



**SIOUX FALLS**  
DEVELOPMENT FOUNDATION

**WIN**  **IN** 20  
**WORKFORCE** **SUMMIT** 24



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## PAGE(S)

**3 BEN UTECHT BIO**

**4-5 GET TO KNOW YOUR FUTURE WORKFORCE AND THEIR INFLUENCERS**

### **BREAKOUT SESSION #1**

**6-7 THE TOP 3 MUSTS FOR PUTTING THE RIGHT PEOPLE IN THE RIGHT SEATS**

**7-8 EMPATHY-DRIVEN LEADERSHIP FOR HIGH PERFORMING TEAMS**

**8-9 THE HYBRID WORK REVOLUTION: STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS IN THE NEW NORMAL**

**9-10 NETWORKING LUNCH AND TALENT TALK A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A REMOTE WORKER**

### **BREAKOUT SESSION #2**

**10-11 MICROCULTURES MATTER: TAILORING WORK ENVIRONMENTS FOR EMPLOYEE SUCCESS**

**12-13 RESKILLING REVOLUTION: EMPOWERING EMPLOYEES FOR THE JOBS OF TOMORROW**

**14-15 CEO BREAKOUT SESSION: NAVIGATING WORKFORCE CHALLENGES**

**16-19 CLOSING SESSION EMBARKING ON A JOURNEY WITH GENERATIVE AI: UNVEILING ITS INDISPENSABLE ROLE**

## KEYNOTE

# BEN UTECHT



It is rare to find a true Renaissance man anymore, but that's just that you get with Ben Utecht. Ben has always chased his dreams, finding his way from a small river town in Minnesota to a Super Bowl championship field. Whether it was becoming a world champion in football, singing with major symphonies, serenading Muhammad Ali on his 70th birthday, or stepping into a national advocacy role, Ben has found success in many realms. He honed his already keen public speaking skills at the University of Minnesota, where he graduated with a degree in communications and even started a master's degree in sports management before being swept up into the NFL.

Ben has established himself as a prominent national leadership and motivational speaker for corporations, conventions, and non-profit events. Both of his programs, The Champion's Way and The MVP Program, stem from lessons he learned in the locker room with Hall of Fame coach Tony Dungy and in the huddle with future Hall-of-Famer Peyton Manning. The Champion's Way spotlights and breaks down "The 4 Ls" of leadership: listening, learning, language, and love. The MVP Program comes from Ben's experience with concussions. It inspires audiences to truly care about their minds and to discover how integral memory is to identity. Both programs illuminate dynamic ways to succeed in business and life.

"I believe, as a speaker, that vulnerability equals connectivity. This is why I approach my keynote presentations with a mission of bringing you on an emotional journey through my life, into a hall-of-fame huddle, and onto a field of high-impact lessons. All our lives tell a story, and this is how I tell mine!"

As an influential advocate for brain health, Ben served as the national spokesperson for the American Academy of Neurology and currently sits on the prestigious board of the American Brain Foundation. Ben was given the AAN's most esteemed honor, the Public Leadership in Neurology Award, in 2014. Also at that time, Ben released a music video for his song "You Will Always Be My Girls," written as a love letter to his wife and daughters with the goal of emotionally connecting people to the importance of their memories. The video has impacted the lives of many, garnering over 1.3 million YouTube views to date.

Ben can now add "author" to his resume, with the release of his new book *Counting the Days While My Mind Slips Away*, published by Simon & Schuster. The book is the first memoir from a former NFL player who left the game as a result of concussions. It takes the reader on a heart-felt journey through the ups and downs of Ben's life with faith, family, and football. Ben has a message of hope that has reached a nation-wide audience, inspiring people to value every moment to its fullest.

*Counting the Days While My Mind Slips Away* is available in hardcover, eBook, and audiobook formats wherever books are sold.

# GET TO KNOW YOUR FUTURE WORKFORCE AND THEIR INFLUENCERS



## JODI SCHWAN - MODERATOR

Jodi Schwan is the founder of Align Content Studio, which launched in 2017 and provides content marketing strategy, production and distribution for clients in a wide range of industries. She also develops and oversees Align's original digital media brands, including [www.SiouxFalls.business](http://www.SiouxFalls.business) and [Pigeon605.com](http://Pigeon605.com), along with providing business news and analysis to Dakota News Now and KELO-AM. Jodi is a former editor, broadcaster and columnist who also served as chief of staff for the city of Sioux Falls from 2006 until 2010. She earned her bachelor's and master's degrees in journalism from Northwestern University and is a native of Cleveland, Ohio.



## JERRY OLSZEWSKI

Jerry Olszewski enters his 12th season as the Augustana head football coach in 2024 as a three-time NSIC Coach of the Year. Entering his 17th season overall as a head coach, Coach Olszewski owns a career record of 106-59 while owning a 74-41 record in 10 completed seasons at Augustana.

He was named the 21st head coach in school history on Dec. 12, 2012, after five seasons as the head coach at St. Olaf in Northfield, Minnesota.

Olszewski began his tenure at Augustana in 2013 with a 41-28 win over MSU Moorhead in the season opener at Kirkeby-Over Stadium. Augustana posted a 4-2 record in home games during Olszewski's first season while allowing just 14.2 points per game at KO Stadium.

Before his appointment at St. Olaf, Olszewski was the defensive coordinator at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point for two seasons (2006-2008). He served two terms on the staff at Minnesota State (1993-1997 and 1999-2002).

He was with the Green Bay Bombers of the Indoor Football League as the offensive coordinator and special teams coordinator for one season (1998-99) and served one year as a defensive line coach at California Lutheran University (1997-98).

Away from coaching, Olszewski was the athletic director and dean of students for the Little Chute (Wisconsin) School District (1998-99) and chief executive officer of the Mankato Family YMCA (2002-2006).

Olszewski earned his bachelor's degree at Wisconsin-Stevens Point (1993) and a master's degree from Minnesota State-Mankato (1995). He earned All-Wisconsin State University Conference honors as a defensive back at Stevens Point and led the league in interceptions (1990).

An active member of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes for more than 20 years, Olszewski's community service also includes Special Olympics, YMCA volunteer, church youth leader, MS Walk coordinator and school district volunteer.

He and his wife, Deana, are the parents of one son Jett, and two daughters, Jersey and J.J.





## ERIC HENDERSON

Eric Henderson was promoted to head coach of Jackrabbit men's basketball March 27, 2019 and enters his sixth season at the helm of the program in 2024-25. He previously spent three years as an assistant at South Dakota State, rising to associate head coach for the 2018-19 campaign.

Henderson has posted a 109-48 overall record and a 65-15 mark in the Summit League in his previous five years as head coach. Henderson's squads having never finished worse than second in The Summit League standings, while they have won at least a share of the Summit League regular season title in four seasons and won two conference tournament titles en route to a pair of NCAA Tournament appearances. Henderson's winning percentage at SDSU (.694) is the highest among all-time Jackrabbit coaches with at least 20 victories.

Henderson's first season in 2019-20 as a collegiate head coach was a historic one as he was named The Summit League Coach of the Year while guiding the Jackrabbits to a 22-10 record and share of their third-straight Summit League regular season title. Henderson coached three all-league performers, including the league's Player (Douglas Wilson) and Freshman (Noah Freidel) of the Year. SDSU went 16-0 at home in 2019-20 and posted a 13-3 record in league play.

The 22nd head coach in Jackrabbit basketball history, Henderson began his coaching career as an assistant at Wayne State (Neb.) from 2001-03 and returned to the collegiate ranks as an assistant at North Dakota State from 2014-16 after coaching in the prep ranks in Wisconsin.

A 2000 graduate of Wayne State (Neb.), Henderson began his collegiate coaching career at his alma mater from 2001-03 as an assistant coach. After coaching girls' basketball at Wayne Community School for two seasons, he moved on to Iowa State, where he was the graduate manager for the Cyclones' men's basketball team from 2006-08 and a learning specialist for the 2008-09 season. He returned to coaching in the prep ranks at Burlington Catholic Central High School in Burlington, Wisconsin, from 2009-14, while also serving stints as principal and athletic director.

He and his wife, Alicia, live in Brookings, South Dakota with their four children, sons Kooper, Kort and Kyler, and daughter McKinley.



**AVA GUZZETTA**



**MORGAN PUTZIER**



**SHA'VELL O'DEL**



## DR. JENNIFER REECY, MODERATOR

Dr. Jennifer M. Reecy is a dynamic trailblazer in both her military and civilian careers, currently serving as the Chief Employee Experience Officer (CEEO) at The First National Bank in Sioux Falls. She has been honored for her distinguished achievements as a catalyst for driving increased performance, producing high-impact results, and a focus on long-lasting culture change.

Jenn believes, “Either you drive disruption, or you’re outpaced by it.”

Jennifer instinctively engages others with her relentless commitment, vibrant energy, and trusted knowledge in building leaders, teams, and organizations in their pursuits of greatness. Her spirit is contagious and instantly brings life to all endeavors!

Above all else, Jennifer is a wife and mother to three beautiful children. Together, they celebrate in building one another up through the belief of “to whom much is given, much is required”. You must be committed to the pursuit of being better leaders.



## ERICA BECK

Erica Beck has served as the Chief of Staff for the City of Sioux Falls and Mayor Paul TenHaken since 2018. In this role, she partners with Mayor TenHaken on developing strategic initiatives, enhancing community relations, and driving the execution of key organizational operations. Drawing from two decades of professional experience, Erica’s focuses her efforts on creating bold vision, developing strategy, and emboldening people on her path.

Before taking on her current role with the City of Sioux Falls, she served as Vice President of Development for Lloyd Companies. In this position, she was entrusted with leading business strategy, external market development, marketing, and public relations. Prior to her time with Lloyd Companies, she had the privilege of spearheading leadership development at Raven Industries, a global innovation and technology company dedicated to aiding farmers in feeding the world. During this period of private sector service, she was recognized by the Prairie Business Journal as one of the region’s leading women in business and as the inaugural winner of the Steve Metli Vision Award from Downtown Sioux Falls.

Erica and her husband, Ivan, have been married for 27 incredible years and have three amazing children, a wonderful daughter-in-law, a beautiful granddaughter and a stubborn miniature wiener dog.



## KYLE HELDER

Born and raised in South Dakota, Kyle Helder is a Talent Acquisition leader at Avera Health that is passionate about building relationships and connecting people to meaningful work. Kyle's background in Project Management has allowed him to connect this passion with helping organizations create programs to expand their talent pipelines and build teams that drive work aligned to their mission.

When not working, Kyle is spending time with his wife and their three children building memories and finding adventures through travel and being outside. Kyle is passionate about skiing, climbing, hiking, biking and pickle ball.

## EMPATHY-DRIVEN LEADERSHIP FOR HIGH PERFORMING TEAMS



## ABBY JOHNSON-YOUNGQUIST, MODERATOR

Abby Johnson-Youngquist is the Director of Marketing & Communications at Auto Body Specialties, a family-owned, wholesale automotive parts & paint distributor. With a strong creative vision, Abby effectively communicates a compelling narrative of her family's business, their industry, and the culture they cultivate. She holds a BFA from the University of South Dakota and an MBA from Capella University, integrating her artistic expertise with strategic business leadership.



## ROBYN EWALT

Robyn Ewalt is a professional leadership development consultant development with Avera Health Talent Development. She has over twenty years of leadership experience, with more than a decade in primary care clinic administration. Prior to her jump into in health care 16 years ago, she spent 14 years in the retail industry.

Her primary functions within her consultant role are bringing leadership development opportunities forward for formal leaders as well as future and informal leaders.

The mission of Avera Leadership Development is to design and deliver learning opportunities to meet the development needs of new and current leaders, provide growth opportunities for the development of future leaders, and standardize leadership development processes throughout Avera.

Robyn is active in several organizations in South Dakota and the Aberdeen community area. She has served for more than a decade on the Aberdeen Area Chamber of Commerce Health and Wellness Committee and is an ongoing member of the board of directors for Aspire, Inc. She regularly volunteers for her children's schools and clubs, and is also active in her church.

Robyn lives just outside Aberdeen on a hobby farm with her husband, Jeremy, their three kids, and a menagerie of four legged and furry friends.





## JENNIFER SCHMIDTBAUER

Jennifer is passionate about closing the gap between the ways things are and the way they could be. She has been supporting people and solving problems for over 25 years in publicly-traded companies, non-profits, and governmental organizations. Jennifer became a Crestcom business owner in 2023 and is excited to share her energy and expertise in helping managers across South Dakota elevate their confidence and success in leading others.

## THE HYBRID WORK REVOLUTION: STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS IN THE NEW NORMAL



## MILANA SEMMLER, MODERATOR

With almost a decade of marketing experience, Milana has dedicated most of her career to teaching businesses how to leverage digital and social media strategies. During this time, she identified a pivotal gap in the market: the acute need for affordable marketing services. This realization sparked her entrepreneurial journey, leading her to establish her own consulting agency. Her ambition and dedication didn't stop there; Milana became a Partner at Jodder - Your Social Companion. Jodder stands as a testament to her commitment to supporting local businesses, providing them with the tools and strategies needed to thrive in today's competitive landscape. Milana's approach to business is deeply rooted in her passion for helping others, embodying the essence of a founder who prioritizes the success and growth of community businesses.



## MONA SCHAFER

Mona Schafer currently serves as the Vice President of People and Culture for Avel eCare, a leading telemedicine provider based out of Sioux Falls, SD. In this position, Schafer oversees all aspects of human resources management for more than 400 employees and contract staff. She began her career in HR over 17 years ago by serving rural critical access hospitals. This experience opened her eyes to the challenges experienced by small facilities in rural settings and is what inspired her passion for Avel's mission of delivering high quality care when and where it's needed.

Avel eCare offers the largest and most comprehensive virtual health network in the world, partnering with hospitals, health systems, government entities, schools, senior care communities, and law enforcement and EMS agencies around the country. For more than 30 years, Avel has harnessed the power of its technology-enabled workflows and the strength of its clinical expertise to deliver high-quality virtual care impacting millions of patients. Avel eCare services include behavioral health, crisis care, critical care emergency, EMS, hospitalist, pharmacy, school health, senior care, and specialty clinic.



## PAIGE PEARSON MEYER



Vice President of Corporate Communications - Midco. Paige Pearson Meyer is the company's spokesperson and leads the corporate communications and community relations teams. She is responsible for executing internal communications, crisis communications, executive team thought leadership and sponsor partnerships throughout the company's footprint. Paige joined the Midco team in 2016 after working as the Communications & Recruitment Manager at a medical software company. Prior to that, she was a news and sports journalist for TV stations in South Dakota and Wisconsin. Paige earned a degree in sports broadcasting from Indiana University. Paige has graduated from the Leadership Sioux Falls, Leadership South Dakota and MDA Functional Leadership programs. She serves on the Downtown Sioux Falls, Breathe Bravely and Midco Foundation boards. Paige is a mentor for the EmBe Women's Leadership Program, an advisor for the Sioux Falls Chamber Appeals and a member of The WICT Network. She's married to John Meyer, and they have two daughters, Margot (8) and Liv (5), and an Australian Cobberdog named Maggie.

## LUNCH TALENT TALK: A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A REMOTE WORKER

### ASHLEY WENGER-SLABA, MODERATOR



Ashley Wenger-Slaba serves as Sanford Health's Senior Vice President of Employee Experience, Education, and Workforce Relations. In this role, Ashley spearheads employee experience, education, and workforce relations strategy for the Sanford Health organization. Through her leadership of Sanford's Employee Experience, Leadership Education & Development (LEAD), Employee & Labor Relations, and Diversity, Equity & Inclusion teams, Wenger-Slaba creates synergies across these areas and partners with Sanford leaders to influence operational decisions that reflect Sanford's core belief that its people are its greatest resource. A lawyer by training and first career, Wenger-Slaba graduated from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in 2004, and the University of Minnesota law school in 2007.

Ashley is active in the Sioux Falls community where she lives with her four children. Ashley serves on the Board of Directors and Human Resource Committee for Volunteers of America-Dakotas, and sits on the Annual Meeting Committee for Sanford Health.



## DEANE BARKER

Deane Barker is the Vice-President of Digital Experience Consulting at Valtech, a global digital agency. He's been working in content management for 25 years, and has written four books about the patterns and practices of modeling, creating, managing, and delivering digital content, including "Web Content Management: Systems, Features, and Best Practices" for O'Reilly Media and the "Web Project Guide: From Spark to Launch and Beyond." Deane lives in Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

## MICROCULTURES MATTER: TAILORING WORK ENVIRONMENTS FOR EMPLOYEE SUCCESS



## BROOKE FITTS, MODERATOR

Brooke Fitts isn't a tech mogul, a finance wizard, or a "payments guru" (she leaves that to her incredible team!). Instead, she's a passionate leader who excels at transforming ideas into thriving ventures and empowering people along the way.

Her mission is to make products and services truly delightful through impactful partnerships and innovative solutions. Brooke has played a key role in launching digital and financial products across Central Payments, Insight Prepaid Cards, TandemMoney, Meta Payment Systems, and Carsforsale.com, infusing even the most complex spreadsheets with a touch of excitement. As Chief Marketing Officer at Profile by Sanford, she led a team that orchestrated a dazzling array of national partnerships and unique brand engagement strategies. Her entrepreneurial vision shines through in her founding of Jodder, a social media content startup that enhances the digital presence of small businesses and non-profits.

Giving back brings Brooke immense joy. She volunteers with The Power Lunch program to inspire young women to dream big and serves on the Call to Freedom Development Committee, supporting victims of human trafficking. Her achievements include graduating from the Embe Women's Leadership program, being featured on The Art of Marketing Operations Podcast and in CIO Review and receiving a recent highlight in "Faces of Sioux Falls" magazine. Outside her professional endeavors, Brooke is busy managing a family calendar filled with travel and the activities of her three energetic kids (and her beloved husband). She remains grounded by her faith and inspired by Gary Friedman's words: "When we are open and giving of our light, we create an endless reflection that outlives our human existence."

## KARLA SANTI



Karla Santi is the CEO and founding partner of Blend Interactive, a firm renowned for guiding teams through complex web and content challenges. An active member of the Sioux Falls business community, she currently serves on the board of directors for the Sioux Falls Development Foundation, including the Talent & Workforce committee. Karla also serves on the board of Startup Sioux Falls, sharing her entrepreneurial insights and experiences. Named the 2022 SBA Small Business Person of the Year for South Dakota, she is a passionate mentor for women in tech, inspiring the next generation of female leaders.

## NATASHA SMITH



Natasha Smith is the Head of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion at Sanford Health and brings an abundance of experience and lenses to the table to create equitable programming. From Corporate Social Responsibility and Philanthropy work to living day to day as a working Latina mother, Natasha's journey has brought her to her current role where she oversees the diversity, equity and inclusion strategy for Sanford Health. This work is aimed at removing barriers to achieve equitable clinical outcomes and increasing access and belonging for the workforce. She serves on the board for Embe and is a founding member of the non-profit, Pathways to Equitable and Inclusive Workplaces. She is a community organizer and advocate and serves in an advisory capacity for the statewide day of giving, South Dakota Gives.

## NOAH SHEPARD



Noah Shepard, a 2010 graduate of the University of South Dakota, serves as president and CEO of the USD Foundation and Alumni Association. Shepard has most recently served as the vice president for development for the USD Foundation.

Shepard joined the USD Foundation team as campaign director in 2021. He previously held a position at Amazon where he served as the senior quality manager and led community engagement initiatives. During that time, he developed key performance indicators to meet customer expectations, ensuring accuracy and efficiency to enhance service quality.

Additionally, from 2011 to 2017, Shepard held several leadership positions at Molson Coors in Golden, Colorado. It was during this time that he developed a passion for fostering strong customer relationships and cohesive teams. At Molson Coors, Shepard designed and executed multiple training programs aimed at enhancing efficiency, performance and leadership for employees.

Shepard holds a bachelor's degree in education from USD and was quarterback for the Coyotes from 2005-2009. His wife, Abby, is a 2008 graduate of USD, which is where the couple met. She holds a degree in business administration. They have three children: Hazyl, Coy and Braylon.



### ANNA JANKORD, MODERATOR



Anna is passionate about creating and facilitating exceptional learning and leadership development opportunities that create a sense of belonging and purpose for those she impacts. With nearly 15 years of leadership education and training experience, Anna now lives her passion at Viaflex as the Sr. Learning & Development Manager. In her role, she oversees a team that collaborates across boundaries and builds team member talent. She leads her team in developing unique immersive learning and training environments that supports a variety of Viaflex's departments.

Outside of her role at Midco, Anna is actively involved in her community and holds leadership roles in several organizations. The most important role of all is mom. Anna and her husband, Brad, live in Sioux Falls with their 7-year-old daughter, Grace, and 5-year-old son, James.

### DEREK DEGEEST



As the third-generation president of DeGeest Corporation, Derek DeGeest understands the complexities of manufacturing. But it's his vision for the future that quickly led to the company becoming a technology leader through software development, data analytics, automation, and the use of robotics throughout the manufacturing process.

Leveraging this robotic and software experience, Derek brought a new robot technology to North America and became President of LestaUSA after forming a partnership with Lesta Srl to become the sole distributor, integrator and manufacturer of Lesta self-learning robotic finishing technology. Derek led DeGeest Corporation to become a NRTL certified facility for integrating Class I Div 1 self-learning robots. DeGeest is now growing a distribution network to help bring finishing automation to more general industry manufacturers.

Besides leading his companies, Derek's role has evolved to take on a more consultative focus in automation and robotics by creating multi-year automation plans for customers, participating in speaking events, and sharing success stories on his podcast Manufacturing a Stronger Standard in an effort to move the manufacturing industry forward.

As a lifelong advocate for the success of manufacturing, Derek remains active in his community and routinely partners with area schools and technical colleges to encourage young people to choose rewarding careers in manufacturing. Derek is a board member for the Build Dakota Scholarship Program created by business leaders and lawmakers to address South Dakota's workforce shortage. In 2019, he was recognized in Washington D.C. as the Small Business Administration (SBA) Small Business Person of the Year for South Dakota.

## DEVIN MCGREW



Devin McGrew is a seasoned human resources professional with a wealth of experience. Currently serving as the Director of Human Resources at C & B Material Handling, LLC in Sioux Falls, SD, Devin leads and mentors a team of Regional HR Managers to ensure the delivery of exceptional HR services. She is responsible for designing and executing strategic HR initiatives that align with company goals while supporting a workforce of over 400 employees.

Before her current role, Devin served as a Regional Human Resources Manager at C & B Equipment in Sioux Falls, SD, where she managed HR operations for 5 locations throughout WV and VA. She also held the positions of Human Resources Manager and Senior Payroll Administrator in previous roles.

She graduated cum laude from Marshall University with a bachelor's degree in 2014 and will be pursuing an MBA through the University of Sioux Falls beginning in 2025.

Devin relocated to Sioux Falls in December of 2023 from West Virginia with her German Shepherd dog, Cash. On weekends, she can usually be found enjoying one of the many city parks or nearby state parks for hiking or curled up at home with a good book.

## DR. RONALD PLACE



Dr. Place hails from South Dakota and graduated from the University of South Dakota with a Chemistry Degree, along with an ROTC commission. He then graduated from Creighton University School of Medicine. Dr. Place completed his General Surgery internship and residency training at Madigan Army Medical Center (MAMC), Ft. Lewis WA, and fellowship training in Colon and Rectal Surgery at the University of Texas Southwestern in Dallas.

Dr. Place was a full-time surgeon for the first half of his military career. After multiple deployments, he gradually transitioned to full time executive leadership, leading at every level with the military medical system. He completed his nearly 37 years of military service as the 3rd Director of the Defense Health Agency.

Dr. Place is board certified in both General Surgery and Colorectal Surgery and is now the 16th Regional President and CEO of Avera McKennan.

# CEO BREAKOUT SESSION: NAVIGATING WORKFORCE CHALLENGES



## JODI SCHWAN - MODERATOR

Jodi Schwan is the founder of Align Content Studio, which launched in 2017 and provides content marketing strategy, production and distribution for clients in a wide range of industries. She also develops and oversees Align's original digital media brands, including [www.SiouxFalls.business](http://www.SiouxFalls.business) and [Pigeon605.com](http://Pigeon605.com), along with providing business news and analysis to Dakota News Now and KELO-AM. Jodi is a former editor, broadcaster and columnist who also served as chief of staff for the city of Sioux Falls from 2006 until 2010. She earned her bachelor's and master's degrees in journalism from Northwestern University and is a native of Cleveland, Ohio.



## KARI KARST

Kari purchased Buskerud Construction in 1992, a highway specialty contractor based in her hometown of Dell Rapids, SD. In 2009, the company acquired TERIN Corp and expanded their lines of work to include concrete paving. In 2012, the company strategically rebranded as BX Civil & Construction. Through acquisition and expansion of services, BX Civil & Construction has grown more than twenty-fold under Kari's leadership.

In 1996, Kari and her husband Rob purchased the local ready-mix concrete producer, Dells Materials Company. Together they have improved technology and grown successfully, quadrupling the capacity of the facility.

Kari is a life member of the AGC of America's Board of Governors. She served as president of the AGC of South Dakota Highway Heavy Utilities Chapter in 2004 and was recognized as the Chapter President of the Year for Small Chapters by the AGC of America for her service that year. Kari has served on and led various committees for AGC both locally and nationally. She is passionate about our responsibility to provide leadership to our industry through AGC. Kari was elected Vice Chair of AGC of America's Highway Division in March of 2024.

Kari is a member of the Board of Directors of The First National Bank in Sioux Falls and serves on the Audit, Risk Management & Executive Compensation Committees for the Board of Directors. She also currently serves on the Advisory Board for Interstates in Sioux Center, Iowa. Kari's passion for technical education led her to serve on the Southeast Technical College Foundation Board of Directors including serving as the 2022-23 Chair.

Kari received her BS in Civil Engineering from the South Dakota School of Mines & Technology in 1986. Her post collegiate employment was with Ingersoll Rand Company in Charlotte, North Carolina and Los Angeles, California.

Kari & Rob have two married sons, Colin (Elizabeth) and Adam (Megan). They are both graduates of South Dakota State University with degrees in Construction Management. Adam joined the company in 2019, and Colin joined the company in 2022. Together, they are working to transition the company ownership and management to the next generation over the next five years.

Rob and Kari live on an acreage near the Dells Rocky Run Golf Course where they enjoy golfing and spending time with their family and new grandson, Theo. They enjoy traveling, cheering on the Notre Dame Fighting Irish, the Minnesota Vikings & Twins and specifically love spending time at their winter home in Gold Canyon, Arizona.





## SCOTT PETERSON

Scott Peterson is the Chief Executive Officer at Interstates. With more than 30 years of accounting and leadership experience, he has held several roles at Interstates since joining the company in 1995, including CFO and President. He has expertise in developing and growing client, vendor, and business partner relationships. Mostly, he has a great passion for developing, coaching, and mentoring servant leaders and great business team members.

Scott believes in the importance of offering guidance and providing accountability to team members, and in developing and casting an envisioned future for the groups he leads. Prior to Interstates, he worked with KPMG Peat Marwick and Valero Energy. Scott attended the University of South Dakota for his BS degree in Accounting and his MBA in Business Administration. He and his wife, Jana, live in Sioux Falls. They have 3 grown kids along with 3 dogs.



## CORY PRICE

Cory Price serves as the CEO of Furniture Mart USA. He earned his bachelor's degree from the University of Central Florida and went on to receive his MBA from the University of Sioux Falls. With 22 years of experience in the furniture industry, he's proud to have spent the duration of his career with Furniture Mart USA.

Married and a proud father, he and his wife have five children, and their family loves living in Sioux Falls and appreciates all that the community has to offer.



## JIM DOVER

James "Jim" Dover, FACHE, is President and CEO of Avera Health. As the top executive of Avera, he provides strategic vision, operational oversight and executive leadership and direction across all aspects of the health system, including leading the Avera senior leadership team as well as interfacing with governance across the system.

Dover, a seasoned health care executive with 40 years of experience serving in leadership positions across a wide array of hospital and health systems, joined Avera in 2023. Previously he served as CEO of Sparrow Health, based in Lansing, Mich., and in leadership roles for Hospital Sisters Health System in Springfield, Ill.; Daughters of Charity Health System in Los Altos Hills, Calif.; St. Anthony North Hospital in Westminster, Colo.; and several additional health systems on the West Coast. Dover received his bachelor's degree of bacteriology from the University of Idaho, his master's degree of Hospital Administration from the University of Minnesota and is a Fellow of the American College of Healthcare Executives.

Dover was born in California and spent half his life in rural locations such as Idaho, Illinois and Washington state. He and his wife, Maria, have been married 38 years. Together they are proud parents of one adult son, Patrick, and three adult daughters, Michelle, Christina and Kathryn. When not working, Dover enjoys spending time with his wife and family, participating in outdoor activities, and playing tennis.

# CLOSING SESSION: EMBARKING ON A JOURNEY WITH GENERATIVE AI: UNVEILING ITS INDISPENSABLE ROLE



## LAURA MITCHELL - MODERATOR

As VP of Marketing at Lawrence & Schiller, Laura is a leader and a mentor for a team that constantly pushes to keep clients on the forefront of innovation. She leads strategy and client relationships for top clients at L&S, and also manages the digital team, where she coaches her staff to guide clients in social media, analytics, email marketing and website development. She has expertly led strategies for key clients like Travel South Dakota, the Governor's Office of Economic Development, SD Game, Fish & Parks, SD Department of Labor, the Sioux Falls Chamber/Development Foundation/Forward Sioux Falls, USA Triathlon and more. She graduated from South Dakota State University with a BS in Journalism – Advertising, with a minor in Business. She is still a frequent guest lecturer on university campuses in SD, most recently speaking on AI in marketing.



## U.S. SENATOR MIKE ROUNDS

On January 6th, 2015, Senator Marion Michael “Mike” Rounds was sworn into the United States Senate. Senator Rounds serves on five committees: Senate Armed Services; Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs; Indian Affairs; Veterans' Affairs; and the Select Committee on Intelligence.

Rounds previously served as the 31st governor of South Dakota from 2003 – 2011, easily winning reelection in 2006. From 1991 to 2000, he was elected five times to the South Dakota State Senate. In 1995, his colleagues selected him to serve as Senate Majority Leader, a position that he held for six years. During his time in state government, Rounds was committed to growing the economy, keeping taxes low and strengthening South Dakota families.

A lifelong South Dakotan, Senator Rounds was born in Huron, the eldest of 11 children. He earned a bachelor's degree in political science from South Dakota State University. In the private sector, Rounds built a successful insurance and real estate business with offices throughout the state. He resides in Fort Pierre and is the proud parent of four grown children and 10 grandchildren.



## DR. JOSE-MARIE GRIFFITHS

Dr. José-Marie Griffiths is President of Dakota State University in Madison, South Dakota. President Griffiths has spent her career in research, teaching, public service, corporate leadership, workforce and economic development, and higher education administration, with special focus on work in STEM fields. She has served in presidential appointments to the National Science Board, the U.S. President's Information Technology Advisory Committee, and the U.S.

National Commission on Libraries and Information Science. She was a member of the National Security Commission on Artificial Intelligence, part of the John S. McCain National Defense Authorization Act for 2020. This work is continuing with the Special Commission on Special Projects (SCSP), and President Griffiths is an expert advisor for this group. She is a member of the Center for a New American Security (CNAS) Task Force on Artificial Intelligence and National Security. She participated in the White House Cyber Workforce and Education Summit, testified before Senate hearings in 2023 on Artificial Intelligence in Ag and in workforce, and moderated a 2023 all-Senate briefing session on AI.

President Griffiths has led projects for over 28 U.S. federal agencies such as the National Science Foundation, NASA, the Department of Energy, and various intelligence and military agencies, with over 20 major corporations such as AT&T Bell Laboratories, IBM, and Apple, in over 35 countries, and has worked with seven major international organizations, including NATO and the United Nations.

She has received over 20 significant awards in science, technology, teaching, and the advancement of women in these fields. Recent honors include being named the 2024 USA Today Woman of the Year for South Dakota, one of the 50 Influential Women in AI by InspiredMinds!, was awarded the 2023 Council for Advancement and Support of Education's Chief Executive Leadership Award for District VI, and was inducted into the South Dakota Hall of Fame in 2023.

Since coming to Dakota State University in 2015, President Griffiths has led DSU into transformational growth and advancement, a time of rising in almost every endeavor in which the university is involved. Dakota State has seen substantial increases and profound quality improvements in student enrollment; student quality; breadth and depth of academic programs, degree and non-degree-seeking, on-campus and online; scholarship support for students; applied research & development; contributions to state, regional, and national workforce and economic development; partnerships with corporate, non-profit, and government enterprises, locally, regionally, and nationally; new construction and renovation of campus facilities, especially customization of those facilities to support the development and deployment of innovative leading-edge technologies for hands-on teaching/learning, from infrastructure to hardware/software; and private and corporate philanthropy.

President Griffiths has a B.Sc. (Honors) in Physics from University College, London; a Ph.D. in Information Science from University College, London; and completed a post-Doctoral fellowship in Computer Science and Statistics at University College, London. She was also awarded an Honorary degree (D.Sc.) from University College, London for her career and success in science & technology, higher education, and regional/national leadership.





## ERICA DEBOER

Erica DeBoer, RN, MA, CCRN, CNL, serves as Sanford Health's chief nursing officer. A member of the organization's executive leadership team, DeBoer provides clinical expertise for Sanford Health's work in quality, safety, research and care management. She also oversees the integration of clinical initiatives.

DeBoer has more than 20 years of experience as a front-line registered nurse, including roles in critical care, clinical leadership and education. She most recently served as Sanford Health's senior executive director of nursing and clinical services and clinical informatics. DeBoer has also served as adjunct faculty for nursing programs at South Dakota State University and the University of Sioux Falls.

The Sanford Health nursing practice DeBoer oversees is the largest division of the enterprise workforce supporting patient and resident care, including nearly 9,000 nurses across the post-acute, ambulatory and inpatient settings. She believes nurses are a critical part of the fabric binding the many facets of health care work together to achieve safe, high-quality care that exceeds patient expectations.

DeBoer is particularly interested in the link between patient experience and employee experience, knowing that changes in one sphere often directly drive improvements in the other. She sponsors a variety of initiatives in both areas at Sanford, including the use of predictive analytics to inform care and plan workforce needs; leveraging technology to automate non-value-added work so teams can focus on patient care; reducing clinical variations in care; and improving health equity and reducing the barriers patients face in accessing care. DeBoer says nurses are an incredibly flexible, innovative resource in these efforts and are essential to meeting the needs of our patients and communities.

Active in several professional associations, DeBoer holds a bachelor's degree in nursing from South Dakota State University and a master's degree in nursing from Augustana University.

DeBoer resides in Lennox, South Dakota, with her husband, Shane, and their two children.



## NEIL FULTON

Dean Neil Fulton attended the University of Minnesota School of Law, graduating summa cum laude (first in his class) in 1997. He received the Devitt Award for excellence in trial advocacy courses and the Kaplan Award for overall academic excellence at graduation. He spent two summers working with the May, Adam, Gerdes & Thompson law firm in Pierre during law school, trying his first jury trial in Fort Pierre between his second and third years.

Fulton then went on to serve as a law clerk for Judge Diana Murphy of the Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals after graduating from law school. After his clerkship, he returned to May, Adam, Gerdes & Thompson where he served as general counsel to the South Dakota Public Assurance Alliance and the South Dakota Public Entity Pool for Liability, the South Dakota Bankers Association and the Office of the Governor. During this time, Fulton lobbied the South Dakota legislature for a variety of public and private clients.

In 2007, Fulton became Gov. Rounds' chief of staff. In that capacity, he oversaw the day-to-day operations of state government, managed legislative and budgetary proposals for the Office of the Governor, drafted legislation on many issues and worked with public and private organizations across the state.

In 2010, Fulton was chosen by the Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals as federal public defender for North Dakota and South Dakota. In this role, he oversaw a staff of 45 lawyers, investigators and support staff in five offices across both states. He has served on the Defender Sentencing Guideline Committee, the Performance Measurement Working Group and was co-chair of the Defender Legislative Committee. He has testified before the United States Sentencing Commission about tribal sentencing issues, violent offenses and child pornography; and has served on the Sentencing Commission's ad hoc and standing Tribal Issues Advisory Group. Fulton's appellate advocacy experience includes arguing almost 40 cases before the Eighth Circuit and more than 10 before the South Dakota Supreme Court.

## JESSICA J. MESSERSMITH



Jessica J. Messersmith is the Associate Dean for the College of Arts and Sciences, a Professor in the Communication Sciences and Disorders Department, an Audiologist in the Speech and Hearing Clinic, and the Faculty Athletics Representative for the University of South Dakota. She is an audiologist by training with clinical and research focus on clinical practices that hinder or improve outcomes of pediatric patients. Her emphasis areas are cochlear implants and infant hearing detection and intervention. She holds several advisory roles with organizations such as the South Dakota Newborn Screening Advisory Committee, the Joint Commission on Infant Hearing, and the American Academic of Pediatrics Provider Education Committee. Throughout her career, she has continually worked to improve access to care for pediatric patients in underserved, rural, and impoverished areas.