



Gen. George C. Meade



Bear Butte

Meade County News

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Sturgis Scoopers

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VOL. 1 ISSUE 8

Sturgis, SD Thursday August 6 , 2026

Live & Online

Chief's Ride Way To Enjoy Hills And Benefits Sturgis Youth



Group of riders ready to roll August 5th through the Hills on Annual Cheif's Ride. MCNews Photo additional Photos A2

Brandon Bennett

news@MeadeCoNews.com

STURGIS— The annual Chief's Ride August 5th let rally visitors enjoy the Hills

with Sturgis Director of Public Safety Geody Vandewater.

About 50 riders signed up for the ride, which will take them to Whitewood, Spearfish

and Spearfish Canyon, Lead, Nemo and eventually to Rapid City and then back to town.

Chief Vandewater said the ride benefits the Sturgis Police

Athletic League.

"We started this back in 2015 with our boxing program and have expanded that over the years to include mountain

biking and Cops and Kids at Christmastime. So this year the money is going to go to help keep those programs going," he said.

Excitement builds for 86th Sturgis Motorcycle Rally

STURGIS – With just days remaining until the official opening of the 86th Sturgis Motorcycle Rally, excitement is building for a celebration of motorcycles, freedom, and America's 250th anniversary.

The 86th Annual Sturgis Motorcycle Rally, set for Aug. 7-16, carries the theme "America 250," honoring the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence.

"This year's Rally is about celebrating what brings people to Sturgis year after year - freedom, friendship, patriotism, and the chance to experience some of the most beautiful rides in America," said Mayor Rod Bradley. "As our nation marks 250 years of independence, there's no better place to celebrate that spirit than right here in the Black Hills."

The festivities actually begin Wednesday, Aug. 5, with the annual Police Chief's Ride, led by Sturgis Police Chief Geody Vandewater.

The ride gives participants an opportunity to explore some of the Black Hills' most scenic roads while enjoying the camaraderie that has become a hallmark of the Sturgis Motorcycle Rally.

"It's a relaxed ride and a chance to connect with people before the Rally really gets rolling," VanDewater said. "Whether you're a first-time visitor or a longtime Rally attendee, you'll quickly discover the friendships are just as memorable as the ride."

The Rally officially opens Friday, Aug. 7, with the Opening Ceremony on Main Street, where riders from across the country and around the world will gather to kick off another unforgettable Sturgis Motorcycle Rally. The parade through downtown will be at about 2:45 p.m. with Opening Ceremony at Harley-Davidson Rally Point at 3 p.m.

The celebration continues Saturday, Aug. 8, with the 24th Annual Mayor's Ride, led by Mayor Bradley and 2026 Grand Marshal Tim Duffy, a retired FDNY firefighter, 9/11 survivor, and member of the Sturgis Motorcycle Museum Hall of Fame Class of 2026. The ride showcases the beauty of the Black Hills while raising funds for local Sturgis charities.

"There is something special about riding through the Black Hills with friends you've known for years and people you've just met," Bradley said. "That's the magic of Sturgis. Motorcycles have a way of bringing people together, no matter where riders come from."

As riders make their way to Sturgis, they'll experience more than legendary roads and world-class riding.

They'll become part of a tradition that has celebrated freedom, community, and the American spirit for 86 years.

Registration Link
24th Annual Mayor's Ride: <https://www.eventbrite.com/.../24th-annual-sturgis-mayors...>

How to "Throttle Up" the Meade Co News Weekly and keep it Rolling Along!

In 2017 the Sturgis/ Meade County's local newspaper was without warning closed. It was owned by the Rapid City Journal who was part of Lee Enterprises. Sturgis journalist, Bill Cissel started a replacement weekly but a short time later the publication ceased.

Sturgis has been without its truly local newspaper all the years since. We wish to bring back events, business area and community news, kids activities (sports, 4-H, FFA school, etc),

The publisher of the Belle Fouché Beacon (Belle's local paper was also closed in 2017). The Beacon started and continues publishing "truly local" news since June of 2018

That publisher and local Sturgis group are working to have a "truly local" weekly back in our community/county. Updates on what's happening in City, County, and Schools.

You may view the weekly editions being that currently are being built on the website: www.meadeconews.com.

If you share in agreement with others that the "truly local" weekly newspaper should continue on email: news@meadeconews.com and comment. Those that email can receive a weekly email telling when each new issue is published and available to read at no charge!

As the publication and support grow the plan is to have hard copies available for pick up.



Prior Sturgis Main Street Rally crowd. Photo from Sturgis Chamber of Commerce

Bryson Kool Appointed Ambulance Director

Brandon Bennett

news@MeadeCoNews.com

STURGIS—Bryson Kool has been appointed director of the Sturgis Ambulance Service. His salary was confirmed at the Sturgis City Council meeting August 3rd.

We caught up with him during a break in the council



Andy Kool

meeting to ask him what his leadership style will be.

"Aiden made a lot of significant progress for us over the year when it came to billing and patient care, and as of right now we're just trying to get through the rally," he said.

He added they're going to keep evaluating their billing processes and they're at a point where they have a good foundation set and recouping things they've lost in the past.

Staffing and providing the best patient care for the people of Sturgis remains a high priority.

"The citizens are what matter. We hate seeing people hurting when we're on a run but we love to see them at the grocery store," he said.

Finally, transparency with the city and the citizens of Sturgis remains vital.

New Sturgis Ambulance Service Director Bryson Kool

From the Meade County Sheriff's Office:

Hey Meade County...

Well... to be honest, we didn't have a Deadwood Trolley catching fire on the interstate on our Rally Bingo Card this year.

Joking aside, we're thankful no one was injured. The scene was handled safely, traffic kept moving, and the incident was cleared as quickly as possible. Great teamwork by the Sturgis Police Department, South Dakota Highway Patrol, the Sturgis Fire Department, and everyone else who pitched in.

For those inconvenienced by the temporary closure of the eastbound on-ramp at Exit 30, thank you for your patience. As it turns out, Sturgis actually has two interstate access points. We know... shocking.

And finally, to the pickup with the Florida plates that was redirected toward Rapid City by way of Deadwood and Hill City...

Everyone else managed to smile, wave, and follow directions. You chose... a different

adventure.

As we've said before, being kind has its rewards.

Unfortunately, you did not qualify for the rewards program.

Drive safe, be patient, and remember: sometimes the scenic route isn't a punishment...

it's just what happens when the interstate is on fire.

#meadecountycares



Meade County Commission meeting 9:00 am Sept. 1 2026

Additional Cheif's Ride Photos



Meade School District Announces Completion of Woodle Field Turf Project

Brandon Bennett
news@MeadeCoNews.com

STURGIS— Meade School District 46-1 has completed the Woodle Field synthetic turf project, marking the conclu-

sion of a significant facilities improvement designed to serve students, schools, and the Sturgis community for years to come.

Designed for increased availability and consistent

playability, the synthetic turf will expand opportunities for practices, competitions, and community events while reducing weather-related disruptions and maintenance downtime.

The project reflects the

district's continued commitment to maintaining quality facilities that enhance the educational and extracurricular experience for students.

"We are so grateful for the opportunity to partner with Meade School District 46-1 to re-surface Woodle Field," said Reid Poff, Project Manager for Mammoth.

"The community, coaches, fans, families, but most importantly the kids will be able to enjoy playing, competing, and practicing on the field year-round."

SBHS Activities Director Jade Temple said the new facility will benefit students and the community well into the future.

"We're excited to open Woodle Field for our students and community. This new facility provides more opportunities for activities, physical education, and community events throughout the year."

The Sturgis Brown High School boys and girls soccer programs will be the first teams to utilize the new playing surface, beginning practices on August 7.

The public will have its

first opportunity to see the new field in competition during Sturgis Brown's opening soccer matches:

Friday, August 14, 2026
Varsity Boys Soccer vs. Aberdeen Central – 5:00 p.m.
Varsity Soccer vs. Aberdeen Central – 7:00 p.m.
Saturday, August 15, 2026
Boys Soccer vs. Tea Area – 9:00 a.m.
Girls Soccer vs. Tea Area – 11:00 a.m.

Following the conclusion of the Sturgis Motorcycle Rally, the track will reopen to the public on Monday, August 17. Community members are encouraged to enjoy the track while following posted guidelines and respecting scheduled school activities.

Meade School District appreciates the patience and support of students, families, staff, neighbors, and community members throughout construction. The district looks forward to Woodle Field serving generations of students while continuing to be a gathering place for school and events.

Meade School District 46-1
605-347-2523



Meade County South Dakota-Good Morning, Meade County!

Well... we're there, almost. The roads are busy, the campgrounds are getting packed, motorcycles are everywhere, and our deputies have officially entered their annual "Where did all these people come from?" phase of the year. It's Rally time.

As always, our first piece of advice is simple... Slow down. The Rally lasts a little more than a week. There's no trophy for getting to Main Street 37 seconds faster than everyone else.

Now, for today's Public Service Announcement...

If you have outstanding warrants in another state, this is probably not the ideal time to

come to Sturgis and pick a fight with your girlfriend.

While we appreciate you making yourself easy to locate, that's generally going to end with a Fugitive from Justice charge and an extended stay at the Meade County Jail while the agency that issued your warrant comes to collect you.

It's probably not the Rally experience you were hoping for.

On the bright side... you'll save a fortune on campground fees.

Since we're handing out free advice today, here are a few phrases that have been scientifically proven to make your contact with law enforcement take longer, not shorter.

"If you weren't wearing that uniform, I'd kick your #%%\$."

Interesting strategy. It generally results in additional uniforms arriving to hear the rest of your speech.

"You're wasting taxpayers' money!"

Actually... we'd much rather be doing literally anything else. You invited us into this conversation.

"What's your badge number?"

Don't worry. It'll be conveniently listed on whatever paperwork you leave with today, or all over your jail paperwork.

"I pay your salary!"

Unless you own property in Meade County... probably not.

If you do, thank you for your contribution. The commission still hasn't approved our new toasters.

Since we are on a roll, here's some more safety tips..

Your motorcycle sounds awesome. We know. Everyone knows.

Turn signals are not optional equipment.

Your buddy can absolutely wait another 30 seconds for you to make a safe turn.

Everyone has to stop at the stop sign.

Water is cheaper than an IV, and sunscreen is cheaper than aloe.

We've got three days until the official start of the Rally,

but judging by traffic, someone forgot to tell a bunch of folks.

As always... Slow down. Wear your seatbelt. Wear your helmet. Keep your head on a swivel. Be patient. Respect the roads, respect the people around you, and if you happen to meet one of us... let's make it a pleasant conversation. We really do have some cool deputies on the team!!

Have fun, make good decisions, and let's keep this year's Rally memorable for the right reasons.

Suggested edits completed Thank you!!

#meadecountycares
#slowdown
#DriveSafeSD

List of Sturgis Police Department Reserve Officers Given

Brandon Bennett
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The annual listing of volunteers for the Sturgis Police Department Reserves for workers' compensation and liability coverages in 2026 was provided to the city council at its meeting August 3rd by Director of Human Resources Carrie Belawske.

Sturgis Police Reserve Officers are :Matthew Tollison, Hayley Miller, Megan Hopkins,

Chris Bishop, Joseph Hargrave, Michael Bay, Mark Upton and Bryson Kool.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

All volunteers who will be covered by the City's Work Comp and Liability policies must be notated in the City Council minutes each year.

DISCUSSION:

Reserves must complete a comprehensive educational and ride time curriculum as part of the Sturgis Police Department's

Reserve training. They are then certified by the State of South Dakota.

The Reserve Officer list was approved in January 2026. The above officers are new Reserve Officers.

BUDGET IMPACT:

Volunteers comprise a very minor portion of the work comp premiums paid by the City. This expense is included in the annual budget. There is no additional premium for our liability coverage

Hey! Pay Attention!

As you know, the Community Picnic and FINAL Music on Main is coming up on September 2nd. We are currently seeking volunteers for the following tasks:

- Set up – 3-5 PM
- Grilling – 5-7 PM
- Serving food 5-7 PM
- Cleaning and wiping down tables – 5-7 PM
- Tear Down – 9-10 PM

Each volunteer will get a free shirt, so please send me what task you are able to

assist with and what shirt size you would like. Thank you so much for everything you do for Sturgis!

Best,
Kadence Gleason
Assistant Director
Sturgis Area Chamber of Commerce
2040 Junction Avenue
(605) 347-2556
events@sturgisareachamber.com
www.SturgisAreaChamber.com



Rally Licensing, Sponsorship Agreements Approved

Brandon Bennett
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STURGIS— The Sturgis City Council approved licensing and sponsorship agreements with companies at its meeting August 3rd.

Sponsorships Director Lance Schere began with a licensing agreement with Tom's Tees.

"Tom's Tees is one of the original holders of what we call Heritage marks, dating from 1986.

This is a one year extension of the agreement," he said.

The others were with Patchstop Roadshows LLC, a temporary exhibitor who sets up in the liquor store parking lot and AMSOIL who sets up at 964 Main.

Finally, the agreement with Harley Davidson was approved as they take over the Community Center campus.

All were approved with a 7-0 vote, as Ward 3 councilor Mark Chaplin was absent.

Whether you count down the days every year or count the days until it's over, one thing is certain—the Sturgis Motorcycle Rally is here. And judging by the traffic, some folks apparently didn't get the memo that the official Rally doesn't start until Friday.

As we prepare for one of the busiest times of the year, we need to let everyone know that some routine Sheriff's Office services will be temporarily suspended so our staff can focus on public safety and emergency calls.

Beginning August 3, the following services will not be available until August 16:

- Pistol Permit Applications – Of all 365 days in the year... this happened to be the one you picked. We promise we'll be happy to help you after the

Rally.

Fingerprinting Services – Unless you're receiving the complimentary version after arriving with one of our fine law enforcement officers, fingerprinting services will resume after the Rally.

Jail Visitation – Visitation will also be suspended during the Rally. And if your vacation plans included visiting someone at the jail... well... you might want to reevaluate your travel itinerary.

We know this is an inconvenience, especially for our local residents.

We don't make these changes lightly, but every available member of our staff is needed to handle the dramatic increase in calls for service, crashes, medical emergencies, criminal investigations, traffic enforcement, and everything else that comes with hosting hundreds of thou-

sands of visitors.

On August 16, we'll return to our normal operating schedule and resume providing these services.

One last favor...

Before heading to the comments to explain how we've personally ruined your week or deprived you of your constitutional rights by not having these services available, we simply ask for a little grace.

Our deputies, detention officers, dispatchers, records staff, and support personnel will be working long hours under an extraordinary workload to keep our community and our visitors safe.

We appreciate your patience, your understanding, and maybe even a little sympathy.

Now... buckle up. The annual controlled chaos is about to begin.

* * *



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			Home	Sponsors	Submit Event	Events →
< > This Month August 2026 Next month						
M	T	W	T	F	S	S
27 8:00 am - 9:00 am Monday Breakfast at the Senior Center	28	29 6:00 pm - 9:00 pm Sturgis Music on Main	30	31	1	2
3 6:30 pm - 8:00 pm Sturgis City Council meeting	4	5	6 6:30 pm - 8:30 pm Leather Mustang Performance	7 6:30 pm - 8:30 pm Whiskey Walkers	8 6:30 pm - 8:30 pm Jack Grijalva	9 11:00 am - 5:00 pm 20th Annual Cycle Source Custom Bike SHOW 6:30 pm - 8:30 pm Whiskey Walkers 7:00 pm - 9:00 pm Jamey Johnson – Sturgis
10 Old School Chopper Show 11:00 am - 5:00 pm Vintage Day At The Iron Horse 6:30 pm - 8:30 pm Scott Pelchat 7:00 pm - 11:00 pm .38 Special – Sturgis	11	12 11:00 am - 3:00 pm 20th Annual Cycle Source Run To The Line	13 For the Love of Veter...	14 1:00 pm - 5:00 pm Mini Bike Racing & Old Time Bike Games	15 8:00 am - 12:00 pm Weekend Wellness Clinics	16
17	18	19	20	21	22 10:00 am - 12:00 pm WanderWild Trail + Art	23
24	25	26 6:00 pm - 9:00 pm Sturgis Music on Main	27 3:30 pm - 5:00 pm Chess Club	28	29	30

Central Meade County News

By Sandy Rhoden, July 23, 2026

I'm not sure, but I wouldn't be surprised to find out that we are setting new records for the hottest consecutive days in a row.

Last week was hot and by last weekend temperatures in Central Meade County hit 112 degrees with Sunday hitting 108. The rest of the week looks to be in the upper 90s or hotter. If prayers for rain were ever needed, now is the time.

Over the weekend the folks in Meade County were finding hilltops to keep watch on possible fires. The lightning on Saturday ignited several fires, we heard 18, north of Union Center up to Hy.212.

As election day for the Governor's runoff race approached us last week, we

were on the road and time did not allow for me to write the CMC News. As I sit here on the home stretch on Sunday evening, we have done all that we can do to serve the state of South Dakota. Larry has continued to stay busy as Governor while keeping up with his campaign. The schedule has been heavy for the last two months. Tuesday night should be the end of a grueling, 2nd campaign and folks should have a nice break from mailers and texts by the time you read this news.

As the first Sunday of the month, this is a reminder there will be a pot luck dinner after church services next week in Union Center. It's hard to believe the end of July is almost here. Any hay that's bailed up seems to be very slim this year. We have had wonderful, abundant moisture for the last two years so this year's condition is a bit hard to accept.

Reggie and Jennifer Rhoden were blessed with a baby daughter on July 23 in Rapid City. Louise Holly Rhoden

came into the world at 8:51 pm weighing 7lb. 90z. and was 19 inches long. Big brother Lincoln settled into his new role right away and seems to adore her.

Louise Holly is the tenth grandchild of paternal grandparents, Larry and Sandy Rhoden of Union Center. Maternal grandparents are Albert and Holly Bruch of Sturgis. Louise joined her family at home in Rapid City on Friday, July 24th. The Lord never stops His blessings from flowing.

By John Newby

“Building Main Street, not Wall Street”

“Communities, Not Companies, Decide Which Dreams Survive”

I still think about a sign I noticed in a small retail shop while traveling. It read, “When you support a local small business, you’re supporting a local dream.” Pair that with something the late football coach Lou Holtz once said. “Ability is what you’re capable of doing. Motivation determines what you do. Attitude determines how well you do it.” Put those two ideas side by side and you get the real formula for whether a Main Street business survives or closes its doors for good.



than 95 percent of all business establishments outside our metro areas. That is not a supporting cast. That is the leading actor and the whole production.

And people are showing up for it. Heading into the 2025 holiday season, 86 percent of American households said they planned to shop small, a jump of more than 10 percent from prior years, with Gen Z and Millennial shoppers leading the way at nearly 89 percent. According to SCORE, 67 cents of every dollar spent at a small business stays right there in the community, 44 cents to the business itself and another 23 cents circulating through other local businesses it buys from. That is not charity. That is an investment loop, and it is one of the few investment loops left that pays the whole community back.

Here is what has not changed

since I first wrote about that sign. Capability and motivation only get a business halfway there. The rest depends on whether if the community actually believes the business deserves to win. I still meet towns bursting with confidence, where leaders and residents alike expect success and treat every setback as a problem to solve rather than a wall to give up in front of. I still meet other towns that view every obstacle as permanent wall, and it shows up in empty storefronts and shrugged shoulders. The difference is never talent. It is belief, carried all the way from the mayor's office to the coffee shop counter.

A college professor once asked our class what separates creative people from everyone else. After a room full of guesses, he gave his answer. Creative people believe they are creative. Everyone else does not, so they never try. I think about that every time I walk a thriving downtown next to a struggling one. The buildings are not that different. What is different is whether the people inside them, and the neighbors walking past, believe something good is still possible there.

Lou Holtz understood that

the whole team always outperforms the sum of its parts. Main Street works the same way. One passionate shop owner cannot rebuild a downtown alone. It takes second line leaders, the chamber board members, the civic club presidents, the teachers who mention local shops to their students, all catching the same vision and pushing it forward. When an entire community catches that vision together, dreams that looked impossible start showing up in storefront windows.

But belief must be matched by execution, and execution today means meeting customers on their own terms. Shoppers now move fluidly between browsing online at night and buying in person the next afternoon, and they expect the businesses they support to show up in both places. A shop that treats its website, its social media, and its front door as three separate afterthoughts is quietly making the same mistake that once showed up as early closing times. The lesson has not changed, only the hours have moved. Meeting the customer halfway now means being visible and reachable whenever they are ready to buy, not just when it is convenient for the register. While the numbers vary by communities, over 60% of all retail transactions take place after 5:00PM – when does

your business close?

None of this is abstract for the town you live in. Every dollar that leaves your Main Street for a distant Wall Street headquarters is a dollar that will never fund your Little League team, your food pantry, or your Fourth of July fireworks. Every dollar that stays is fuel for the next dream, the next storefront, the next generation willing to bet on itself.

So here is something you can do before the day is over. Walk, drive, or click your way to one locally owned business you have not supported this month and spend something there today. Then tell one neighbor why you did it. Community belief spreads the same way commerce does, one transaction and one conversation at a time. Do this as if your communities life depended on it, because it does!

John Newby, Pineville, MO., is a nationally recognized publisher, community, business and media consultant, & speaker. His column appears in communities nationwide. He is currently the CEO of the McDonald County Chamber and the founder of Truly-Local, dedicated to helping communities create excitement, energy, and capture the synergies needed to thrive in an ever increasingly complicated environment. He can be reached at John@Truly-Local.org.

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PRESSED BETWEEN THE PAGES #46

by DeAnn (Wolkow) Kruempel

“From Rags to Something Like Riches”

“Oh, no! I spilled!” In my haste to maneuver the big bowl of potatoes across the table to Dad, I bumped my glass. Water flooded across the table, threatening the salt and pepper shakers and the toothpick dispenser. Mom rushed to the rag drawer and returned with a thin, white t-shirt, complete with armpit holes. I tossed it to the center of the table to stop the river from Niagara falling into the cracks between the leaves that extended the Formica table. Just in the nick of time!

“I’m sorry, Mom.” I mopped up the rest of the mess and glanced at our

mother. She smiled her understanding smile that said we all spill sometimes.

That handy cleanup t-shirt, as well as the menagerie of other well-used garments and other household fabrics that waited in the rag drawer, were used countless times to clean up spills, wash windows, dust furniture and scrub floors. The rag drawer was a classic example of the way people lived when we grew up in the 1950s and 1960s. Nothing was wasted.

Clothes were worn, handed down to younger siblings, and patched until they graduated to the rag bag. On a cold Saturday, Mom would bring out the bag and we girls would sort, cut and save. We snipped buttons from old shirts and

Mother knew the best uses for every rag. Delmer recalls rubbing Vicks VapoRub on his congested chest and throat. Mom attached a thick wool rag to hold in the warmth. Amazingly, he felt better! Some thread-bare items transformed to box liners for baby pigs or sheep that needed a warm bed by the stove for a day or two.

Using what we had was a way of life. After all, why buy an item when you had something perfectly good at home? But manufacturers made people believe we needed something “better”—like the “quicker-pick-upper” and the germ-spread-fighter. Products began replacing those useful rags. Likely, consumers enjoyed the conveniences. Some may have belittled the old-fashioned ways. Paper towels, rather than once-towels took over the mopping-up of spills. Rags

went to the land-fill.

Something we might consider, as we tear three feet of absorbency from the roll: every year more than 18 million trees are cut down in North America just for paper towels. That averages at least 50,000 trees every single day. One ton of paper towels requires 17 trees and 20,000 gallons of water.

As a child, I don't recall having even one roll of paper towels in the house. No. We used rags. Could be what we thought of as old rags were really riches all along.

The author's column appears in a growing number of Midwest newspapers. Kruempel has compiled and published her column stories every year for the last five years. She has also published a historical fiction series, “Promises to Keep.” Her ten books are available on Amazon. Contact Kruempel at deannkruempelaauthor@gmail.com.

The Good Stuff

by Jim Thompson



Jim Thompson takes motivational stories that listeners and readers send him and incorporates them into the program. It has been on the air for more than 10 years.

As with many stories and poems the author is hard to determine, making “anonymous” the most prolific story teller of all. Here’s another one that gives us an idea of whether to look back or ahead:

The Train of Life

Some folks ride the train of life, looking out the rear, Watching miles of life roll by, and marking every year.

They sit in sad remembrance, of wasted days gone by, And curse their life for what it was, and hang their head and cry.

But I don't concern myself with that, I took a different bent, I look forward to what life holds, and not what has been spent.

So strap me to the engine, as securely as i can be, I want to be out on the front, to see what I can see.

I want to feel the winds of change, blowing in my face, I want to see what life unfolds, as I move from place to place.

I want to see what's coming up, not looking at the past, Life's too short for yesterdays, it moves along too fast.

So if the ride gets bumpy, while you are looking back, Go up front, and you may find, your life has jumped the track.

It's alright to remember, that's part of history, But up front's where it's happening, there's so much mystery.

The enjoyment of living, is not where we have been, It's looking ever forward, to another year and ten.

It's searching all the byways, never should you refrain, For if you want to live your life, you gotta drive the train.



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Jonathan Ellis & Joe Sneve

South Dakota State Penitentiary loses fourth warden in five years amid senior staff shake-up

Corrections secretary calls changes ‘consistent with the agency’s mission’

John Hult
SouthDakotaSearchlight.com



The South Dakota Department of Corrections has lost its fourth penitentiary warden since 2021 amid staffing changes that also include the departure of two other high-ranking officials.

Joseph Roemmich, who came to South Dakota from New Mexico just over a year ago to oversee the employees and inmates at the oldest parts of the penitentiary in Sioux Falls, is no longer employed by the state, according to department spokesman Michael Winder. He also confirmed the departures of Director of Prison Operations Amber Pirraglia and Maj. Cody Hanson.

Pirraglia was Roemmich’s superior. In addition to Sioux Falls, Pirraglia oversaw prisons in Springfield, Yankton, Pierre and Rapid City. She had previously worked in corrections in Colorado, and came to South Dakota shortly after the hiring of another Colorado transplant, former Corrections Secretary Kellie Wasko.

Wasko hired Roemmich last year, a few months before she resigned. Gov. Larry Rhoden hired Secretary Nick Lamb, who’d worked most recently in Iowa, to succeed Wasko.

Hanson, who worked for the prison system prior to Wasko’s arrival, was an administrative major at the prison who’d testified to lawmakers as an advocate for a new men’s prison. He’d also helped lead media tours of the penitentiary. Tabatha Benting, warden of the maximum security Jameson Annex, located on the state penitentiary campus, is now serving as penitentiary warden.

Winder did not offer de-

parture dates or other details on the circumstances surrounding the exit of the three employees.

A statement from Lamb on Wednesday said staffing changes are part of a broader effort to improve operations across the prison system, though he did not mention any staff members by name. The statement noted the expansion of community service work by inmates, the adoption of a prison seminary program and additional training programs, the expansion of educational partnerships with Southeast Technical College and Western Dakota Technical College, and a tightening of parole supervision.

“I have been evaluating the agency operations, and we are making some personnel changes consistent with the agency’s mission and the steps we’re taking,” Lamb wrote.

Rhoden, in a separate statement, said he’s “proud of the work” Lamb’s done in his first nine months on the job and called him “a strong leader” who “clearly shares my mission to keep South Dakota strong, safe, and free.”

History of shake-ups amid debate over new construction
The state split warden duties in Sioux Falls into two positions last year. Prior to Roemmich’s arrival, the entire state penitentiary campus — which includes the 1881 penitentiary complex, the Jameson Annex and a separate work release center — was supervised by a single warden.

Roemmich’s predecessor, Teresa Bittinger, served less than two years and oversaw a period of controversy and unrest, which included lockdowns and a temporary shut-down of tablet-based inmate communications. She was appointed in 2023 to replace Dan Sullivan, who also served fewer than two years. He replaced Darin Young, ousted in a staff shake-up initiated by then-Gov. Kristi Noem in 2021.

State lawmakers voted last

fall to replace the oldest parts of the penitentiary, which was built prior to South Dakota statehood, with a \$650 million facility now under construction on the eastern side of Sioux Falls. The other two prison buildings on the penitentiary campus, located on a hill overlooking Falls Park less than a mile from downtown Sioux Falls, will continue to house inmates when the new prison complex opens in 2029.

Commission member: Loss of institutional knowledge is concerning
Rep. Kady Wittman, D-Sioux Falls, is chair of the state’s Corrections Commission. The group is meant to offer guidance on corrections policy, and to approve any spending decisions on prison industries.

The loss of so many leaders is a concern for Wittman. Beyond the wardens, other long-term employees — including Doug Clark, the former deputy corrections secretary who served as interim warden after Young’s departure — have left the prison system over the past five years.

“There’s no real institutional knowledge left,” Wittman said.

Wittman would like to see the commission move toward monthly meetings and address questions about leadership and institutional knowledge, as well as employee retention more broadly, but said it had been difficult to get traction during Wasko’s term.

The former secretary had sought to limit the commission’s scope of discussion and access to information, and some of the commission’s work has been taken on by the Correctional Rehabilitation Task Force.

The latter group was formed following the Legislature’s prison funding vote, with a promise from Gov. Rhoden to address the state’s high reoffense rate.

Lamb has appeared at both of the Corrections Commission meetings held since Wasko’s departure, introducing himself in the first and offering rundowns of the task force’s discussion points during the second.

Wittman said she expects the next Corrections Commission meeting to take place within the next few months. The next meeting of the Correctional Rehabilitation Task Force is scheduled for Aug. 19.

John Hult is the senior reporter for South Dakota Searchlight. He has more than 15 years experience covering criminal justice, the environment and public affairs in South Dakota, including more than a decade at the Sioux Falls Argus Leader. South Dakota Searchlight is part of States Newsroom, the nation’s largest state-focused nonprofit news organization.

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From left, former South Dakota State Penitentiary Warden **Joe Roemmich**, Maj. **Jarod Hettich**, former Director of Prison Operations **Amber Pirraglia** and Corrections Secretary **Nick Lamb** pose in a social media photo posted in February to congratulate Hettich on a promotion. (South Dakota Department of Corrections photo)



The South Dakota State Penitentiary, pictured on March 27, 2024. (Photo by John Hult/South Dakota Searchlight)

Attorney General Jackley Announces State Appeals Federal Injunction in Mayday Health Lawsuit

PIERRE— South Dakota Attorney General Marty Jackley announces he has appealed a U.S. Federal Court’s preliminary injunction that halted the enforcement of a new state law that prohibits the advertisement, dispensing, and distribution of abortion pills in South Dakota.

The U.S. District Court in Rapid City in July ruled in favor of Mayday Health which had requested the injunction. The law was scheduled to

take effect July 1. “South Dakota’s law prohibiting advertising for illegal abortion pills is designed to protect women’s health and innocent life,” said Attorney General Jackley. “As Attorney General, I stand with the Legislature, Governor, and our citizens in defending and protecting innocent life.”

Attorney General Jackley’s appeal was filed Monday with the U.S. Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals.

Price tag for Trump’s D.C. deployment of National Guard: \$1.4B more through 2029

Sam Gauntt

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Roots #70

“Mick Harrison: Belle Fourche Prairie Painter”

Meg English
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Mick Harrison



Harrison is a Belle Fourche painter who is quite acclaimed in the professional art world.

This summer he received some notoriety closer to home. The July August issue of South Dakota Magazine features the work of several regional artists who were asked to submit paintings of what South Dakota may have looked like 250 years ago.

Mick submitted a painting of a grizzly bear flushing a grouse. “There Were Grizzlies” is an oil on linen, 16” x 20”. “It took about two weeks to finish the painting, drying time included.” Mick told me.

The painting is another fine example of what I love about Mick’s work, vibrant colors, prairie landscapes, magnificent skies and settings that provoke a desire to crawl into the painting and stay for a while. (Perhaps without the Grizzly)

Mick explained how the South Dakota Magazine project came about. “They gave us a list of possible subject matter but gave us free reign on our own ideas.” He said.

“I originally picked a grizzly running from fire, but another artist had already picked that. I decided to use a background I had painted before of an area near where I grew up. No photos were used other than the background which was

from a photo I took years ago. Even then, I used my ‘artist’s license’ in painting it.”

As I explained, Mick Harrison is a nationally recognized American artist who happens to live in Belle Fourche and a native South Dakotan.

He grew up in Mobridge in the 50s and 60s with a gift for drawing and an eye for cool cars, so he wanted to be a car designer. Unfortunately, Mobridge High School did not offer art classes.

However, Mick’s innate talent, eye for color, style and form earned his acceptance at the prestigious Los Angeles School of Art and Design, to pursue his dream. But the school was expensive. Mick opted for The School of Mines instead, but engineering school was not a good fit either, so he joined the U.S. Army.

Following a three-year tour of duty in the service Mick landed a job in in Cedar Rapids, Iowa as a staff artist for Rockwell International. With no formal art training, Mick apparently fell into the job. The work paid well. Life was secure and good, but Mick had made up his mind to be a fine artist. He resigned from the job and moved with his family back to Mobridge.

That was in 1974, nearly 50 years ago. Mick recalled how he and his wife Noreen celebrated with a dance when True West Magazine bought his first work. They have never looked back.

These days what Mick likes to do best is paint. His studio looks out over the bluffs east of Belle Fourche. The scenery reminds him of

the prairie near Mobridge and the land west of the river where he spent summers at his grandparents’ ranch.

Mick describes himself as a prairie painter. Primarily Mick paints in oil on large canvases. He is prolific painter with an impressive portfolio.

In Mick’s work, colors are magnificent, skies are vast, even grass and the occasional tree take on meaning. People populate the landscapes. Often a lone cowboy engaged in pensive reflection sits high on a handsome horse while a dog or two stands ready for action. There are cows too.

Many of his paintings depict Native Americans. There are also paintings of pioneer settlers and farmers. These are the salt of the earth people whom Mick admires in real life.

Mick recognizes that artists sometimes idealize the culture or lifestyles of their subjects. He explained that all art is essentially an artist’s perception. Mick admits that he may be guilty of some idealization in his work, although he has a deep and abiding respect for the various people who have served as stewards of the land.

Mick conveys a mastery of form and figure. His use of color to create atmosphere is especially skillful. Mick understands color. “Less is more.” he said referring to

the palette he uses for each painting.

Although the collective range of colors offers all the colors one might see in nature throughout the seasons or times of day on the prairie, Mick keeps the palette for each painting simple bringing a sense of unity to the work. “I use lots of white to bring out the light.” There is always a recognizable atmospheric quality to Mick’s paintings. Mick’s night paintings are distinctive and blue.

Mick often uses photographs or composites of several photographs to create a scene. Before he starts work on a large canvas, Mick will do a sketch or a pen or pencil and ink drawing to see where the light and dark values belong and to see how the larger work will be laid out.

Mick is well established as a recognized western artist who has worked with notable galleries throughout the country.

In marketing their work artists must keep up with technology. At one time Mick did very well with prints. However, there were challenges. Mick recalls experimenting with printers in the early days, and sending one off to the dump when it became obsolete. When the tractor at the dump rolled over the printer and crushed it, Mick felt free. These days, Mick mostly sells original

paintings.

He credits those who can run a gallery business and sell the art. Marketing artwork is a separate talent.

Mick admires the work of the artists from the era of magazine illustrators. Harvey Dunn, Norman Rockwell, N.C Wyeth, and Frederick Remington are inspirational. “There is always more to learn.” Mick noted as he reflected on these inspiring painters.

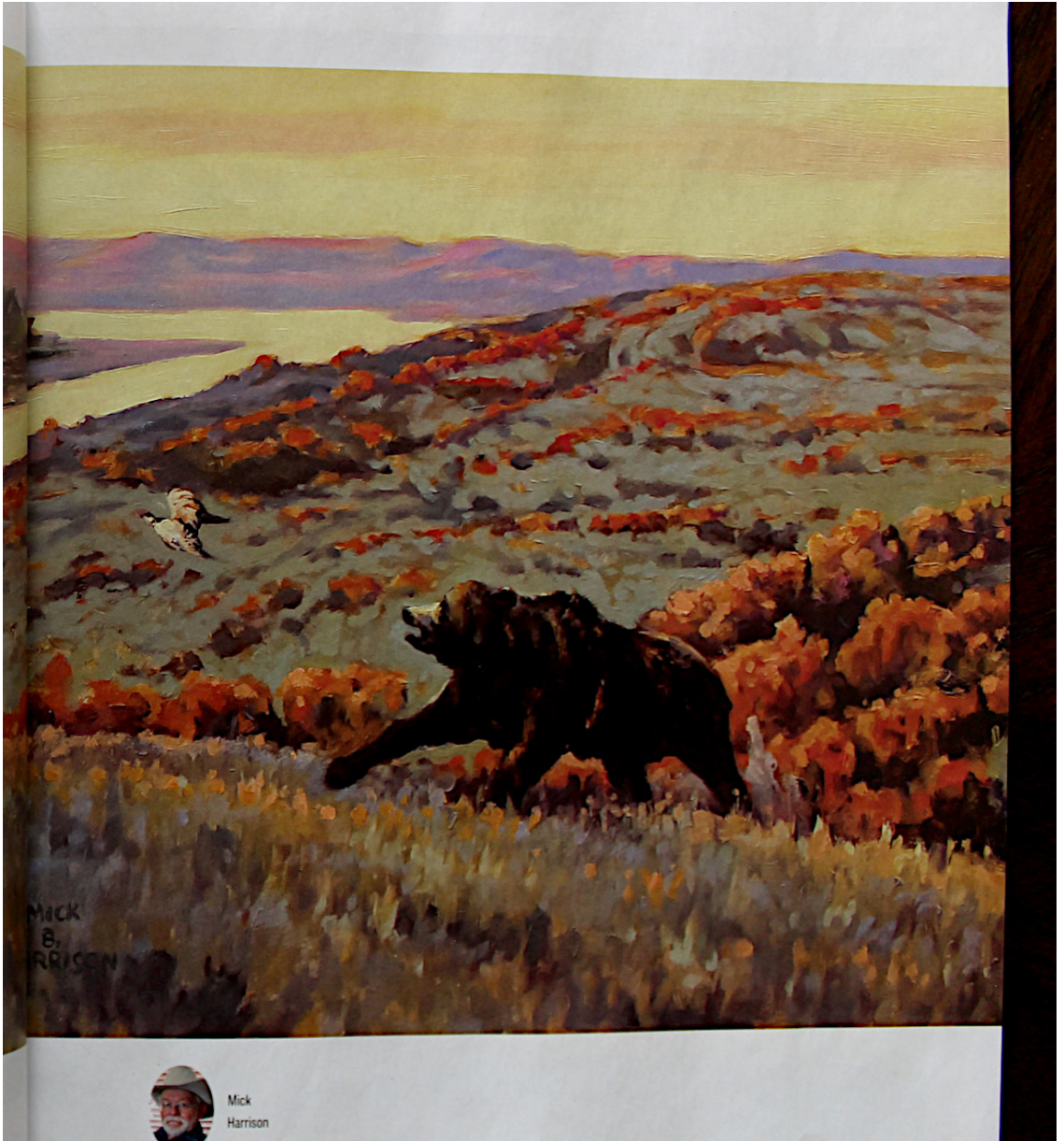
Still, Mick has remained true to his style. An artist must be him or herself. It’s good to admire other artists, but one thing Mick has noticed is that some artists start to look like others. “It’s better to remain true to yourself.” He commented.

Although Mick admits that his work is based on his own perceptions, he likes to think that the landscape lines, colors, people and animals in his work are perceptions of what is beautiful, good and lasting and valuable in western culture.

In terms of artistic independence, Mick Harrison and his wife Noreen have lived a rich life. Noreen is a writer who has self-published several novels. They have two grown daughters and grandchildren who are very much at home with their grandparents. Mick is grateful that he never became a car designer.



South Dakota Magazine Lead Page: Imagining this land in 1776



Mick Harrison

THE DAKOTA SCOUT

The Dakota Scout is a South Dakota owned, sourced and printed independent operation co-founded by Ellis and Sneve. Together, they have more than 30 years of combined experience in South Dakota journalism that have earned them reputations as dogged reporters who’ve not lost touch with their neighbors’ sensibilities. Be in the Know!

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