

South Dakota National Guard

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

SD National Guard hosts 32nd annual Dining-Out

PIERRE, S.D. – The South Dakota National Guard hosted its 2016 Dining-Out at the Ramkota Hotel and Convention Center in Pierre, Feb. 4. The annual tradition has brought Guardsmen from across the state together for a formal evening for the last 32 years.

The atmosphere, while formal, includes deep-rooted traditions which lighten the mood and provide both members and guests not only plenty of laughs, but a chance to learn some of the organization’s history, traditions and an opportunity to recognize individual and unit achievements.

“For the last 32 years, this annual event has been an excellent forum to celebrate the organization’s proud history and traditions,” said Lt. Col. Brendan Murphy, executive officer to the SDNG adjutant general. “This event provides the Guard an opportunity to honor several individuals for their outstanding support to the National Guard and highlight our significant accomplishments to the community, state and nation.”

A video highlighting the many accomplishments made by the men and women of the SDNG in 2015 was shown in addition to comments from Gov. Dennis Daugaard and Maj. Gen. Tim Reisch, the SDNG adjutant general. The National Guard also recognized a family, an employer and a public servant with awards recognizing their contributions to the SDNG mission.

Pro Patria Award – Iberdrola Renewables, Buffalo Ridge II Wind Farm

The awards portion of the dining-out began by presenting Iberdrola Renewables, Buffalo Ridge II Wind Farm with the 2015 South Dakota Employer Support for the Guard and Reserve Pro Patria Award.

The Pro Patria Award is presented annually to one employer in the state who provides the most exceptional support of our national defense through leadership practices and personnel policies that support their employees who serve in the National Guard and Reserve.

“Since 9/11, our National Guard and Reserve have been heavily relied upon as part of the total military force,” said Maj. Lona Christensen, executive director for the SD ESGR committee. “Iberdrola realizes the importance of a strong force and provides support and opportunities to members of the Armed Forces.”

Tech. Sgt. Brandon Johnson, a member of the South Dakota Air National Guard’s 114th Maintenance Squadron, works as a wind energy technician with Iberdrola and nominated his employer for the award.

During Johnson’s deployment this past year, Iberdrola hung a flag in his office and a sign that read, “Called to active duty” so all would remember when they saw the empty office.

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Johnson's team also placed a lighted flag on top of one of their wind turbines, which remained there for the duration of his deployment. To do this, they had to design a special stand and pole with a light that could withstand the high winds at the top of a wind turbine. They presented him the flag upon his return.

Iberdrola also hired a company to create a three-part video series, about Johnson and the company's commitment to him and his service.

Johnson's co-workers were encouraged to download an app for their phones and maintain regular communication with him during his deployment.

Other support came in the form of care packages, co-workers checking in on the family, and providing assistance when needed.

"Family members knew they could call without hesitation if assistance was ever needed, but it wasn't necessary to call, as someone was always stopping by to check in with his family," Christensen said. "The family was told that all of the postage for their care packages would be covered by the company." "Iberdrola made this the easiest deployment I have had so far," Johnson said.

"Employers are inextricably linked to the nation's defense by sharing their most precious assets, their employees," said Christensen. "Iberdrola Renewables, Buffalo Ride II Wind Farm is deserving of this recognition for their outstanding contributions to our military services. Iberdrola's leadership exemplifies the patriotic spirit that is alive and well here in our great State of South Dakota."

The Williamson Militiaman Award – Chief Warrant Officer 5 Lynn Wright

The SDNG next awarded the 2015 Williamson Militiaman Award to Chief Warrant Officer 5 Lynn Wright.

The Williamson Militiaman Award, established in 1987 by Maj. Gen. Ronald F. Williamson, recognizes an individual who exemplifies the spirit of the citizen-Soldier as shown by their community leadership, their support of the National Guard and the defense of the country.

Wright has been serving both state and nation for over 40 years in uniform, beginning with her 1975 enlistment into the U.S. Army. Following her time on active duty, she went on to serve in the SDNG in various personnel services positions at the company and battalion level. In 1990, she became a part of the Warrant Officer Corps.

"She has served in many roles or additional duties alongside her primary military position, to include the Joint Force Headquarters sexual assault response coordinator, unit victim advocate and most recently in the protocol section of the Golden Coyote Training Exercise," Reisch said. "However, the single greatest enduring contribution, and her passion, is to the family readiness of SDNG service members and their families."

While serving as a traditional Soldier, one who serves one weekend a month and two weeks a year, she recognized family programs was not well supported and took it on herself to bolster that program.

Wright realized that the educational resources and communication traditionally sent through the service members were not reaching the families so she targeted families directly to provide resources, including educational symposiums where she fostered professionalism training among family readiness volunteers.

She continued to invest herself in training and mentoring unit and Family Readiness Group leadership on the importance of family readiness, providing technical guidance on processes, regulations, documentation and helped sustain lead volunteers and Family Readiness Group programs during long-term deployments.

“Before there was the contracted South Dakota Family Assistance Center as we know it today – she was advocating for families,” said Reisch. “During annual training, she provided emergency and routine messages from the Family Assistance Center to units in the field and ensured, in the event of a family emergency, Soldiers had adequate transportation home. During Operation Desert Shield/Storm, she established a Family Assistance Center that provided support to the families of Soldiers deployed.

“Before there was a South Dakota National Guard Youth Program as we know it today – she was initiating training designed to increase the self-esteem of service members' children, mentoring youth at the Custer Youth Camp program or assisting with worship for young people in grades 5-8,” Reisch said. “Even today, she can be found at nearly every youth program event.

“Before there was the Strong Bonds marriage enrichment program or suicide prevention training as we know it today – she was working with the State Chaplain's Office to develop marriage enrichment and suicide prevention programs,” Reisch said.

“But above all things related to family readiness is her love and passion for the Family Readiness Group volunteers,” said Reisch. “She recognized that strong military families are a retention tool in the hand of the unit commander; and strong, confident, well-trained and supported volunteers make for a strong family readiness program. She has been a willing advocate for the Family Program, working tirelessly at providing Family Program training and assistance to volunteers and units in the state ensuring all military family representatives and civilian volunteers are aware of all training support and programs available to them.”

The SDNG estimates that Wright has conducted hundreds of volunteer trainings, impacting several hundred, if not thousands, of service members and volunteers and every unit in the SDNG.

“Without a doubt, she is truly the expert in South Dakota on family readiness,” said Reisch. “Nationally recognized and considered a go-to person in the family readiness program world, her direct mentorship has led to three South Dakota Army National Guard units receiving the prestigious Department of Defense Reserve Affairs Family Readiness Awards – just in the last four years alone.”

Wright has served the SDNG Family Readiness Program as a traditional Soldier, on short-term orders and most recently, for the past 11 years, as a contract family readiness support assistant.

“Her emphatic demeanor has inspired and maintained high morale and team spirit in the Family Program for nearly 30 years,” said Reisch.

Past recipients of the award include: Former Adjutants General Phil Killey and Harold Sykora; former U.S. Senators Tom Daschle and Tim Johnson; former Governors William Janklow and Michael Rounds; and current Governor Dennis Daugaard.

The Adjutant General's Family Award – The Vanderwolde Family

To conclude the awards portion of the evening, Reisch awarded the 2015 Adjutant General's Family Award to the Vanderwolde family.

“The Vanderwolde family is the epitome of the word volunteer,” Reisch said. “They are giving by nature, and do so with joy and goodness in their hearts.

“It's never a question of if they will volunteer; it's a matter of ‘what are they going to do next’ that gives the essential backbone to the Family Volunteer Group and the South Dakota Air National Guard,” added Reisch.

The Vanderwolde family has been volunteering with the South Dakota Air National Guard for more than 15 years, on events ranging from children's holiday parties to youth programs to supporting deployed members.

"As we look to support our fellow Airmen, we can always count on this family to provide home-cooked meals to families who might need the extra help," said Reisch. "Deanna is the go-to for families when they have a hardship or are in need of support. She is a role model for our younger families helping guide their path during challenging times.

"Nichole and Brooklyn have also been active with the volunteer group since they were young," Reisch added. "As participants of many of the events, the girls were motivated into volunteering to help with these programs as they got older. They have participated in numerous activities but their true love is the Military Youth Camp."

Both girls started as a youth participants which grew into junior counselors and then to counselor. Nichole has been invested in the youth program for over 10 years. Brooklyn has not only been a wonderful asset to the youth camp but she also been serving on the South Dakota Youth Council for the past two years.

"Because of their vast experience, Ed, Deanna, Nichole, and Brooklyn are a family we turn to when we need to talk through new ideas or put new concepts into motion They are ready and willing to do anything, anytime," said Reisch. "The Vanderwolde family is the pillar of excellence when it comes to the South Dakota National Guard. They are a dedicated to the service members and their families at all costs. We are proud to honor their dedication to our Wing."

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High resolution photos are available at www.flickr.com/photos/southdakotationalguard



160204-Z-GT719-107: Iberdrola Renewables, Buffalo Ridge II Wind Farm is presented with the 2015 South Dakota Employer Support for the Guard and Reserve Pro Patria Award during the South Dakota National Guard Dining-Out at the Ramkota Hotel in Pierre, S.D., Feb. 4, 2016. The award is presented by Gov. Dennis Daugaard to Nick Thiel, plant manager (center) and Tech. Sgt. Brandon Johnson, employee (center right). Also pictured from left is Maj. Gen. Tim Reisch, adjutant general of the SDNG, and Mr. Ron Mielke, ESGR-SD chair. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Heather Trobee/Released)



160204-Z-GT719-115: Chief Warrant Officer 5 Lynn Wright (center right) is presented with the 2015 Williamson Militiaman Award by (from left) Maj. Gen. Tim Reisch, SDNG adjutant general, Gov. Dennis Daugaard and Maj. Gen. Ronald Williamson (retired), during the South Dakota National Guard Dining-Out at the Ramkota Hotel in Pierre, S.D., Feb. 4, 2016. The award recognizes an individual who exemplifies the spirit of the citizen-Soldier/Airman as shown by their community leadership, their support of the National Guard and the defense of our country. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Heather Trobee/Released)



160204-Z-GT719-122: Col. Ed Vanderwolde (second from right), of the South Dakota Air National Guard's 114th Fighter Wing, and his family; wife, Deanna, and daughters, Nichole and Brooklyn, are presented with the 2015 Adjutant General's Family Award by Gov. Dennis Daugaard (left) and Maj. Gen. Tim Reisch (right), SDNG adjutant general, during the South Dakota National Guard Dining-Out at the Ramkota Hotel in Pierre, S.D., Feb. 4, 2016. The award recognizes those family members who support their service members in an exemplary manner while managing family, careers, or even hardship, all the while not seeking recognition for their sacrifices. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Heather Trobee/Released)

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