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PIERRE, S.D. - Cited for strong dedication to serving veterans and their families in South Dakota, county and tribal veterans' service officers (VSO) and staff from the South Dakota Department of Military and Veterans Affairs were recognized at an awards program Monday, Aug. 30, at the Pierre American Legion Cabin.

The annual event, organized by the South Dakota Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, was held in conjunction with a veterans' benefits training workshop for county and tribal VSOs from across the state.

"I believe it is important to recognize individuals who provide outstanding service to our state's veterans," said Steven Harding, deputy secretary of the South Dakota Department of Military and Veterans Affairs. "Working together, we are successful in serving South Dakota's veterans and their families."

Kevin Graber, of Plankinton, received the Jim Melgaard Award, which distinguishes Kevin as the 2010 County/Tribal Veteran Service Officer of the Year. As the VSO for Aurora and Brule Counties, Kevin was recognized for his outstanding dedication to veterans.

Richard Beringer, of Tyndall, representing Bon Homme County, was awarded the 2010 Robert Lindblad Award. He was cited for excellence in outreach.

Patricia Kroupa of Sioux Falls was presented the 2010 Les Mord Award. Kroupa, VSO for Minnehaha County, was cited for her excellence in education.

Steve Oliva of Pierre was awarded the 2010 Glenn Green Advocacy Award. Oliva, field officer for the South Dakota Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, was recognized for his commitment to VSOs, mentoring new VSOs, and expertise on veterans' regulations and benefits.

Noting that Abraham Lincoln once said, "We need to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan," Deputy Secretary Harding said those who were honored at Monday's conference exemplify the commitment that South Dakota's VSOs and the Department's staff provide to veterans and their families. "We serve as advocates for veterans and their dependents and survivors. Our goal is to ensure that all South Dakota veterans and their families receive professional assistance, advocacy and counseling."

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(Photos available upon request)