



The Guardian

The Newsletter of the New Mexico Department of Veterans' Services

Fall, 2015

Governor Martinez Commemorates Construction Phase of First State Veterans Cemetery



Governor Susana Martinez addresses the capacity crowd at the Veterans Day (November 11) ceremony commemorating the beginning of construction at the Ft. Stanton State Veterans Cemetery (lower-right photo).

Governor Susana Martinez dedicated the construction phase of the Ft. Stanton State Veterans Cemetery—**New Mexico's** first state veterans cemetery—at a special Veterans Day Ceremony at the existing Ft. Stanton Merchant Marine & Military Cemetery.

Speaking before a large turnout—which included U.S. Senators Tom Udall and Martin Heinrich—the Governor said the new cemetery is the first of what she hopes will be several rural-area state veterans cemeteries dedicated to **veterans who live too far from our state's two existing national cemeteries in Santa Fe and Ft. Bayard.**

Today, she said, is a day many veterans and their families have been waiting for a long time.

“One of the privileges earned by anyone who's served our country is the right to be buried in a place befitting someone

who has been honorably discharged from military service,” said the Governor. “Their families shouldn't have to make the agonizing choice of either burying their loved ones several hours away, or in a cemetery which does not properly reflect their military sacrifice.”

The Governor launched the State Veterans Cemetery Program in 2013 to plan, design and construct up to **four State Veterans' Cemeteries in Ft. Stanton, Gallup, Angel Fire, and Carlsbad, in the coming years.** Her goal is to provide an honorable final resting place much closer to home for rural-area veterans.

After securing fully refundable start-up funding from the 2015 New Mexico Legislature, the Governor, working with **the New Mexico Department of Veterans' Services** (NMDVS), submitted applications from the four communities to the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Cemetery Grant Program—established by the VA to help states build state-run veterans cemeteries.

The VA approved the Ft. Stanton application earlier this spring. Completion is expected by the Spring of 2017.

Additionally, the VA notified Governor Martinez that the Gallup application has been accepted for **inclusion on the VA's 2016 list of pre-approved cemetery sites.** Architectural and engineering surveys similar to what occurred for the Ft. Stanton site are now proceeding. The NMDVS will continue with the process at Angel Fire and Carlsbad sites.



(continued)

The new Ft. Stanton cemetery will be constructed on vacant land adjoining the existing Ft. Stanton Merchant Marine and Military Cemetery, which was built on the grounds of historic Ft. Stanton—which opened in 1855 as a New Mexico Territories outpost of the U.S. Army.

In 1899, the U.S. Public Health Service established a Merchant Marine Tuberculosis Hospital at the outpost. Since then, more than 1,700 military veterans, merchant marines and hospital employees have been buried at the existing ceremony, which will remain as a separate section within the new state veterans cemetery.



LEFT PHOTO: *New Mexico Department of Veterans' Services Secretary Jack Fox introduces Governor Susana Martinez moments before she delivered the Keynote Address.*



RIGHT PHOTO: *Governor Martinez greets the crowd after the ceremony.*

NMDVS Hires Cemetery Program Director

Thomas Wagner has been named as the New Mexico Department of Veterans' Services State Cemetery Program Director.

Working with Governor Susana Martinez and NMDVS Secretary Jack Fox, Mr. Wagner had been working as a Consultant to help with the application process of the four initial cemetery bids (Ft. Stanton, Gallup, Angel Fire and Carlsbad) to the VA Cemetery Grant Program.

"We are delighted that Tom will remain with us on a permanent basis to help us move this important process forward," said NMDVS Secretary Fox. "Tom has a long history of serving veterans, and brings a wealth of VA management experience to the program and our agency. He is the right person for this very important position as we move forward."

The Albuquerque native is a double Purple-Heart recipient from the Vietnam War who had previously worked for the NMDVS from 2011-**2012 managing the agency's 18 field offices as the Field Operations Director**. Prior to this, he served for thirty years in various management and upper-management positions with the VA in New Mexico and Washington, D.C.

Tom utilized his GI Benefit Bill after his Vietnam War Army Service to earn a Bachelor's Degree in Sociology/History and a Master's Degree in Public Administration from the University of New Mexico.



Tom Wagner

NMDVS State Cemetery Program Director

Veterans Day Celebrated in Communities Throughout New Mexico

In addition to the big Groundbreaking Ceremony of the Ft. Stanton State Veterans Cemetery, Veterans Day 2015 was celebrated in ceremonies and events on Wednesday, November 11—and in some cases, the preceding weekend—in communities throughout New Mexico.

At the Ft. Stanton ceremony, Governor Susana Martinez paid tribute to the men and women who have served our country as members of the United States military.

“We live in a country which treasures the concept of Freedom and Justice for all. Freedom from British Rule is what our forefathers were willing to fight for and sacrifice with their lives,” said the Governor in her Keynote Address. “To the veterans who have joined us here today—and to veterans all over this great state—on behalf of New Mexicans everywhere, I offer our profound thanks for your courage, for the sacrifices you and your families have made to protect our freedoms. Thank you for your service.”

The Governor’s sentiments were echoed at ceremonies and events throughout the state. In the following pages, the New Mexico Department of Veterans’ Services is proud to share images from these ceremonies—courtesy of photos and information provided to *The Guardian* by proud veterans themselves.

Albuquerque (VA Medical Center)



In addition to modern and vintage military vehicles (*top photos*), a replica of the “Batmobile” from the 1960’s popular “Batman” series (*lower-left photo*) took part in the annual Veterans Day Parade in Albuquerque. The parade route began at the Raymond G. Murphy VA Medical Center and ended at the New Mexico Veterans Memorial—in time for the ensuing annual Veterans Day Ceremony. (*Photos courtesy of David Overson/NM VA Health Care System*)

Albuquerque (University of New Mexico)



The University of New Mexico paused to honor its veterans in a solemn and reverent ceremony in the UNM Alumni Chapel with a Formal Flag Ceremony by the UNM Joint Service ROTC Color Guard. More than 3,500 veterans are attending the university courtesy of the GI Education Benefit Bill. *(Photos courtesy of UNM/Mara Kerkez)*

Albuquerque (West Mesa Aquatic Center)



The Cody Unser First Step Foundation (CUFSF) hosted a free SCUBA intro class for the VA Hospital at the West Mesa Aquatic Center in Albuquerque. The foundation is a global not-for-profit organization based in Albuquerque dedicated to raising research funds, public awareness and the overall quality of life for those afflicted with all forms of spinal cord-related paralysis.

The CUFSF was founded by Cody Unser, daughter of Indy Car racing legend Al Unser, Jr., and her mother Shelley after Cody was diagnosed at the age of 12 with Transverse Myelitis. The rare neurological condition attacks the spinal cord and can lead to paralysis. Cody eventually took up **SCUBA** and has become one of the world's leading proponents of SCUBA as a therapeutic exercise for all forms of paralysis. *(Photo courtesy of the Cody Unser First Step Foundation)*

Albuquerque (Explora Museum)



LEFT PHOTO: A Vietnam-era “Huey” helicopter was brought in by the Bernalillo County Sheriff’s Department for a special Veterans Day exhibit at the downtown Albuquerque Explora Museum hosted by the Museum of the American Military Family (MAMF).



RIGHT PHOTO: Vietnam War Huey Crew Chief Paul Silva, MAMF Secretary Ole Olson, and former Vietnam War “Donut Dolly” Mary Cohoe led a panel discussion as part of a tribute honoring women of the American Red Cross--and the “Donut Dollies”; young, college-degreed women who spent a one-year tour in Vietnam as part of an effort by the military to boost the morale of American troops. The “Dollies” ran recreation centers, visited hospitals, and—thanks to Huey helicopters--traveled to front line landing zones and base camps to bring snacks, board games and other items from home to battle-weary soldiers. *(Photos courtesy of Circe Olson/Museum of the American Military Family.)*

Angel Fire-Vietnam Veterans Memorial



LEFT PHOTO: New Mexico Army National Guard LTC Michelle Jaramillo was the Featured Speaker at the annual Veterans Day Ceremony this year at the Vietnam Veterans State Memorial in Angel Fire. LTC Jaramillo is the Battalion Commander of the 615th Transportation Battalion based in Springer.



RIGHT PHOTO: Former Picuris Pueblo Governor and Vietnam Veteran Red Eagle Rael delivered the Keynote Address at the Veterans Day Ceremony at the Vietnam Veterans State Memorial. Mr. Rael is currently the Veterans Liaison for the Pueblo. *(Photos courtesy of the New Mexico State Parks Division of the Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department)*

Capitan



New Mexico Department of Veterans' Services Secretary Jack Fox was a Guest Speaker at the annual Capitan School District "Salute to Veterans" Assembly in the Capitan High School Gymnasium on November 10. The Secretary capped his tribute to veterans by surprising nine-year old Eleck Stone with a **certificate naming him an "Honorary Veteran."** The fourth-grader, who has Cystic Fibrosis, had been named an honorary U.S. Army Ranger earlier in the year—thanks to a request made on his behalf by his parents to the "Make-A-Wish Foundation."

At the assembly in the packed gymnasium, Secretary Fox pinned a New Mexico Veterans' Pin onto Eleck's collar before presenting him with the certificate, which the Secretary read aloud:

"As Cabinet Secretary of the New Mexico Department of Veterans' Services, it is with great pride that I, Jack R. Fox, name you an HONORARY MILITARY VETERAN.

You, Eleck, have always shown a true love and respect for our nation's military personnel. Our nation's service members and veterans live by a code of bravery, honor, dignity, and selflessness—traits which you also live by on a daily basis as you fight Cystic Fibrosis head-on with the "can do" attitude valued by our state's military and veteran community.



New Mexico's veterans are always there to help their fellow veterans. You in turn have always been there for your parents Kimberly and Troy, your younger brother Bryce—and your "other" family members: Your fellow students at Capitan Elementary School.

On behalf of the proud citizens of New Mexico, I commend you on a job well done—and welcome you into the elite community of our state's 171,000 military veterans."

A day after the Capitan School District assembly, nine-year old Eleck Stone met privately with Governor Susana Martinez before she delivered the Keynote Address for the Veterans Day ceremony at the nearby Ft. Stanton cemetery. (see page 1 for details of this event)

Hobbs



LEFT PHOTO: The Hobbs High School “Marching Eagles” Band was among the many entries at the annual Hobbs Veterans Day Parade through the city’s downtown area. The parade ended near VFW Post 3274, which hosted the city’s annual Veterans Day Tribute to Veterans Ceremony—followed by a free lunch.



RIGHT PHOTO: Among the speakers at the ceremony were *(from left to right)* New Mexico Department of Veterans’ Services Secretary Jack Fox, NMDVS Hobbs Veterans Service Officer Dalton Boyd, VFW Post 3274 Chaplain Charlie Dice, Parade Coordinator Casey Shaner, VFW Post 3274 Commander Eddie Rodriguez, and Past VFW State Commander and Past Post 3274 Commander Cathy Brock at the podium. *(Photos courtesy of Sid Barrett)*

Laguna Pueblo



Veterans dating back to service in WWII attended the annual Salute to Veterans ceremony at the K’awaika Center in the Pueblo of Laguna.



RIGHT PHOTO: One of the featured speakers was former six-term Laguna Pueblo Governor Tom Dailey. The 96-year old WWII U.S. Army veteran, who saw combat action in the Battle of the Bulge, provided the invocation--and later sang a song he composed in honor of his granddaughter, who also served in the military. Mr. Dailey is one of five WWII veterans living in the Pueblo of Laguna. *(Photos courtesy of Mary Scott/Pueblo of Laguna)*

Las Cruces



A “Huey” helicopter which saw extensive action in the Vietnam War was the star attraction at the 20th Annual Veterans Day Parade in downtown Las Cruces.

The venerable “bird” had a long and distinguished military career—primarily “in country” during the war. It flew more than 1,000 hours of combat support in medical evacuations, logistical operations, and search and rescue operations from February 1969 through August 1970. It was part of the 1st Aviation Brigade, 268th Combat Aviation Battalion, and was also assigned to the 134th Assault Helicopter Co., and late to the 61st Assault Helicopter Company.

The two-ton, 45-foot long helicopter was obtained earlier this year from White Sands Missile Range. It will be fully restored and re-painted before being permanently mounted above the city’s new Vietnam Veterans Memorial Monument by mid-January. *(Photos courtesy of Jim Harbison)*

Mescalero



The American Legion Post 48 Color Guard had the honor of Posting the Colors at the big pre-Veterans Day concert featuring Country Music Star Tracey Lawrence on November 10 at the Inn of the Mountain Gods in Mescalero.

LEFT PHOTO: Doing the honors were *(from Left to Right)*: Mescalero Veterans Service Officer Kelton Starr, Mescalero Tribal member Toni Treas-Juarez, and Mescalero Tribal Sergeant-at-Arms David Lewis. *(Photos courtesy of Kelton Starr)*

Ruidoso



LEFT PHOTO: The American Legion Post 79 Women's Auxiliary teamed with the Ruidoso Community Center's *Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP)* to host a Veterans Day Flag Raising Ceremony at the Ruidoso Community Center. The used in the ceremony belonged to the late former long-time Post Commander Romeo Klein. His daughter Carol Rue graciously provided it for the ceremony.



RIGHT PHOTO: WWII Army veteran Robert Orr (*far left*) and Korean War Army veteran William McNay (*center*) were among the veterans in attendance to receive a pin in from Aging and Long-Term Services Department Senior Volunteer Programs Manager Miguel Ulibarri in appreciation for their contributions to the RSVP. (*Photos courtesy of Miguel Ulibarri/ALTSD Senior Volunteer Programs Manager*)

Silver City



LEFT PHOTO: New Mexico Department of Veterans' Services Veterans Service Officer Bradley Brock was among the speakers at G.W. Stout Elementary School's Tribute to Veterans Assembly in Silver City. The ceremony began with the Posting of the Colors, the Pledge of Allegiance in English and Spanish, and the pledge to the New Mexico flag. Veterans from each service in attendance were asked to stand and be recognized. Each grade then sang a service branch song. Students also performed a flag-fold ceremony, followed by a bugle rendition of *Taps*.



RIGHT PHOTO: (*from L to R*) G.W. Stout First Grade teacher and New Mexico Army National Guard Member Frank Arias, Kindergarten teacher Melissa Brown, NMDVS Silver City-based Veterans' Service Officer Bradley Brock, and Kindergarten teacher Laura Brown are joined by two kindergarten students. (*Photos courtesy of NMDVS Veterans Service Officer Bradley Brock*)

Santa Fe



One of the biggest Veterans Day parades took place in the state capital of Santa Fe. The parade route began at Fire Station #1 in the north side of the city. Participants marched through the downtown Plaza before ending at the Santa Fe Veterans Memorial. *(bottom two photos)* for the annual Veterans Day Ceremony hosted by VFW Post 2951. *(Top four photos courtesy of David Silver/City of Santa Fe Emergency Management Director; bottom two photos courtesy of NMNG MSG Douglas Mallary)*

Santa Fe (Continued)



The Santa Fe-based ***Listening Horse Therapeutic Riding Program*** was one of the participants in the Santa Fe Veterans Day Parade. The program offers equine-assisted therapy to active military, veterans and their families--and anyone facing challenges relating to Post-Traumatic Stress, Traumatic Brain Injury, physical injuries, substance abuse, grief, and other behavioral/emotional/physical issues. No previous horse experience is necessary.

LEFT PHOTO: Listening Horse Staff Member and Vietnam Veteran Jus Jolley riding “Zorro” is joined by program volunteer Sue McCormick riding “Shalomar” and Service Dog “Otie.”

RIGHT PHOTO: Gus, Zorro and Otie riding with program volunteer and Vietnam Veteran Mark Boutillier riding “Apache.” *(Photos courtesy of Laurie Seton/Listening Horse Therapeutic Riding Program)*



The parade culminated outside the Bataan Memorial Building at the Santa Fe Veterans Memorial for the annual Veterans Day Ceremony hosted by VFW Post 2951. *(Photos courtesy of New Mexico Army National Guard MSG Douglas Mallary.)*

Tularosa



LEFT PHOTO: The Town of Tularosa held its annual Veterans Day Ceremony at Veterans Memorial Park. The Keynote Address was given by USAF CMSgt Scott Loescher of nearby Holloman Air Force Base.

RIGHT PHOTO: One of the special guests at the ceremony was 93-year old Pearl Harbor Attack Survivor Stephen DuBois *(in dark jacket, at right)*. The former Navy Medic had only arrived in Pearl Harbor just six days before the infamous December 7, 1941 sneak attack. Mr. DuBois was awakened by exploding bombs and joined a nearby Marine to man an anti-aircraft gun. They were credited with downing two attacking Japanese planes. Mr. DuBois is also a veteran of the Korean War. *(Photos courtesy of Richard McElderry/Lincoln & Otero Counties Veterans Leadership Council.)*

Upper Fruitland



The Upper Fruitland Veterans Organization Color Guard had the honor of Presenting the Colors at a special Veterans Day Ceremony at the Northern Edge Navajo Casino in Fruitland (San Juan County).

LEFT PHOTO: Claire King from the casino's Human Resources Department sang the National Anthem—in English and Navajo. She is the proud mother of U.S. Army PFC Cassandra King from Ft. Hood, TX.



RIGHT PHOTO: Upper Fruitland Veterans Organization Commander Alvis Kee straightens the American Flag moments after his unit posted the Colors. *(Photos courtesy of Alvis Kee/Commander, Upper Fruitland Chapter Veterans Organization.)*

Cremated Remains of 28 Veterans Laid to Rest With Full Military Honors



Governor Susana Martinez delivered the Eulogy at a special Forgotten Heroes Funeral on October 13 at the Santa Fe National Cemetery for the cremated remains of twenty-eight military veterans whose bodies, upon their deaths, were unclaimed by family members.

The twenty-seven men and one woman—all from Bernalillo County—received a formal military funeral in accordance with the Forgotten Heroes Burial Program, a collaborative effort between the state and all thirty-three counties in New Mexico to ensure that any honorably-discharged deceased veteran whose body goes unclaimed receives a military funeral at the Santa Fe National Cemetery—with the people of New Mexico legally recognized as the family of record.

Flanked by New Mexico Department of Veterans' Services Secretary Jack Fox and New Mexico National Guard Adjutant General Andrew Salas, the Governor paid tribute to whom she called “these true heroes, for their service and sacrifice for our country.”

“It is with somber hearts that we’re gathered here today, as we lay to rest twenty-eight veterans of the United States Armed Forces --who upon their deaths, went unclaimed by any family member, friend, or even acquaintance” said an emotional Governor Martinez, her voice often cracking as she read the Eulogy. “We do not know much else about these twenty-eight patriots beyond their name, rank and serial number. What we do know is that they served our country with bravery and selflessness. I am grateful that we can come together to thank them for their honorable service. They are not alone. We are here for them...to say good-bye, and to give them the final salute they deserve”

Interred with full military honors at today’s funeral were: USA PVT Robert Axtell, USN Veteran Stanley Boyett, USA PVT Kenneth Carnes, USA Veteran Harold Chalupa, USN Veteran Robert Darden, USAF Am Bruce Davis, USA PVT Arturo Gavilanes, USN Veteran Keith Goodman, USA Veteran Norman Grady, USA Veteran Adrian Greene, USN Lt. Gerald Lalley, USA PFC Glenn Loney, Jr., USA Veteran Stanly Minge, USA SPC Brock Parker, USMC Veteran William Perdue, USA PVT Thomas Ricks, USN Veteran John Scott, USAF SrA Arthur Sharkey, USA SGT David Slygh, USAF Capt. Charles Smith, USA SGT Chester Smith, USN Veteran Michael Stange, USA SPC4 Wayne Summers, USN SR Eugenia Tatum, USA SSG Carl Thompson, USA PFC Joseph Wallheimer, USA Veteran Curtis Wheeler, and USMC LCpl James Wesenberg.

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Upon arrival, many veterans made it a point to stop by the table to salute the unclaimed cremated remains of the 27 veterans about to be laid to rest with full military honors.

VA Medical Center Chaplain Ronald Cok delivered the special Funeral Prayer. A Flag-Fold Ceremony and 21-Rifle Volley were performed by a multi-branch United States Armed Forces Honor Guard. A rendition of Taps was performed by Jake Trujillo of the Roswell Color Guard. General Salas presented the folded American Flag used in the service to Governor Martinez, who accepted it on behalf of the citizens of New Mexico.

The Forgotten Heroes Burial Program was the first state-involved collaborative effort in the country to ensure that unclaimed deceased honorably-discharged veterans receive a military funeral.



New Mexico Department of Veterans' Services Secretary Jack Fox delivers the Opening Remarks at the October 13 "Forgotten Heroes Funeral" for the unclaimed cremated remains of 28 military veterans.



Members of the Vietnam Veterans of America/Northern New Mexico Chapter 996 salute a wreath presented by the group during the gravesite service.



New Mexico National Guard Adjutant General Andrew Salas (center) prepares to accept the American Flag from the Multi-Branch Honor Guard which had covered the remains of the 28 cremated veterans.



New Mexico Department of Veterans' Services Secretary Jack Fox (center) stands at attention as New Mexico National Guard Adjutant General Andrew Salas (left) presents the folded American Flag to Governor Susana Martinez—who accepted it on behalf of the grateful citizens of New Mexico.

Big Turnout for Sixth Annual New Mexico Women Veterans Conference



Women veterans representing every branch of service and dating back to the Korean War era attended the Sixth Annual New Mexico Women Veterans Conference today at the Albuquerque Marriott Pyramid Hotel.

The purpose of the conference, which was presented by the New Mexico Department of Veterans Services (NMDVS), the New Mexico VA Health Care System (NMVAHCS) and ***Women Veterans of New Mexico***, was to educate women veterans about their available veterans benefits--everything from health care, counseling and other VA programs, to state and other federal benefits.

Retired Air Force Colonel and current NMVAHCS Women Veterans Program Manager Tanya McKinney started the day with a presentation emphasizing women-specific acute, primary, preventative, and behavioral health care offered by the Raymond G. Murphy VA Medical Center in Albuquerque.

“I cannot emphasize enough how much VA health care has changed—especially for women,” said Ms. McKinney. “We have changed with the times. Women veterans now receive the very latest and best health care offered by any medical facility in the country.”

NMVAHCS representatives also gave a presentation about programs specifically for veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

“This is not your father’s VA system,” said NMVAHCS Director Andrew Welch during his morning address to the more than 150 women in attendance. “Women are the fastest-growing segment in the veteran population—and we have grown and changed to better serve women.”

There were also presentations about additional VA benefits, pensions, adaptive sports programs—as well as information by other presenters about Social Security benefits, aging and long-term care benefits, and vocational rehabilitation programs available by the state.

NMDVS Veterans Service Officer Theresa Zuni and NMDVS State Approving Agency Director Marilyn **Dykman presented information about available state veterans’ benefits**—ranging from property tax exemptions for veterans, special license plates, free park and museum passes. Ms. Dykman presented information about how the agency oversees universities, colleges and vocational training programs available for use by a veteran’s G.I. Educational Benefit Bill.

Women play an important part in today’s military, said NMDVS Secretary Jack Fox in his Welcome Address. He said it is therefore important that they know about these and many other benefits available to them as military veterans.

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“Women have come a long way in today’s military. No longer are you behind the scenes or stuck in offices,” said Secretary Fox. “You are veterans serving in combat zones now—just like your male counterparts. You have earned your veterans’ benefits, thanks to your service and sacrifice for our country.”

According to the latest VA data, of the country’s 21.6 million veterans--2,035,213 million are women; roughly equivalent to the size of the entire general population of New Mexico. Of our state’s 171,528 veterans—16,743 are women.



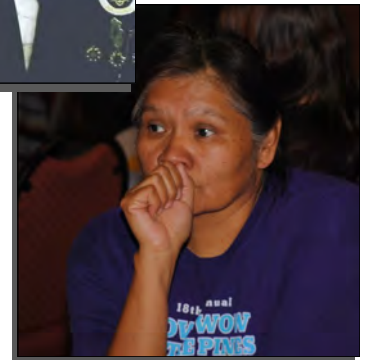
One-hundred fifty women veterans registered for the Sixth Annual New Mexico Women Veterans Conference on October 24 at the Albuquerque Marriott Pyramid Hotel.



New Mexico VA Health Care System Director Andrew Welch followed NMDVS Secretary Jack Fox in welcoming the women to the conference. Mr. Welch stressed the willingness of the NMVAHCS to listen and adapt to the needs of “...the fastest-growing segment of our nation’s veteran population.”



During breaks, attendees were encouraged to visit tables outside the ballroom staffed by representatives from two dozen veterans’ service organization. In this photo, New Mexico Department of Veterans’ Services State Approving Agency Director Marilyn Dykman (right) answers questions about the GI Veteran Education Benefit Bill.



Staffing Set for NMDVS Rural Veterans Coordination Program

The New Mexico Department of Veterans Services has opened five rural offices to help rural-area veterans on a variety of issues, including assistance with disability compensation, pension claims, health care, and dependent/survivor benefits. The regional offices are the result of a federal grant. In addition, rural veterans can also call a new toll-free hotline to get their questions answered.

The agency was one of only five recipients nationwide of \$2 million Rural Veterans Coordination Program (RVCP) grants created by the U.S. Veterans Health Administration and the Office of Rural Health to assist rural-area veterans. The NMDVS has created RVCP offices staffed by grant coordinators in the following five regions of New Mexico: Central (Albuquerque), Northwest (Shiprock), Northeast (Las Vegas), Southwest (Santa Clara), and Southeast (Roswell). The coordinators will travel throughout their assigned regions to find veterans who have not enrolled in the VA health care system. The goal is to educate rural-area veterans about the services and programs available to them and their families. Though the focus is on identifying transitioning active-duty personnel and veterans who have recently left active-duty service, any veterans who have served will receive assistance.

The coordinators will put veterans in touch with the nearest NMDVS office, the VA regional office in Albuquerque, or an appropriate local agency to help with filing for disability compensation, pension claims, education and vocational training, life insurance, home loans, health care, transportation issues, burial assistance, and dependent/survivor benefits. The coordinators—who have extensive knowledge of their regions and what services are available—can also put veterans in touch with non-VA agencies offering services or programs which help veterans.

New Toll-Free Phone Number

In addition to the five regional RVCP Coordinators, the program also features a ***VetConnect*** statewide toll-free “hotline” for rural veterans and their families to access information about available services and programs for veterans in their area. That number is 1-(800) 672-7006.

Meet the RVCP Team



Edward Mendez
RVCP Director

Edward Mendez is the Rural Veterans Coordination Program (RVCP) Director for the New Mexico Department of Veterans' Services. The Albuquerque native comes to the agency from the New Mexico Department of Transportation, and the New Mexico Department of Workforce Solutions, where he assisted veterans in his role as a Veteran Employment Representative (LVER) and Disabled Veterans Outreach Program (DVOP) specialist.

Ed is a veteran of the United States Navy and has served onboard the USS Duluth (LPD-6) while stationed in San Diego, CA, and on the minesweeper USS Ardent during mine countermeasure operations in support of Operation Desert Storm in the Persian Gulf. He also worked in the Naval Recruiting District Office in Albuquerque. Ed can be contacted at edwardl.mendez@state.nm.us or (505) 383-2417.



Jim Cassidy
*NMDVS RVCP Coordinator/
 SE Region*

Jim Cassidy is the RVCP Coordinator in southeastern New Mexico and is based in Roswell in the same office as the NMDVS Roswell-based Veterans Service Officer.

A native of Cleveland, New Mexico (Mora County), Jim comes to the NMDVS from the New Mexico Department of Workforce Solutions—where he served as a Disabled Veterans Outreach Program (DVOP) Specialist in Roswell. Prior to this, he was a DVOP Specialist and a Local Veterans employment Representative (LVER) in Clovis.

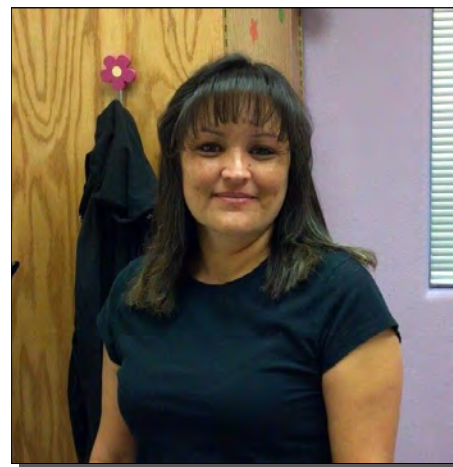
Jim retired after 20 years of service with the United States Air Force. The Operation Iraqi Freedom veteran was stationed in various bases and TDY throughout the world in Aircraft Maintenance and Logistics. After retirement he continued his aviation career in Roswell as Vice President of Great Southwest Aviation until 2012. Along his professional career, Jim earned several degrees in Professional Aeronautics and Aviation Safety.

Jim can be contacted at james.cassidy@state.nm.us or (575) 885-4939.

Angelina Trujillo is the RVCP southwestern New Mexico Region Coordinator and is based in Santa Clara (Grant County).

A native of Silver City, Angelina comes to the NMDVS from the New Mexico Department of Children, Youth & Families Department's Child Protective Services Division, where she was an investigator for six years and a recruiter for foster and adoptive families for two years. She has a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Social Work from Western New Mexico University.

Angelina comes from a family with a long history of military service **with the U.S. Army, Navy, Air Force and Marines...with service from** World War II to the current Post-9/11 war eras. She can be contacted at angelina.trujillo@state.nm.us or (575) 912-3166.



Angelina Trujillo
*NMDVS RVCP Coordinator/
 SW Region*



Sarah Bustos

*NMDVS RVCP Coordinator/
NE Region*

Sarah Bustos is the RVCP Coordinator in the northeastern New Mexico region and is based in Las Vegas, NM.

A native of Las Vegas, Sarah recently earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology with a minor in Sociology from New Mexico Highlands University. She is engaged to U.S. Marine Lance Corporal Anthony Cantu, who served as a Cannon/Rocket Crewman from 2010-2014—the generation of veterans targeted by the RVCP! Sarah can be contacted at sarah.bustos@state.nm.us or (505) 796-2109.

Robertson Yazzie, Jr. is the RVCP Coordinator in northwestern New Mexico/the Four Corners Region and is based in Shiprock.

A native of Crownpoint and a Navajo Nation Tribal Member, Robertson comes to the NMDVS from the Navajo Nation, where he worked with the Navajo Nation Judicial Branch as a Veterans Justice Outreach Coordinator. He has also worked with the New Mexico Children Youth and Families Department as a Permanency Planning Worker.

Robertson is also a combat veteran, having served 8 ½ years active duty with the United States Army Military Police. While in the military, he was deployed twice in support of Operation Iraq Freedom and once to Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom before he was honorably discharged as a Staff Sergeant in 2011. Robertson can be contacted at robertson.yazzie@state.nm.us or (505) 252-5987.



Robertson Yazzie, Jr.

*NMDVS RVCP Coordinator/
NW Region*



John Griego

*NMDVS RVCP Coordinator/
Central Region*

John Griego is the RVCP Coordinator in the central New Mexico region and is based in the NMDVS Albuquerque Eagle Rock office.

John brings a wealth of experience working with veterans to the NMDVS. He has worked with Child Protective Services, the Veterans Jail Diversion Program, and has worked on programs helping Veteran Homelessness and veterans with developmental disabilities.

The native of Chinle, AZ also served seventeen years in the United States Army as a 19K30 M1A2 SEP Abrams Tank Armor Crew Member, having served in Operations Desert Shield/Desert Storm, Provide Comfort, and Operation Joint Guardian in Kosovo/Bosnia. John was also stationed in Korea, Germany, Ft Hood, and Ft Knox. He earned a Bachelors and Masters degrees in Social Work from New Mexico Highlands University.

John can be reached at griegom.john@state.nm.us or (505) 383-2408.

NMDVS Cuts Ribbon to Officially Open New Field Office in Roswell



Dark, rainy skies did not lessen the turnout nor dampen the mood at a ribbon-cutting ceremony today to officially dedicate the opening of the New Mexico Department of Veterans' Services Field Office in Roswell.

The new office, located at 1600 SE Main Street, should make visiting the agency an easier and more enjoyable experience for veterans and their families, according to New Mexico Department of Veterans' Services Secretary Jack Fox.

"While we liked our old office, it was in a federal building—and it required passing through the necessary

federal security measures to enter it," said NMDVS Secretary Fox in his remarks before an overflow crowd attending the ceremony. "This new office provides easier access and parking for our veterans and their families."

The new office also houses the NMDVS' newly-hired Rural Veterans Community Pilot (RVCP) Grant Southeast Coordinator, Jim Cassidy, who will work hand-in-hand with the agency's Roswell Veterans' Service Officer Richard Moncrief.

The NMDVS was one of only five recipients nationwide of a two-year VA RVCP grant to specifically reach out and assist rural-area veterans with any benefits help they need.

"Jim (Cassidy) and our other coordinators will aggressively go out here in southeast New Mexico and the other three quadrants of the state to identify veterans and their families who are not currently engaged with the VA," said RVCP Grant Director Ed Mendez at the ceremony. "The VA says there are 171,000 veterans in New Mexico. We believe there are between 15-20,000 additional veterans out there that we and the VA do not know about—and are not receiving any benefits."

According to the latest VA data, there are 5,286 veterans living in Chaves County.

As part of the RVCP Grant, plans are also in place to develop a 24-hour **"call center" for veterans anywhere** in the state to call for information about health care, transportation services, help for homelessness, and any other needs. Walk-ins are welcome at the new NMDVS field office. But veterans and their spouses are strongly encouraged to make an appointment with NMDVS Veterans Service Officer Richard Moncrief at richard.moncrief@state.nm.us or (575) 624-6086.



NMDVS Roswell Veterans' Service Officer Richard Moncrief (3rd from right) cuts the ribbon to officially open his new office. Helping him do the honors were (from L to R): NMDVS Secretary Jack Fox, Roswell Mayor Dennis Kintigh, NMDVS SE RVCP Coordinator Jim Cassidy, State Representative Candy Ezzell, and State Representative Bob Wooley.

NMDVS, HSD Launch Veterans “Network of Care Portal”



The Behavioral Health Collaborative of the New Mexico Human Services Department (HSD) and New Mexico Department of Veterans' Services (NMDVS) have launched new online portals that will act as “one-stop shops” to help people find and navigate the behavioral health-related and veterans services available to them.

The new Network of Care for Behavioral Health and Network of Care for Veterans, Service Members and Their Families portals streamline access to behavioral health-related and veterans' services, providing a single place for information and resources for individuals, families, agencies and providers.

“This new Network of Care for Behavioral Health portal will be a valuable tool in our continuing efforts to improve access to care and treatment for New Mexicans,” said HSD Cabinet Secretary Brent Earnest. “Putting access to more information and services in one place will help New Mexicans navigate the behavioral health system and get the assistance they need.”

“New Mexico has excellent VA Health Care and private-practice options available for veterans,” said NMDVS Secretary Jack Fox. “But we're such a large and mostly rural state that sometimes finding help can be a problem for veterans and their families. I'm excited about how this portal can alleviate this problem.”

Available online at newmexico.networkofcare.org/mh, Network of Care for Behavioral Health provides a comprehensive directory of services and information for individuals and their families seeking to address depression, substance abuse and other behavioral health-related issues. Services include contact information for and access to addiction treatment and recovery; education and employment resources, child, adolescent and family services; legal and medical providers; and more. The portal also provides access to the latest news about behavioral health-related conditions, treatments and other valuable information.

The Network of Care for Veterans, Service Members and Their Families can be accessed at newmexico.networkofcare.org/veterans. It brings together critical information for all components of the veterans' community, including veterans, family members, active-duty personnel, reservists, members of the New Mexico National Guard, employers, service providers and the community at large.

To increase accessibility and accommodations for users, the Network of Care portals provide near-universal access, regardless of income or literacy levels, to their web-based information and services through text-only versions and other adaptive technologies. The site is fully ADA-compliant and available in multiple languages.

The Network of Care for Behavioral Health site also allows behavioral health-related service providers to share best practices and other ideas through social networking, community calendars and other tools. **Service providers can even build their own free websites in the “For Providers” section.**

NMVBOC Presents Six Veterans Business Development Workshops this Fall

The New Mexico Veterans Business Outreach Center (NMVBOC) hosted or co-hosted six free veterans business development events this Fall.

NMVBOC Veterans Business Advisor Rich Coffel presented three NMVBOC ***On the Road*** workshops: Taos on September 30, Ruidoso (Oct. 23), and Santa Rosa (Dec. 9)—and a ***NMVBOC On the Rez*** workshop for Native Americans in Mescalero (Sep. 11). The workshops offer help to veterans who want to open their own business or expand an existing operation. Wells Fargo bank, the New Mexico divisions of the U.S. Small Business Administration and the Small Business Development Centers, and local Chambers of Commerce also partnered to present these workshops. Individual private one-on-one consultations were also available for attendees at the workshops.



NMVBOC Veterans Business Outreach Director Joe Long participated in two ***Boots to Business: Reboot*** seminars: Mesilla (Sep. 14—above photo) and Santa Fe (Nov. 6). These are two-day training programs presented mainly by the Small Business Administration (SBA) providing an overview of business ownership, an outline of the components of a business plan, a practical exercise in opportunity recognition, and an introduction to available public and private resources.

The seminar focused on an Introduction to Entrepreneurship course for military veterans, Guard/Reserve/Active-Duty service members and their spouses. Attendees then take an eight-week online course through the Institute for Veterans and Military Families at Syracuse University. For more information about the Boots to Business program, the NMVBOC ***On the Road/On the Rez*** workshops, or how the NMVBOC can help veterans with their small business concerns, go the NMVBOC website at www.nmvboc.org. Or you can contact NMVBOC Veterans Business Advisor Rich Coffel at richardl.coffel@state.nm.us or (505) 383-2402.



Richard Coffel (*2nd from right*), the New Mexico Veterans Business Outreach Center's Veterans Business Advisor, was awarded the New Mexico Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve's (ESGR) "Seven Seals Award" for his outstanding support of the ESGR's *Employer Initiative Program* at its Winter Executive Committee Meeting on December 3 in Albuquerque.

Rich was recognized for his tireless work in serving as a mentor for unemployed National Guard and Reserve members—helping them with their resumes, ***Dress for Success*** counseling, and interview skills. According to the ESGR, "...Rich's work contributed to helping the unemployment rate for members of the New Mexico

National Guard drop to 2.4%--far below the state average for veterans. " (From L to R: ESGR Employment Coordinator Brad Lakin, ESG State Chair Ray Battaglini, NMVBOC Veterans Business Advisor Rich Coffel, New Mexico National Guard Adjutant General Andrew Salas.) (Photo courtesy of the NMESGR)

NMDVS Presents Five Fall “Benefits Fairs”

The New Mexico Department of Veterans’ Services presented five *Veterans Benefits Fairs* this fall as part of its ongoing effort to educate veterans and their families about VA and state veterans’ benefits.

The NMDVS enlisted the help of the New Mexico VA Health Care System, the New Mexico VA Regional Office, the Santa Fe National Cemetery, the New Mexico Department of Workforce Solutions and other state and local agencies to staff informational tables at the following free events:

- Silver City/Western New Mexico University (Aug. 1)
- Albuquerque/Patrick J. Baca Library (Aug. 14) (Dec. 4)
- Moriarty/Moriarty Civic Center (Oct. 16)
- Hobbs/New Mexico Junior College (Nov. 14)

“These benefits fairs are an important part of what we do at the New Mexico Department of Veterans’ Services,” said NMDVS Secretary Jack Fox. “These are great opportunities for veterans to meet representatives from agencies dedicated to helping them and their families—and they’re all under one roof.”

More benefits fairs throughout the state will be scheduled in 2016. Locations and details will be listed on the NMDVS website Events Calendar page at www.dvs.state.nm.us/events_calendar.html.



Silver City/Aug. 1

NMDVS Veterans Service Officer Bradley Brock (red shirt) assisted veterans at the August Silver City Benefits Fair on the campus of Western New Mexico University.



NMDVS Veterans Service Officer Dale Movius (above, in red shirt) at the Aug. 14 Benefits Fair in Albuquerque.



Hobbs/November 14

NMDVS Veterans Service Officer Dalton Boyd (right, in red shirt) assisted veterans at the November 14 Benefits Fair in Hobbs at New Mexico Junior College.



NMDVS “Adopts” Albuquerque Park on Behalf of Veterans and Their Families



The New Mexico Department of Veterans’ Services held a “Sign Unveiling Ceremony” on September 10 at Wild Flower Park in Albuquerque to formally “adopt” the park.

The park is located about a mile east of Balloon Fiesta Park...on San Mateo Boulevard NE between Eagle Rock and Modesto Avenues.

The NMDVS adopted the park through the city’s *Adopt-a-Park Program*, which allows civic-minded organizations or individuals to help the city of Albuquerque maintain its parks by providing monetary or “manpower” donations.

Enhancement and light maintenance at the park will be performed by NMDVS personnel--along with support from volunteering veterans, veterans’ organizations and programs which partner with the agency to support veterans and their families.

The goal of the adoption is to allow veterans a chance to give back to the community through participating in the various park beautification projects.

“We are extremely excited about this opportunity to adopt this beautiful park on behalf of the veterans in the city of Albuquerque,” said NMDVS Secretary Jack Fox at the ceremony. “We will help make this a park which veterans will be proud to call their own and to make it a place where they will enjoy spending time with their families and other veterans.”



NMDVS Secretary Jack Fox (at right, in above photo) presents a framed NMDVS poster to City Councilor Brad Winter in appreciation for the councilor’s support of the agency’s effort to adopt Wild Flower Park.



NMDVS Provides Assistance at “Stand Downs” for Homeless Veterans



Once again this year, the New Mexico Department of Veterans' Services (NMDVS) was honored to take part in various annual “Stand Downs” for homeless veterans in communities throughout the state.

The 2015 Stand Downs were held in Albuquerque on October 15-16, Artesia (Oct. 10), Carlsbad (Oct. 9), Farmington (Oct. 9), Gallup (Oct. 2), Las Cruces (Oct. 17), Santa Fe (Nov. 13-14), and Durango, CO (Oct. 27).

Depending on the locations, they were presented as part of **joint collaborations by the New Mexico Veterans' Integration Center (NMVIC) and the New Mexico National Guard**—with help and participation from the

NMDVS, the New Mexico Department of Workforce Solutions (NMDWS), the Albuquerque U.S. Department of Veterans' Affairs Regional Office, the New Mexico VA Health Care System, and other federal, state and local agencies or organizations.

The concept is modeled after the military “Stand Downs” popularized during the Vietnam War to offer battle-weary soldiers a temporary safe haven to rest, receive medical treatment, get a hot meal, and clean up before returning to combat action.

The 2015 Stand Downs for Homeless Veterans provided the opportunity for homes and near-homeless veterans to get free clothing, bedding, food, a hot meal, hygiene kits, flu shots, basic medical screening, legal consultation, and many more goods and services.

Veterans' Service Officers from the New Mexico Department of Veterans' Services--and in selected locations, the Albuquerque VA Regional Office—were on site to assist veterans with filing for their VA and state veterans' benefits. VA and NMVIC representative were also present at many of the sites to offer help securing temporary or long-term housing solutions at some of the locations. In addition, representatives from the NM Department of Workforce Solutions offered employment assistance. Hot meals were also provided by the New Mexico National Guard or other local/charitable agencies.



Photos on this page are from the 2015 Albuquerque “Project Stand Down/Hand Up” Stand Down for Homeless Veterans



LEFT PHOTO: (from L to R at table) NMDVS Health Care Specialist Joseph Dorn, Health Care Program Coordinator Mitchell Lawrence, Veterans Service Officer Dale Movius and Veterans Service Officer Jeff George assisted veterans on Day 1 of the October 15-16 "Project Stand Down/Hand Up" Stand Down for Homeless Veterans held at The Rock at Noonday Ministry in downtown Albuquerque.



Santa Fe "Vet MissionPossible" Stand Down for Homeless Veterans

NMDVS Veterans Service Officer David Smith (Left photo; seated at table) assisted veterans on Day 1 of the November 13-14 Santa Fe "VetMission Possible" Stand Down for Homeless Veterans held at the Santa Fe University of Art & Design.



Artesia Stand Down for Homeless Veterans

NMDVS Veterans Service Officer Dagmar Youngberg (**LEFT PHOTO**; 2nd from right) was one of the driving forces behind the October 9 Stand Down in Artesia and the October 10 Stand Down in Carlsbad. In the left photo, she presents a Certificate of Appreciation to the Legacy Inn for their hospitality in providing the use of its hotel for the Artesia event.

RIGHT PHOTO: The VA provided its Mobile Vet Center from Las Cruces for the Artesia and Carlsbad Stand Downs.

NMDVS Secretary Fox Helps Lay Wreaths at “Wreaths Across America” Ceremony in SFE



NMDVS Secretary Jack Fox helped place wreaths at selected gravesites for the December 12 “Wreaths Across America” ceremony at the Santa Fe National Cemetery.

New Mexico Department of Veterans’ Services Secretary Jack Fox gave the Keynote Address on December 12 at the 2015 ***Wreaths Across America*** ceremonial Christmas tribute to deceased veterans the Santa Fe National Cemetery.

The ceremony was one of hundreds of similar ceremonies simultaneously taking place coinciding with the noon (EDT) Wreaths Across American ceremony at Arlington National Cemetery in Washington, D.C.

Ceremonies were held at all 147 national cemeteries, hundreds private and public cemeteries, and at national cemeteries in 24 other countries.

“Today is a day to remember that the military service of our soldiers, sailors, airmen, marines, and Coast Guard service members who are no longer with us is not

forgotten this Christmas season,” said Secretary Fox at the brief Opening Ceremony. “Today is a day to remember that Americans are able to safely and freely celebrate the Christmas season...to spend time with family and loved ones....because of the service and sacrifice of the men and women who have served in the United States Armed Forces.”

Wreaths Across America began in 1992 when the Worcester Wreath Company in Massachusetts made arrangements to have a surplus of Christmas Wreaths placed on selected gravesites at the Arlington National Cemetery—**our nation’s largest burial site for deceased veterans. The action was repeated the following year, and quickly spread to other national and public cemeteries in the coming years.**

Following the ceremony at the Santa Fe National Cemetery, Secretary Fox joined the crowd to place more than 1,000 special Christmas-Season Wreaths at selected gravesites of military veterans. The wreaths were pre-purchased by family members and friends of deceased veterans—and also by ordinary citizens wishing to honor the service of deceased veterans during the Christmas holiday season.

In addition to the Santa Fe National Cemetery, Wreaths Across America ceremonies also took place at the Ft. Bayard National Cemetery, the Ft. Stanton Merchant Marine & Veterans Cemetery, the General **Douglas L. McBride Roswell Veterans Cemetery...and** at private cemeteries in Roswell, Carlsbad, Farmington, Gallup, Los Alamos, Lovington, and Ruidoso. For more information about the ***Wreaths Across America*** program, go to <http://www.wreathsassamerica.org>.



The VFW Post 2951 provided the 21-Rifle Volley and the playing of “Taps” during the December 12 “Wreaths Across America” ceremony at the Santa Fe National Cemetery.

NMDVS FIELD OFFICES

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There are seventeen field offices of the New Mexico Department of Veterans' Services offices throughout the state to assist veterans and their eligible dependents with filing for VA and state veterans benefits. Each office is managed by a nationally-certified **Veterans' Service Officer** who is committed to helping fellow veterans with filing for the benefits earned through their service and sacrifice for our country.

Please contact your nearest office to set up an appointment. For additional information, you can also contact the main NMDVS office in Santa Fe toll-free at 1-(866) 433-8387 or by visiting our website at www.dvs.state.nm.us and going to the FIELD OFFICES link.

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