

WESTERN TRADER

Published by Southern Hills Publishing, P.O. Box 551, Custer, SD 57730 • Phone 605-673-2217 • Email: custerads@gwtc.net
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ISSUE NO. 53

DINING • ARTS • ENTERTAINMENT • EVENTS



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE — Sprockets Fun Foundry in Keystone will host Trivia Night this Saturday—and every Saturday—from 5:30-7:30 p.m. in the taproom. There are two one hour sessions, and up to four people can play per team. It is free to play. [AI Generated Artwork]

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Tribal nations in SD are betting on tourism on reservations

By Molly Wetsch
South Dakota News Watch

Some members of the state's tribal nations are beginning to slowly embrace visitors, as the South Dakota Native Tourism Alliance (SDNTA) works with tribal leaders and organizations to reframe tourism on the nine reservations as an engine for economic development.

Tourism and visitors haven't always been positive concepts in these communities, Sarah Kills In Water of SDNTA told News Watch. There has long existed on reservations a hesitation to allow outsiders into certain traditional spaces and a general fear of exploitation. That's especially true in South Dakota, where some Native lands are among the poorest regions in the country.

"When we first entered these spaces, they didn't want to know about tourism. They already had this idea that we were selling our culture. And so we had to do a lot of work in educating," Kills In Water said. "But once we did that, their little light bulb started to click on and you could see them starting to dream and starting to think, 'What can I do?'"

SDNTA was recently awarded the \$175,000 J.M. Kaplan Innovation Prize, one of 10 organizations of more than 3,500 applicants to receive ongoing funding, training and resources to grow their efforts.

Native tourism highlights cultural reconnection, historical conversation

Rhea Waldman, executive director of SDNTA, and Kills In Water envision a world in which reservations are crucial destinations for South Dakota visitors, as much as Mount Rushmore National Memorial, Badlands National Park and Crazy Horse Memorial.

"Tourism is, just in South Dakota, a big thing. And so what we're trying to do is highlight the gems that stand on every single reservation, and they're very different. Every reservation has their own own cultural pieces, their own stories, they have their own museums," Waldman said.

Nationwide, tourism on reservations has quietly grown. The Navajo (Diné) nation's tribal lands are home to iconic natural landmarks like Monument Valley



LOCAL KNOWLEDGE — Native leaders teach a group about indigenous flora and fauna in the Black Hills. [Submitted Photo/SOUTH DAKOTA NATIVE TOURISM ALLIANCE]

and Antelope Canyon — though hiccups like the COVID-19 pandemic and a drop in international visitors have inhibited some tour operators.

Kills in Water said that many of the possibilities tribal members find the most exciting are outdoor activities that they think travelers will enjoy, which also allows for connection to the land that Indigenous people have called home for thousands of years.

"There's a lot of ideas surrounding outdoor recreation on the Rosebud reservation. Our people want to take people out on hiking trips and look at our medicines and teach them about the flora and the fauna of our reservation," Kills In Water said.

Reconnecting Native Americans to their own culture

In addition to economic development, reconnecting with cultural traditions can be beneficial for tribal members as well, promoting greater community connection and leadership development.

"I see this as the main opportunity to reconnect our people to our culture. Through learning about our culture and reconnecting, they're going to find ways that they can educate visitors about who we are today. Not in a way that's exploiting our culture, not selling our ceremonies. But educating our visitors about who we are today, about all of the things that we've been through and that we're still here. Yes, we still have struggles, we're still challenged. But we're still here to tell our story,"

Kills In Water said.

Several significant historical sites exist on those tribal lands, including the Wounded Knee Memorial on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, land which President Donald Trump recently signed legislation protecting.

Visitors interested in the history of the country would find trips to reservations in South Dakota especially insightful, Waldman said.

Tourism on tribal lands, though, will always look different than other trips across the country. The more rural nature of most reservations will change things as well as the inherent cultural onversations that occur when visiting historic sites or witnessing tribal traditions.

Sherry L. Rupert, CEO of the American Indigenous Tourism Association, said that the experiences tourists are not expecting, especially when it comes to Native culture, are often the most rewarding.

"Oftentimes people don't know it, but that's really what they're looking for — being outside and learning about people that have been here for thousands of years. It changes their perspective of the world. They go back and share that with their families, and it changes who they are as people," Rupert said.

Barriers to successful tribal tourism

Though the opportunities that a tourist economy holds are enticing to many, there are still barriers to many tribal nations' entry into the industry.

In South Dakota, where reservations and trust land comprise more than 12 per-

cent of the land, population centers are few and far between, which can make travel difficult.

Support services may also not be sufficient to accommodate groups of tourists.

"It's really hard if you have a community that doesn't have the infrastructure to bring tourists there," Waldman said. "If the restaurant that we were planning on going to is closed and there aren't really a lot of other options, and then you're an hour and a half away from anything else, that is not necessarily helpful."

And then there's the challenge of basic economics.

"If you have a community that really wants to build tourism and you have artisans and artists and other people in the tourism industry that are trying to build their business," Waldman said, you also need an influx of tourists and their dollars in order to support those business owners.

"So that is really the big chicken-and-the-egg situation that we're in, where that is a real challenge. How do we make sure that we build demand and supply at the same time?"

The balance between allowing tourists into Native communities to learn more about the culture, while also protecting sacred spaces is also a challenge, Waldman said. Tribal members' level of comfort with tourist engagement varies greatly, so

any ongoing work requires tailored plans for each tribe.

Bus tour company Trafalgar launched a "National Parks and Native Trails of the Dakotas" trip in 2022, which made stops on reservations in North Dakota and South Dakota, including the Pine Ridge, Rosebud and Standing Rock reservations.

Though Waldman said large tours can often be difficult to navigate when it comes to lodging, meals and other logistics, continued partnerships with tour companies like that allow for further visibility among potential visitors.

"We're trying to navigate this place and say, 'What are you looking for?' Because we don't want to create something that no one takes. And there are some that say, 'You create what you want to create. We will find the right people.' Those are exactly the partners and the partnerships that we need," Waldman said.

State support crucial for ongoing tourism efforts

In 2016, South Dakota Republican U.S. Sen. John Thune co-sponsored the bipartisan NATIVE Act — or the Native American Tourism and Improving Visitor Experience Act.

That legislation was unanimously approved by the Senate and ensures that tribal nations are represented among federal agencies working within the tourism industry, that continued infrastructure development is supported and that data is collected and analyzed surrounding tribal tourism.

"South Dakota is rich in the culture and traditions of the Lakota, Dakota, and Nakota nations," Thune said in a statement after the legislation passed. "We should do all we can to help celebrate and recognize the numerous and oftentimes invaluable contributions our tribal communities provide to our state."

Rupert told News Watch that ongoing collaboration with state and federal tourism agencies is crucial to ensuring ongoing exposure for tribal experiences.

Travel South Dakota, which promotes the state as a vacation destination, did not respond to requests for

comment for this story. The agency hosts a list of ways to experience Native culture in South Dakota on its website, including several attractions on tribal lands.

"Support from the state destination marketing organization or the state tourism office is necessary. They're tasked with marketing all the destinations and experiences in your state, and that should include the Indigenous offerings as well," Rupert said.

Waldman said that working with the state's tourism office has allowed SDNTA to understand what visitors are looking to get out of experiences, how to market them and how to use data to their advantage.

"There's definitely places where working together is really important because they have a huge budget for marketing, for example. They have a lot of contacts. So they're helping us to get the word out and also make sure that we are at the table to make some of the bigger decisions," Waldman said.

South Dakota is well known for several attractions with connections to Native culture — especially in the Black Hills, the traditional sacred lands of the Lakota and other Native people. But Waldman and Kills In Water hope that visitors see the value in visiting tribes where they currently exist.

"What we hope to create are these powerful connections between our guests and who we are," Kills In Water said. "We want them to see us for who we are, not for what they think we are, not for what they've been told we are by somebody else. We want to share, authentically, our story with every person who comes, who has an interest to learn."

This story was produced by South Dakota News Watch, an independent, non-profit organization. Read more stories and donate at sdnewswatch.org and sign up for an email for statewide stories. Investigative reporter Molly Wetsch is a Report for America corps member covering rural and Indigenous issues. Contact her at molly.wetsch@sd-newswatch.org.

To ensure publication, ads must be received

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Sunday
11 a.m.–7 p.m.

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6 a.m.–8 p.m.
Sunday
7 a.m.–7 p.m.

CABOOSE COFFEE COMPANY

Monday–Saturday
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Sunday Closed

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Daily 5 a.m.–Midnight

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TURTLE TOWN

Sunday–Thursday
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5–8 p.m.

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8 a.m.–9 p.m.
Sunday 8 am.–8 p.m.

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SPROCKETS FUN FOUNDRY

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Noon to 8 p.m.

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Sunday 10 a.m.– 5 p.m.

XANTERRA@MT. RUSHMORE

Daily 8 a.m.– 9 p.m.

HOT SPRINGS EATS

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DAIRY QUEEN

Daily
10:30 a.m.–9 p.m.

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Wednesday-Sunday
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Closed Monday & Tuesday

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Sunday 7 a.m.–1 p.m.

PIZZA HUT

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SILK ROAD EXPERIENCE

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Tuesday & Wednesday Closed

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Sunday 5:30 a.m.–Noon

TACO JOHN'S

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7 a.m.–9 pm.
Sunday 8 a.m.–8 p.m.

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High Season
Monday–Saturday
6:30 a.m.–8 p.m.
Sunday 9 a.m.–3 p.m.

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Friday & Saturday 11 a.m.–9 p.m.
Sunday 11 a.m.–7 p.m.

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Friday & Saturday 3-6 p.m.
Sunday 8 a.m.-3 p.m.

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Friday & Saturday
9 a.m. – 2 a.m.

KHANTONG THAI CUISINE

Monday-Wednesday-Friday
11 a.m.– 4:30 p.m.

THE HAT CREEK GRILL

Friday & Saturday
Noon–10 p.m.

VICTORY STEAKHOUSE & LOUNGE

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Saturday
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Tues, Thurs, Fri.
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Saturday 6:30 a.m.-10:30 a.m.

CAMBRIA COFFEE & DECKER'S MARKET

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Saturday 7 a.m.–2 p.m.
Sunday 8 a.m.–Noon

HOT STUFF PIZZA

Daily
5 a.m. - 6 p.m.

TACO JOHN'S

Daily
11 a.m.–10 p.m.

HANNAH'S HEAVENLY TREATS

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Saturday 7 a.m.- 10 a.m.

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8 a.m.-6 p.m.
Saturday 9 a.m.–4 p.m.

HI-16 CAFE

Thursday–Sunday
7 a.m.–9 p.m.

ISABELLA'S

Sunday–Wednesday
11 a.m.–8 p.m.
Tuesday - Saturday
11 a.m. - 9 p.m.

PERKINS TAVERN

Monday–Wednesday
11 a.m.–8 p.m.
Thursday - Sunday
7 am - 9 pm

PIZZA BARN

Monday–Thursday
4–9 pm
Friday & Saturday
4–10 pm

UNCLE VITO'S

Tuesday–Friday
7 a.m.–2 p.m.
Saturday
7 a.m.–10 a.m.

PRINGLE EATS

THE HITCHRAIL BAR & RESTAURANT

Tuesday–Sunday
11 a.m.–8 p.m.

RAPID CITY EATS

SHIPWRECK'S BAR & GRILL

Monday–Wednesday
11 a.m.–8 p.m.

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BLACK HILLS

Live

LIVE MUSIC - LOCAL EVENTS

Wednesday 12-31

NEW YEAR'S EVE

Men's Breakfast Bible Study
The Little White Church
Hill City, SD
7:30 AM

Seniors Fitness Class
Hill City Center
Hill City, SD
8:30 AM

Seniors Bridge Card Games
Hill City Center
Hill City, SD
10 AM - 3 PM

New Year's Early Eve Party
Custer County Library
Custer, SD
Noon

Sprockets New Years Eve Family Fun Event
Sprockets Fun Foundry
Keystone, SD
2 - 10 PM

Adult Bible Study
The Little White Church
Hill City, SD
6 PM

Pringle AA Group
Pringle Community Center
Pringle, SD
7 PM

Thursday 1-1

Seniors Mahjongg
Hill City Center
Hill City, SD
10 AM

Seniors Hand & Foot Card Games
Hill City Center
Hill City, SD
1 PM

Imagination Club
Hill City Public Library Kid's Annex
Hill City, SD
3:15 PM

Friends of Bill W. AA Group
Bethesda Lutheran Church
Hot Springs, SD
6 PM

Bluegrass *LIVE*
The Gaslight Restaurant
Rockerville, SD
6:30-8:30 PM

Custer AA Group
Custer Alano Club
Custer, SD
7 PM

Friday 1-2

Seniors Fitness Class
Hill City Center
Hill City, SD
8:30 AM

Seniors Coffee Club
Hill City Center
Hill City, SD
9 AM

Community Food Pantry
The Little White Church
Hill City, SD
9 AM - 11 AM

Storytime
Hill City Public Library
Kids Annex
Hill City, SD
9:30 AM

Saturday 1-3

Friends of Bill W. AA Group
Bethesda Lutheran Church
Hot Springs, SD
10 AM

Custer AA Group
Custer Alano Club
Custer, SD
10 AM

Custer Pack Dog Walk
Pageant Hill
Custer, SD
11 AM

Trivia Night - 1980s
Sprockets Fun Foundry
Keystone, SD
6 PM

Sunday 1-4

Custer Community Action Team Food Distribution
CAT Building, Corner of N. 6th and Lincoln Streets
Custer, SD
10 AM-1 PM

Women's 12-Step Recovery
Custer Alano Club
Custer, SD
10:15 AM

Adult Bible Study
The Little White Church
Hill City, SD
6 PM

Monday 1-5

Community Food Pantry
The Little White Church
Hill City, SD
9 AM - 11 AM

Learn to Quilt
Quilted Buffalo
Custer, SD
9 AM to Noon



ANOTHER NEW YEAR OPPORTUNITY — Keystone will be the site of a family-friendly New Year's Eve event when Sprockets Fun Foundry hosts its family fun event beginning at 2 p.m. The event runs until 10 p.m. and will feature a wristband special for arcade play and virtual reality, as well as party favors. [Submitted Photo]

Seniors Yoga
Hill City Center
Hill City, SD
9:15 AM

Pringle AA Group
Pringle Community Center
Pringle, SD
Noon

Custer Rotary Club
Custer Senior Center
Custer, SD
Noon

Chick Chat and Crafts
The Little White Church
Hill City, SD
4 PM

Custer City Council
Custer City Hall
Custer, SD
5:30 PM

Buffalo Gap Town Board
Buffalo Gap Community Center
Buffalo Gap, SD
6 PM

Financial Peace University Class
The Little White Church
Hill City, SD
6 PM

Tuesday 1-6

Seniors Beginning Line Dancing
Hill City Center
Hill City, SD
9 AM

Seniors Hand & Foot Card Games
Hill City Center
Hill City, SD
1-4:30 PM

Seniors Knitting Class
Hill City Center
Hill City, SD
1-3 PM

Custer Piecemakers Quilt Guild
Custer Lutheran Fellowship
Custer, SD
1:30 PM

Custer County Republicans
Custer County Courthouse
Annex Pine Room
Custer, SD
5:30 PM

Celebrate Recovery
The Little White Church
Hill City, SD
5:45 PM

Hill City Lions Club Meeting
Hill City Center
Hill City, SD
6 PM

Hermosa Town Board
Hermosa Town Hall
Hermosa, SD
6 PM

Hermosa 12-Step Recovery Program
Hermosa United Church of Christ
Hermosa, SD
6 PM

Friends of Bill W. AA Group
Bethesda Lutheran Church
Hot Springs, SD
6 PM

Ladies Night at The Cruisin' Canvas
The Cruisin' Canvas
Custer, SD
6-8 PM

Bingo Night
Gold Pan Saloon
Custer, SD
6:30 PM

Entrepreneur Meeting
Hill City Center
Hill City, SD
6:30 - 7:30 PM

Custer AA Group
Custer Alano Club
Custer, SD
7 PM

Wednesday 1-7

Men's Breakfast Bible Study
The Little White Church
Hill City, SD
7:30 AM

Merchants Meeting
Hill City Center
Hill City, SD
8 AM

Driver's License Exams
Custer County Courthouse
Annex Pine Room
Custer, SD
8 AM to 5 PM

Seniors Fitness Class
Hill City Center
Hill City, SD
8:30 AM

Seniors Bridge Card Games
Hill City Center
Hill City, SD
10 AM - 3 PM

Life Group
The Little White Church
Hill City, SD
10 AM

Seniors Lunch Bunch
Hill City Center
Hill City, SD
11:30 AM - 12:30 PM

Kidzlife
The Little White Church
Hill City, SD
3:15-5:15 PM

Keystone Town Board Meeting
Keystone Community Center
Keystone, SD
5 PM

Youth Group
The Little White Church
Hill City, SD
5:30 PM

Adult Bible Study
The Little White Church
Hill City, SD
6 PM

Pringle AA Group
Pringle Community Center
Pringle, SD
7 PM

Thursday 1-8

CPR/AED Morning Session
Hill City Center
Hill City, SD
8 AM

Women's Bible Study Fellowship
The Little White Church
Hill City, SD
8:30 - 10 AM

CPR/AED Afternoon Session
Hill City Center
Hill City, SD
1 PM

Imagination Club
Hill City Public Library Kid's Annex
Hill City, SD
3:15 PM

Friends of Bill W. AA Group
Bethesda Lutheran Church
Hot Springs, SD
6 PM



THURSDAYS AT THE GASLIGHT — The Gaslight in Rockerville is the place to be on Thursdays for Bluegrass music. Starting Thursday night the restaurant will host a Bluegrass jam each Thursday. The music begins at 6:30 p.m. and the public is invited to join in. [AI Generated]

Nature's Clues: Intro to Animal Tracking
The Trailhouse
148 Gordon St.
Custer, SD
6-7:30 PM

ADD/ADHD Support Group
Monument Health Custer Hospital Conference Room
Custer, SD
6:30 PM

Civil Air Patrol
Custer County Airport
Custer, SD
6:30 PM

Custer AA Group
Custer Alano Club
Custer, SD
7 PM

Friday 1-9

Community Food Pantry
The Little White Church
Hill City, SD
9 AM - 11 AM

Storytime
Hill City Public Library
Kids Annex
Hill City, SD
9:30 AM

Story Time
Custer County Library
Custer, SD
10 AM

Grief Support Group
Monument Health Custer Hospital
Custer, SD
1 PM

Wellness Support Group
Monument Health Custer Hospital
Custer, SD
2 PM

Rollerskating
Keystone Community Center
Keystone, SD
6 - 8:30 PM

Saturday 1-10

Friends of Bill W. AA Group
Bethesda Lutheran Church
Hot Springs, SD
10 AM

Custer AA Group
Custer Alano Club
Custer, SD
10 AM

Custer Community Action Team Food Distribution
CAT Building, corner of N. 6th and Lincoln streets
Custer, SD
2-5 PM

Chess Club
Pringle Town Hall
Custer, SD
5-7 PM

Trivia Night - Local Knowledge
Sprockets Fun Foundry
Keystone, SD
6 PM

Trivia Night w/Mike
With The Wind Winery
Hill City, SD
6 PM

Sunday 1-11

Seniors Sunday Breakfast
Hill City Center
Hill City, SD
8 AM - 12 PM

Women's 12-Step Recovery
Custer Alano Club
Custer, SD
10:15 AM

Monday 1-12

Community Food Pantry
The Little White Church
Hill City, SD
9 AM - 11 AM

Learn to Quilt
Quilted Buffalo
Custer, SD
9 AM to Noon

Seniors Yoga
Hill City Center
Hill City, SD
9:15 AM

Pringle AA Group
Pringle Community Center
Pringle, SD
Noon

Custer Rotary Club
Custer Senior Center
Custer, SD
Noon

Paint And Sip Party - HC Arts Council
With The Wind Winery
Hill City, SD
1 PM

Chick Chat and Crafts
The Little White Church
Hill City, SD
4 PM

Bookuquet Book Club - "Killers of a Certain Age"
Petals & Pages
Custer, SD
5 PM

Custer School District Board of Education
School Administration Building
Custer, SD
6 PM

Financial Peace University Class
The Little White Church
Hill City, SD
6 PM

Hermosa Arts & History Association
HAHA Building
Custer, SD
6:30 PM

Tuesday 1-13

Seniors Beginning Line Dancing
Hill City Center
Hill City, SD
9 AM

Zonta
Custer County Library
Custer, SD
1 PM

Feeding South Dakota Truck
The Little White Church
Hill City, SD
1-3 PM

Seniors Hand & Foot Card Games
Hill City Center
Hill City, SD
1-4:30 PM

Seniors Knitting Class
Hill City Center
Hill City, SD
1-3 PM

Custer City Planning Commission
Custer City Hall
Custer, SD
5 PM

Custer Meet & Eat
Custer Community Church
Custer, SD
5-7 PM

Celebrate Recovery
The Little White Church
Hill City, SD
5:45 PM

Hermosa 12-Step Recovery Program
Hermosa United Church of Christ
Hermosa, SD
6 PM

Friends of Bill W. AA Group
Bethesda Lutheran Church
Hot Springs, SD
6 PM

Ladies Night at The Cruisin' Canvas
The Cruisin' Canvas
Custer, SD
6-8 PM

Bingo Night
Gold Pan Saloon
Custer, SD
6:30 PM

Hot Springs Amateur Radio Club
South Annex Building
709 Jensen Highway
Hot Springs, SD
6:30 PM

Pringle Town Board
Pringle Community Center
Pringle, SD
7 PM

Elk Mountain School District Board of Education
Elk Mountain School
Custer, SD
7 PM

Custer AA Group
Custer Alano Club
Custer, SD
7 PM

Wednesday 1-14

Custer Area Economic Development Corp.
Black Hills Energy
Custer, SD
7 AM

Men's Breakfast Bible Study
The Little White Church
Hill City, SD
7:30 AM

Driver's License Exams
Custer County Courthouse
Annex Pine Room
Custer, SD
8 AM to 5 PM

Seniors Fitness Class
Hill City Center
Hill City, SD
8:30 AM

Life Group
The Little White Church
Hill City, SD
10 AM

Seniors Bridge Card Games
Hill City Center
Hill City, SD
10 AM - 3 PM

Kidzlife
The Little White Church
Hill City, SD
3:15-5:15 PM

Youth Group
The Little White Church
Hill City, SD
5:30 PM

Adult Bible Study
The Little White Church
Hill City, SD
6 PM

Park Board Meeting
Hill City Center
Hill City, SD
6 PM

Pringle AA Group
Pringle Community Center
Pringle, SD
7 PM

Thursday 1-15

Women's Bible Study Fellowship
The Little White Church
Hill City, SD
8:30 - 10 AM

Seniors Foot Clinic
Hill City Center
Hill City, SD
8:30 AM

Seniors Mahjongg
Hill City Center
Hill City, SD
10 AM

Seniors Hand & Foot Card Games
Hill City Center
Hill City, SD
1 PM

Imagination Club
Hill City Public Library Kid's Annex
Hill City, SD
3:15 PM

Friends of Bill W. AA Group
Bethesda Lutheran Church
Hot Springs, SD
6 PM

Civil Air Patrol
Custer County Airport
Custer, SD
6:30 PM

Custer AA Group
Custer Alano Club
Custer, SD
7 PM

Friday 1-16

Seniors Fitness Class
Hill City Center
Hill City, SD
8:30 AM

Community Food Pantry
The Little White Church
Hill City, SD
9 AM - 11 AM

Seniors Coffee Club
Hill City Center
Hill City, SD
9 AM

Storytime
Hill City Public Library
Kids Annex
Hill City, SD
9:30 AM

Story Time
Custer County Library
Custer, SD
10 AM

The Wilt Brothers *LIVE*
Custer Beacon
Custer, SD
7-10 PM

Saturday 1-17

Friends of Bill W. AA Group
Bethesda Lutheran Church
Hot Springs, SD
10 AM

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