

## 'Everybody respected him': Remembering Lyle Swenson

by: [Dan Santella](#)

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MITCHELL, SD (KELO) — Lyle Swenson, who served for more than three decades as Davison County Sheriff, died Tuesday at the age of 89. Both Doug Kirkus and Kelly Gross, who each served as deputies while Swenson was sheriff, say he was a man whom others held in high esteem.

"No matter where you'd go in the state and talk to other law enforcement, you mention Lyle's name, everybody knew him," Kirkus said. "Everybody respected him."

"There's probably no man that I respect more than Lyle Swenson," Gross said. "I can say that emphatically. I've had a lot of supervisors in my life, and he's always been the number one."

That theme continues when chatting about Swenson with current Davison County Sheriff Steve Harr.

"A 32-year-sheriff," Harr said. "I mean, that says something. The people around really like you if you're going to be able to hold on for that length of time."

For Gross, Swenson was more than a leader.

"My dad passed away right before I got hired at the sheriff's office," Gross said. "So, I was 22 years old, and he kind of took over the surrogate dad role and kind of helped me along, too, with that, so. I wouldn't call him a friend until later years because I always respected him with such a level, but he always was that leader for me."

"I've heard the word thrown out a lot in the last 24 hours that he was a legend to South Dakota law enforcement," Harr said.

Now in 2024, Harr looks to emulate the man who once occupied the office he now holds.

"Learning how to treat people, treating the public, treating staff ... everything that you get told by people is how good Lyle was at doing it, and you take that to heart," Harr said.

Swenson was Davison County Sheriff for 32 years. He served as a U.S. Marshal after he finished his time as sheriff.

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Lyle Swenson, a respected lawman who served as Davison County Sheriff for over three decades, passed away on **July 16, 2024** at the age of 89<sup>1</sup>. His legacy extends beyond his tenure, leaving an indelible mark on South Dakota law enforcement. Colleagues and friends alike held him in high esteem, emphasizing his leadership and dedication. Swenson's impact was felt not only professionally but personally, as he mentored and supported those around him. His funeral services will be held at **2:30 PM on Tuesday, July 30**, at the First United Methodist Church in Mitchell, with burial at Servicemen's Memorial Cemetery at a later date<sup>2</sup>. The National Sheriffs' Association also mourns his passing, recognizing his contributions as a former Board President from 1989 to 1990<sup>3</sup>. Lyle Swenson's legacy lives on, inspiring current law enforcement professionals to follow in his footsteps and uphold the values he exemplified<sup>1</sup>.

**'He left a big legacy': Community leaders mourn death of longtime Davison Co. Sheriff Lyle Swenson**

“We are forever indebted for his community service and all the work he did, not only as sheriff but as a dedicated volunteer,” Jim Miskimins said of late friend.



In a 2017 file photo, Lyle Swenson, president of the Mitchell Area Historical Society, speaks at a ribbon-cutting ceremony in 2017 to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the society and the 110th birthday of its building, the Carnegie Resource Center.

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#### News reporting

MITCHELL — Nearly three decades have passed since Lyle Swenson wrapped up his career as the Davison County sheriff, but his legacy still inspires leaders at the sheriff’s office.

After being elected as the county’s sheriff in 1965, Swenson went on to serve in the role for 34 years.

His law enforcement career is one of many achievements for which Swenson will be remembered.

Swenson died on Tuesday. He was 89.

“He left a big legacy at the sheriff’s office. Everybody you talked to loved working for him. I hope to keep that type of culture,” Davison County Sheriff Steve Harr said of Swenson.



A 2021 file photo included four former Davison County sheriffs as then-sheriff Steve Brink was retiring. From left, Lyle Swenson, Dave Miles, Steve Brink and current Sheriff Steve Harr.

Erik Kaufman / Republic

Swenson's ability to have a positive impact on others can be seen in Davison County State's Attorney Jim Miskimins, who developed a close bond with Swenson at an early age.

"I grew up going to the Methodist Church where Lyle went, and I got to know him then. He influenced me in many ways. I'm honored to be one of his many friends," Miskimins said of Swenson.

While Swenson was known throughout the Mitchell area and state for his law enforcement career, he impacted the community in many other ways.

"We are forever indebted for his community service and all the work he did, not only as sheriff but as a dedicated volunteer," said Miskimins, who is the current Corn Palace Stampede Rodeo Committee Chairman. "A lot of the history of the Corn Palace Stampede Rodeo is intact solely because Lyle kept track of it and documented it."

Swenson was a longtime member of the rodeo committee and spent many years volunteering at the Carnegie Resource Center. As a member of Mitchell's Masonic Lodge, Swenson played an instrumental role in maintaining the local Masonic chapter and he regularly showed a passion for history and preserving Mitchell's history.



In a 2019 file photo, Lyle Swenson, left, and Troy Magnuson, both former Master Masons of the Mitchell Masonic Lodge with the Masonic emblem that was formerly affixed atop the 301 N. Main St. building being torn down in downtown Mitchell.

Mitchell Republic file photo

Over the past decade, Swenson spent much of his time in the basement of the Carnegie Resource Center preserving important moments in Mitchell's history. He would archive historical documents and old newspaper clippings from the Mitchell Republic.

In a 2019 interview with the newspaper, Swenson shared a story about the time the Corn Palace caught on fire in 1979 while he was sheriff.

Swenson said receiving the call informing him that the Corn Palace domes were on fire stood as "the most alarming phone call" he experienced in his 42-year law enforcement career. He was on vacation when the call came in, which prompted Swenson to cut the trip short and return to Mitchell.

"To make matters more challenging, Main Street was torn up at that time for road construction. So the fire trucks had to get through thick mud to start putting the fire out," Swenson said. "I couldn't believe it when I heard the Corn Palace was on fire. They did a great job, though, and thankfully the building was saved."

After capping his 34-year run as Davison County's sheriff, Swenson was appointed as the U.S. Marshal of the District of South Dakota in 1997. As a U.S. Marshal, Swenson was tasked with handling a wide variety of duties as a federal law enforcement officer. He served in that role for four years before his retirement.