

WESTERN TRADER

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Custer • Hill City • Hot Springs • Edgemont • Keystone • Newcastle, Wyoming and Everything in Between

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ISSUE NO. 49

DINING • ARTS • ENTERTAINMENT • EVENTS



PARADE TIME — Christmas is in the air in Custer County this weekend, as there is a variety of activities planned to ring in Christmastime. Among those, of course, is the annual Christmas Parade down Mt. Rushmore Road in Custer. That will be immediately followed by the lighting of the Juanita Fish Memorial Tree at Way Park. See page six of the Trader for a complete list of activities this weekend. [WT Photo/ESTHER NOE]

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Searching for Savannah: Eight months and no answers since woman’s disappearance

By John Hult, South Dakota Searchlight and Amelia Schafer, ICT

There are rumors. About what’s known and who knows it. About why what’s known has never moved out of the realm of rumor and into the investigatory record.

Savannah Standing Bear’s family and friends have plenty of rumors, but not many answers. It’s been eight months since she disappeared from the Parmelee community on the Rosebud Reservation in South Dakota, and the only thing that feels certain, they say, is the feeling that someone knows something.

There’s also a nagging suspicion that something either won’t be shared with authorities, or won’t bring resolution if and when it’s reported.

“The feeling around here is you can murder a Native woman and get away with it,” said Hollis Flowers, a family friend who’s helped lead the push to keep Savannah’s story in the public eye as temperatures drop and another season of uncertainty begins.

There’s still hope, though, that an answer will emerge—especially after a celebration last week in Parmelee meant to mark Savannah’s 23rd birthday and keep her name on the tip of the community’s tongue.

About a week before the event, Savannah’s mother, Gayla Smith, said the eldest of her two daughters has a heart for those who suffer. It’s a personality trait that’s been evident for as long as Smith can remember.

“She’d see people on the street, like when we would go to Rapid City,” Smith said, referring to the homeless population. “She’d see people like that, she would always want to go and help them.”

It’s Smith who’s suffered since March 24. That was the last day she heard from Savannah, setting off a police investigation and a series of searches that’s continued into the fall.

Sixty percent of missing South Dakotans are Native Americans

Savannah is one of an unclear number of Native Americans who’ve gone missing or been killed in the state of South Dakota. Nationally and internationally, the movement to draw attention to Indigenous people

who disappear or die under violent circumstances is commonly called Missing and Murdered Indigenous People.

South Dakota has taken some steps to track the cases in recent years. The South Dakota Missing Persons Clearinghouse, which launched in 2020, lists the names of those whose disappearances have been reported to law enforcement locally and passed along to the South Dakota Attorney General’s Office. On any given day, the list has at least 100 missing people, though the names shift in real time as people are found or go missing.

On Tuesday morning, Native Americans made up 60 percent of the 112 listed names. Of 59 missing females, 66 percent were Native American. The percentages, as compiled periodically by South Dakota Searchlight, typically fall in or near that range.

Around 8.5 percent of South Dakotans are Native American, according to census data.

Ten of the cases in the state missing persons clearinghouse as of Tuesday morning — Savannah’s among them — came from the Rosebud Sioux Tribal Police Department. That’s approximately 9 percent of current missing persons cases. Residents of the Rosebud Reservation represent less than 3 percent of South Dakota’s total population.

A mother’s warning

The last time she saw her daughter, Smith remembers warning her to stay at home and stay out of trouble.

“But when I got up, she wasn’t in her room,” Smith said.

In the days following, Smith said she heard different things from different family members. Some said that Savannah had ended up in the tribal jail and would be out later, but when Smith looked into it, her daughter hadn’t been in jail.

So Smith went to check in with other relatives around the Rosebud Reservation. One relative in Parmelee said Savannah had “walked off” with a friend, Smith said, but it wasn’t a friend she recognized.

‘Truly a homebody’

Smith and Standing Bear are close. They’ve always been.

One of Savannah’s distinguishing features, noted on the missing persons posters



ON LOCATION — A birthday cake for Savannah Standing Bear is displayed on Nov. 23, 2025, in Parmelee. [Submitted Photo/**THE STANDING BEAR FAMILY VIA SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT**]

hung up around the Rosebud Reservation and posted to social media, is a tattoo of her mother’s first name under her right eye.

It’s now been eight months since Smith last heard from her daughter, since Savannah played with her nephew and since Savannah logged into the social media accounts where she loved to chat.

“She has a really big heart,” Smith said. “She’s my baby.”

She loves to listen to music, take photos and just hang out, Smith said. Her absence has left a void for her family.

“She loved the sunset, taking pictures of it,” Smith said. “It’s really hard for me to see the sun go down without her.”

Tips don’t yield results

Tips have yet to aid in the search for Savannah, the family said.

Early this year, reports that Savannah was sighted at a Maverik gas station on the north side of Rapid City — two and a half hours from where she was last seen — led investigators to switch gears and focus on the Black Hills city.

Police spent days combing over footage from the gas station, only to find the “sighting” was a different Native American woman, tribal officials said.

“There’s no proof she ever left,” Flowers, the family friend, said in May.

More frightening tips have emerged, as well.

Once, the family heard that a body was found on the reservation. Family members jumped in to respond

‘We’re doing these things,’” he said. “But I’ve learned and lived it now, and watched these other people that are missing their precious ones, too. They’re having the same dam problem.”

Communication, collaboration

Dolores “Totes” Waln, a Rosebud Sioux Tribal Council member, said her experience helping the family has exposed gaps in communication between emergency managers, police and the volunteers who’ve pitched in.

“When they were going to drain the dam, nobody knew about it until we heard it live on the air from the tribal president,” Waln said of a summer search effort from the tribe around a stock dam about 6 miles east of Parmelee, which was discussed on the radio. “And we’re all like, ‘What?’”

Shelby Lorenzo Homer, of the 4Corners K9 Search And Rescue nonprofit, said collaboration and communication has been a struggle for months. Recently, however, she worked with agents from the federal Bureau of Indian Affairs on a search in October.

“That’s when we really started seeing some communication and some collaboration,” Homer said.

In a statement, a BIA spokesperson said the agency is working closely with the FBI and Rosebud Sioux Department of Public

Safety on Savannah’s case, coordinating search operations, offering a \$5,000 reward through its Missing and Murdered Unit and “actively supporting Savannah’s family during this difficult time.”

After Savannah’s birthday celebration and candlelight vigil in Parmelee over the weekend, the hope is that extra attention can be combined with improved collaboration to yield results.

The hope goes all the way to the top in Rosebud. Tips sometimes land in the inbox of Rosebud Sioux Tribal President Kathleen Wooden Knife. When that happens, the president said, she passes them along to police.

Then, like everyone else, she waits.

“And my hope is that ‘OK, this time will be the time we’re going to find her,’” Wooden Knife said. “It hasn’t happened yet.”

The BIA’s \$5,000 reward is open to anyone with information that can lead authorities to Savannah. The BIA can be reached at (833) 560-2065, by email at OJS_MMU@bia.gov, or by texting keyword BIAMMU and a tip to 847411.

South Dakota Searchlight is part of States Newsroom, the nation’s largest state-focused nonprofit news organization. See more at southdakotasearchlight.com.

Pet of the Week



Meet Phoebe. She is a mixed breed with maybe some lab in her. She is very sweet and is looking for an active family that likes to hike or maybe go to the lake. She is high energy.

All 'Pet of the Week' listings are available for adoption at the Battle Mountain Humane Society, 27254 Wind Cave Rd., Hot Springs, SD. 605-745-SAVE (7283)

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Sunday 8 a.m.-3 p.m.

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Saturday 9 a.m.-4 p.m.

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ALL ABOARD

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Sunday
11 a.m.–7 p.m.

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Wednesday–Saturday
4 p.m.–Close

HILL CITY CAFE

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9 a.m.– 12 a.m.
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Friday & Saturday
4–10 pm

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Friday 8 a.m.–5 p.m.
Saturday 9 a.m.–3 p.m.
Sunday Closed

CHUTE ROOSTER

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11 a.m.– 9 p.m.
Sunday 10 a.m. –6 p.m.

**LINTZ BROS.
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Thursday–Monday
3–9 p.m.

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10:30 a.m.–9 p.m.

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11 a.m.– 4:30 p.m.

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

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**DOWNTOWN DELI
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CITIZENS CENTER**

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Noon–close

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MOCASSIN SPRINGS**

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Closed Monday & Tuesday

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Friday & Saturday
Noon–10 p.m.

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Friday–Saturday
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79 LOUNGE

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Tues–Sat 11 a.m.–9 p.m.

**THE HITCHRAIL
BAR & RESTAURANT**

Tuesday–Sunday
11 a.m.–8 p.m.

**DAKOTA
BROASTED**

Tuesday–Saturday
11 a.m.–6 p.m.

**HEART OF THE
HILLS EXXON**

Daily 5 a.m.–Midnight

**LAZY R BAR &
GRILL**

Tuesday–Saturday
4-9 p.m.

PIZZA HUT

Monday–Saturday
11 a.m.–9 p.m.

YESWAY

Monday–Saturday
6 a.m.–9 p.m.
Sunday 8 a.m.–9 p.m.

RAPID CITY EATS

**FRONTIER
BAR & GRILL**

Daily 11 a.m.–9 p.m.
Closed Tuesday

**PRAIRIE DOG
TAPROOM**

Every Day but Tuesday
11 a.m.– 9 p.m.

KEYSTONE EATS

**SILK ROAD
EXPERIENCE**

Thursday–Saturday
3-7 p.m.

YESWAY #1174

Daily
Open 24 hours

**SHIPWRECK'S
BAR & GRILL**

Monday–Wednesday
11 a.m.–8 p.m.

**GOLD PAN
SALOON**

11-2 a.m.
Food 11-2 a.m.

SICK-N-TWISTED

Thursday–Monday
11 a.m.–8 p.m.

**CARVER'S CAFE
@ MT. RUSHMORE**

8 a.m.–4:30 p.m.

**SOUTHERN HILLS
DINER & BAKERY**

Thursday–Monday 8 a.m.–2 p.m.
Tuesday & Wednesday Closed

NEWCASTLE EATS

**YOUR SUPPORT
MAKES A
DIFFERENCE.**

HJEM AM

Wednesday -Friday
8-11 a.m.
Saturday & Sunday
8 a.m.–Noon

**SILVER DOLLAR
SALOON**

Monday–Thursday
1–10 p.m.
Friday–Sunday Noon–10 p.m.

CRUIZZERS PIZZA

Daily
10 a.m.–10 p.m.

**SOUTHERN HILLS
GOLF COURSE**

Daily 7 a.m.–8 p.m.

BOOPA'S

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

**Without our
READERS,
SUBSCRIBERS
& ADVERTISERS
we would not exist.**

**LAUGHING WATER
RESTAURANT**

Seven Days A Week
10:30 a.m.–7 p.m.

**TIN CITY
SALOON**

Sunday-Thursday 11 a.m.–9 p.m.
Friday & Saturday 11 a.m.–11 p.m.

**ENO'S PIZZA
& PUB**

Monday–Thursday
11 a.m.–9 p.m.
Friday-Sunday 11 a.m.–10 p.m.

**SPRINGS
COFFEE KIOSK**

Mon–Fri 5:30 a.m.–4:30 p.m.
Saturday 5:30 a.m.–2 p.m.
Sunday 5:30 a.m.–Noon

**DONNA'S
MAIN ST. DINER**

Daily
6 a.m.–2 p.m.

**We strive to give the
best LOCAL
COVERAGE you will
not get
anywhere else
except
in our newspapers.**

**MARIA'S
MEXICAN RESTAURANT**

Monday–Sunday
7 a.m.-7:30 p.m..

**THREE FORKS
BAR, GRILLE &
CASINO**

Daily 11 a.m.–7 p.m.

RUBY HOUSE

Daily
11 a.m.–9 p.m.

TACO JOHN'S

Monday–Saturday
7 a.m.–9 pm.
Sunday 8 a.m.–8 p.m.

KAFFEE KLATSCH

Mon–Wed 5:30 a.m.–12:30 p.m.
Tues, Thurs, Fri.
5:30 a.m. - 1 p.m.
Saturday 6:30 a.m.-10:30 a.m.

**We believe in
FREEDOM OF THE PRESS.**

MINER'S CUP

Monday–Saturday
6:30 a.m.–1 p.m.

TURTLE TOWN

Sunday–Thursday
10 a.m.–4 p.m.
Friday-Saturday
9 a.m.–5 p.m.

**SPROCKETS FUN
FOUNDRY**

Thursday-Sunday
Noon to 8 p.m.

THE KITCHEN INK

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

**CAMBRIA COFFEE
& DECKER'S MARKET**

Monday–Friday 7 a.m.–5 p.m.
Saturday 7 a.m.–2 p.m.
Sunday 8 a.m.–Noon

**We are not
corporately owned.
The Custer County
Chronicle has been
a privately owned &
independent
publication in
Western South
Dakota
for 143 years,
est. in 1880.**

PIZZA MILL

Tuesday-Saturday
11 a.m.–7 p.m.
Delivery Fri & Sat 4-6 p.m.

TURTLE TOWN

Monday-Saturday
10 a.m.–6 p.m.
Sunday 10 a.m.– 5 p.m.

TURTLE TOWN

Monday-Saturday
10 a.m.–6 p.m.
Sunday 10 a.m.– 5 p.m.

**TWO COWS
CREAMERY & BISTRO**

Monday–Thursday 11 a.m.–8 p.m.
Friday & Saturday 11 a.m.–9 p.m.
Sunday 11 a.m.–7 p.m.

**HOT STUFF
PIZZA**

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

**SUBSCRIBE
to the Chronicle or
Prevailer
Call 605-673-2217**

**BLACK HILLS
BURGER & PIZZA CO.**

Tuesday–Saturday
11 a.m.–2 p.m.
Thursday-Friday 5–7:30 p.m.

**XANTERRA@MT.
RUSHMORE**

Daily 8 a.m.– 9 p.m.

**HEAVEN SCENT
BAKERY**

Wednesday-Monday
10 a.m.–5 p.m.

TACO JOHN'S

Daily
11 a.m.–10 p.m.

**HANNAH'S
HEAVENLY TREATS**

Tues - Fri 7 a.m.– 2 p.m.
Saturday 7 a.m.- 10 a.m.

**SKOGEN
KITCHEN**

Tuesday–Saturday
5–8 p.m.

**SUBWAY
RESTAURANT**

Monday–Saturday
8 a.m.–9 p.m.
Sunday 8 am.–8 p.m.

DAIRY QUEEN

Monday–Saturday
11 a.m.–8 p.m.
Sunday 11 a.m.–7 p.m.

DAIRY QUEEN

Monday–Saturday
11 a.m.–8 p.m.
Sunday 11 a.m.–7 p.m.

DAIRY QUEEN

Monday–Saturday
11 a.m.–8 p.m.
Sunday 11 a.m.–7 p.m.

DAIRY QUEEN

Monday–Saturday
11 a.m.–8 p.m.
Sunday 11 a.m.–7 p.m.

