This approach typically left half the class bored because they were already proficient, while the other half felt frustrated or anxious as the rest of the group waited for them to catch up.

Every class seems to have a couple of “Eagle Scouts” who can tie every knot underwater and behind their back, while at the same time, there’s always at least one new firefighter handling rope for the very first time. With such a wide range of experience in a class of 20-30 students, it can be difficult for an instructor to effectively engage everyone at the same time.

That’s exactly the challenge I faced when I was asked, last-minute, to teach knots to a Firefighter 1 class of 25 students after the scheduled instructor had to step away due to a family emergency. Naturally, I was a bit anxious. As I began preparing, an idea struck me. These days, if you don’t know how to do something, there’s almost always a YouTube video to show you how. I figured there would

be plenty of videos demonstrating how to tie firefighter knots, and sure enough, there were.

Since I would be the only instructor in the room, I decided to take a different approach than the one described above. I selected a high-quality YouTube video for each required knot and used an online QR code generator to create QR codes linking to those videos. I then created a handout for each knot, which included the QR code and a photo of the finished knot. (Copies of these handouts are available under the Resources tab on the IFA Training Article Archive website: tinyurl.com/mwty7p7m)

When class began, I divided the students into small groups of 3-4 and provided them with strands of rope and a packet containing the QR codes. Using their phones, students scanned the QR codes and practiced tying the knots at their own pace following along with the videos. Additionally, I showed them how to slow the videos down to half or three-quarters speed for easier learning.

In these small groups, the more experienced students—the “Eagle Scouts”—naturally took on teaching roles, helping their classmates who were struggling. Meanwhile, this format freed me up to work one-on-one with those needing extra guidance, without making the entire class wait to move on. As the session progressed, I identified the strongest students and encouraged them to float around the room and assist other groups.

Once a group of students be-



gan feeling confident in tying the knots, we moved into the next phase: using those knots to hoist various tools such as axes, pike poles, and ladders. Again, I incorporated video-based instruction, utilizing skill videos from the Essentials 7 app. Again, this allowed for additional one-on-one coaching and gave students plenty of hands-on practice. Ultimately, this self-paced, video-supported approach proved highly effective for teaching knots to a large class with diverse

skill levels. It allowed students to progress at their own speed, while also fostering peer teaching and collaborative learning which created a supportive and engaging classroom environment.

This experience reminded me of the importance of staying flexible and open to new teaching methods as an instructor. While this approach wouldn’t necessarily fit every Firefighter 1 topic, the combination of technology, self-paced learning, and peer in-

struction proved to be an excellent strategy for teaching knots. It’s an approach I will definitely use again.

Cole Kleinwolverink is a member of the Waukee Fire Department, Granger Fire Department, and Fire Science instructor at Des Moines Area Community College. Feel free to reach out to him at kleinwolverinkc@gmail.com with any questions, comments or inquiries.

Ellsworth Annual Training Includes SD and NE National Guards

On June 9, large smoke plumes engulfed the air surrounding the west side of Ellsworth Air Force Base. It wasn’t a real emergency.

The smoke was part of the Ellsworth Fire Department’s annual fire training which included both the South Dakota and Nebraska National Guard.

“This is exciting, challenging and real-world training that the soldiers enjoy doing and this is what prepares us best for when real world fire emergencies take place,” said the commanding officer for the Nebraska Army National Guard firefighter teams, Andrew Walton.

Approximately 30 firefighters from the guard were put through a downed aircraft fire simulation.

“This is especially useful when you have a large fire that you can’t really approach very well on foot,” said the lead firefighter for the South Dakota Army National Guard, Clayton Spencer. “So, you kind of knock it down a little bit, and then you’re able to get a little bit closer and then pull the hand lines off. And then you can do some more work once you get off.”

On windy days like Monday, Spencer said the wind can pose as a challenge, but it can also be used as a tool. “In this case, we fight upwind of the fire, and it



helps us push the fire to a certain spot, then you can target it better,” said Spencer.

“We’ve got a bunch of fuel spilled in there, and then we always try to push it away from the civilians’ escape route,” said a firefighter for the Nebraska National

Guard, Laura Dietz. “So, we’d go from the front of the plane, pushing it to the back, using the wind kind to our advantage.”

Walton said this is the first time both the South Dakota and Nebraska National Guard fire teams have collaborated here on

base. “It’s allowed us to work alongside the South Dakota firefighter teams, get to know them and build that connection as well,” said Walton.

Through the training, Walton wants to ensure soldiers can evaluate a fire scene and commu-

nicate effectively and are familiar with the materials and equipment they’re working with.

The Ellsworth Air Force Base live fire training ran from Saturday through Monday.



2025 South Dakota Fire School

June 10-12 •
Watertown





2025 South Dakota Fire School

June 10-12 • Watertown







2025 South Dakota Fire School

June 10-12 •
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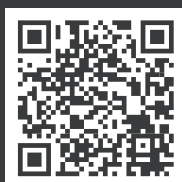
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2025 South Dakota Fire School

June 10-12 •
Watertown





Watertown rollover accident on I-29

A single vehicle rollover accident occurred in Watertown on Wednesday, where the person in the car was transported to the hospital.

On Wednesday, May 14th, Watertown Fire Rescue responded to a rollover car accident on Interstate 29. The incident was reported just before 10:30 p.m., near mile marker 179, where the vehicle was blocking the southbound lanes.

Engine 1 and Medic 4 were dispatched to the scene, where they found a single victim trapped inside the vehicle, according to a release. The patient required extrication using WFR's "Jaws of

Life." After being removed, the driver was transported to Prairie Lakes Hospital for treatment, the release stated.

An extensive debris field was covering the southbound lanes as a result of the accident. Engine 1 remained on the scene for nearly two hours to assist with cleanup and was supported by Crocker's Collision.

Watertown Fire Rescue was also assisted on scene by the Codington County Sheriff's Office, Watertown Police Department, and the South Dakota State Highway Patrol.

(Watertown Public Opinion, Watertown, May 17, 2025)

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