



The Guardian

The Newsletter of the New Mexico Department of Veterans' Services

April, 2016

New Mexico Veterans Business Outreach Center Named Tops "VBOC" in the Nation



Joseph Long
VBOC Director

The New Mexico Veterans Business Outreach Center (VBOC) has received the prestigious *Excellence in Service* award by the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) and will be honored at a May 1 luncheon in Washington, D.C. as part of the SBA's annual Small Business Week celebration.

The outreach center, which is the veterans' business development division of the New Mexico Department of Veterans' Services, assists veterans with starting and managing a business. It is under the direction of VBOC Director Joseph Long, who is assisted by Veterans Business Advisory Rich Coffel, and Administrative Assistant Danelle Lucero. All three will attend the award luncheon.

"I'm proud of the staff at our Veterans Business Outreach Center. This is a job well done. Because of their hard work, veterans are learning the ins and outs of starting and managing a business of their own," said a delighted Governor Susana Martinez upon learning of the award. "This is a well-deserved recognition, and I have no doubt that our team at the outreach center will continue the great work they are doing for our men and women who have served our country."

The SBA was particularly impressed with the *VBOC's On the Road* and *On the Rez* business development workshops to teach veterans in New Mexico and in Native American reservations and pueblos how to start and expand a business. More than 1,300 New Mexico veterans have attended these free workshops since their inception in 2011.



Rich Coffel
VBOC Veterans Business Advisor

New Mexico's VBOC is funded through a grant issued by the SBA and is



Danelle Lucero
VBOC Administrative Assistant

managed by the New Mexico Department of Veterans Services. In addition to the workshops, the center hosts the annual Southwest Veterans Business Conference, and provides business counseling for veterans.

"We're proud of the work being done by our Veterans Business Outreach Center division," said NMDVS Secretary Jack Fox. "It comes as no surprise that one of the most hard-working, diligent and integrity-filled teams I've ever worked with is being given such praise and recognition."

Veterans needing assistance with starting or managing their own business can contact VBOC Director Joe Long at joseph.long@state.nm.us or (505) 383-2401; or VBOC Veterans Business Advisor Rich Coffel at richardl.coffel@state.nm.us or (505) 383-2402.

Capacity Crowd Attends 2016 Southwest Veterans Business Conference



More than 300 veterans, Guard/Reserve and transitioning active-duty service members attended the 2016 Southwest Veterans Business Conference on April 1 at the Marriott Pyramid Hotel in Albuquerque.

The conference was presented by the New Mexico Veterans Business Outreach Center (VBOC) along with partnering agencies New Mexico Veterans Business Advocates, the American Indian Chamber of Commerce, SCORE, the Veterans Procurement Assistance Center, the Small Business Development Center of New Mexico (SBDC), the SBDC Procurement Technical Assistance Program, the American Indian Procurement Technical Assistance Center, and WESST

New Mexico.

Among the topics covered were: What Every Veteran Entrepreneur Should Know, Business Basics in the Southwest, Business Financial Planning, Creating an Effective Website, Doing Business with the Government, and Doing Business with Prime Contractors. Attendees were also able to meet one-on-one with the presenting agencies, other attending agencies and contractors, and with other entrepreneurs.

“We were quite pleased with the turnout and the energy at the conference,” said VBOC Director and conference moderator Joseph Long. “The feedback we received was very positive—about the information provided, and the opportunity to network with other like-minded veterans, veteran-friendly employers and agencies.”



TOP PHOTOS: NMVBOC Veterans Business Advisor Rich Coffel (left photo) and NMDVS Veterans Service Officer Gordon Schei (right photo/seated) were among the service provider agencies on hand to assist veterans/answer questions at the April 1 SW Veterans Business Conference in Albuquerque.



LEFT PHOTO: State Representative Bob Wooley (R-Chaves County), who is also the Co-Chair of the Military & Veterans Affairs Legislative Committee, was also on hand to answer any questions from conference attendees.

First On The Rez Business Development Workshop of 2016 Presented by NMVBOC



From L to R: NMVBOC Director Joseph Long, Shiprock Regional Business Development Office Senior Office Specialist Tovina Yazzie, Shiprock Regional Business Development Office Program Manager Randy Sells, Small Business Development Center Department Manager Elaine Young, and NMDVS Veterans Business Advisor Rich Coffel.

The first *VBOC On The Rez* veterans business development workshop of the year presented by the New Mexico Veterans Business Outreach Center was attended by sixty-eight Native American veterans who were interested in learning about programs to help veterans open or expand a small business.

The workshop is similar to the VBOC's ongoing *On the Road* series of business development workshops for veterans—which along with the VBOC are presented by the U.S. Small Business Administration, the New Mexico Small Business Development Center (SBDC), the SBDC Procurement Technical Assistance Program (PTAP), and Wells Fargo Bank to help veterans achieve their entrepreneurial goals.

What's unique about the *On the Rez* workshop is the focus on programs to help Native-American veterans with their small business needs.

The American Indian Chamber of Commerce of New Mexico, the American Indian Procurement Technical Assistance Center and the Shiprock Regional Business Development Office were also co-sponsors for this workshop.

"We are all extremely pleased at the turnout," said VBOC Director Joseph Long. "The attendees were enthusiastic about learning how to succeed in running a small business. We received very positive feedback about their experience."

The NMVBOC also presented an *On the Road* business development workshop in Las Vegas (NM) on March 9, which was attended by thirty five veterans.

Additional *On the Road* and *On the Rez* workshops are scheduled in communities throughout the state this year.



NMDVS RVCP Regional Coordinator Robertson Yazzie (2nd from left) **and Veterans Service Officer Beverly Charley** (far right) *were on hand to assist attendees with their veterans' benefits needs.*

From L to R: Shiprock Regional Business Development Office Senior Office Specialist Tovina Yazzie, NMDVS Rural Veterans Coordination Program (RVCP) Northwest Region Coordinator Robertson Yazzie, Jr., Navajo Nation Office of the President & Vice President Veterans Liaison Jamescita Peshlakai, New Mexico Indian Affairs Department Cabinet Secretary Kelly Zunie, and NMDVS Farmington Office Veterans Service Officer Beverly Charley.

NMVBOC to Present *VBOC On the Road* Workshop in Portales on May 11



The next *VBOC On the Road* business development workshop will be in Portales on May 11 from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the historic Yam Theater, located at 219 South Main Street. As with all workshops, spouses are also invited to attend. A free hot lunch will be provided for all attendees. Among the topics to be covered are: How to determine if a business idea is feasible, available financial assistance for veterans, special business incentives for New Mexico veterans, how to create a business plan, how to pursue government contracting possibilities, veteran-friendly franchise opportunities, and other ways the VBOC and the presenting partner agencies can help entrepreneurial-minded veterans and spouses.

As an added bonus, attendees can take advantage of private on-site “walk-in” business counseling sessions for more personal assistance.

“Walk-ins” are welcome, but pre-registration is strongly recommended by contacting the Portales/Roosevelt County Chamber of Commerce at (575) 356-8541, via e-mail at chamber@portales.com, or online at www.portales.com. You can also contact the Clovis/Curry County Chamber of Commerce at (575) 763-3435 or events@clovisnm.org.



2nd Annual New Mexico Veterans Job Fair Set for April 29

The New Mexico Trucking Association and the New Mexico Department of Veterans' Services are inviting companies, service provider agencies, and military veterans to the *Second Annual Veterans Job Fair* on April 29 from 10am-2pm in Albuquerque at the Isleta Casino and Resort.

There is no registration fee for companies or employers to set up hiring booths inside the job fair. There is also no charge for veterans, National Guard or reserve-component service members looking for a job.

There is a \$100 registration fee for companies, vendors, or service-provider agencies that would like to set up promotional or display booths or tables outside the Grand Ballroom—where the job fair takes place.

No pre-registration is necessary for job-seekers.

Companies or service-providers can pre-register online at www.nmtrucking.org or by contacting New Mexico Trucking Association Managing Director Johnny Johnson at (505) 884-5575.

NMDVS Hosts Benefits Fair for National Guard, Reserve Component Members



The New Mexico Department of Veterans' Services hosted a Veterans' Benefits Fair on March 5 in Albuquerque for members of the New Mexico National Guard, and for members of the Reserve Component units.

More than 150 Guard/Reserve personnel attended the fair held on the Van Buren Middle School campus, which featured workshops presenting information about VA health care benefits, state veterans benefits, business entrepreneurial help for veterans, an introduction to the WESST Enterprise Center, applying for state jobs, and job-seeking/résumé-building tips.

The goal, said NMDVS Secretary Jack Fox during his welcome address, was to educate Guard and Reserve personnel about the many VA, state and private-sector benefits and programs available for them and their families.

“We want you all to know that these are benefits you have earned through your service to our country,” said Secretary Fox. “Don’t wait five, ten, fifteen...twenty years down the road to suddenly decide to see us or the VA—because by then, it’ll be much more difficult to get these benefits...or even too late. Do it now; you and your families deserve it.”



NMDVS, City of Rio Rancho Present *Rio Rancho Veterans Resource Day*



The New Mexico Department of Veterans' Services assisted the city of Rio Rancho to present *Rio Rancho Veterans Resource Day* on March 18 at the Sabana Grande Community Center.

NMDVS Veterans Service Officer Gordon Schei (*left picture/at right*), NMDVS Health Care Program Coordinator Mitchell Lawrence (*right picture/behind table, at left*) and New Mexico Veterans Business Outreach Center Veterans Business Advisor Rich Coffel (*right picture/next to Mr. Lawrence...both talking to State Senator Craig Brandt of Rio Rancho*) were on hand to help veterans and their families with any VA or state veterans' benefits issues.

NMDVS Presents Veterans Benefits Fair at Navajo Technical University



The New Mexico Department of Veterans' Services, in conjunction with Navajo Technical University and Diné Hoghaan Bii Development, Inc., presented the first-ever *Navajo Technical University Veterans Benefits Fair* on March 29 at the university's Wellness Center in Crownpoint.

Veterans were able to take advantage of this "one-stop" opportunity to find out about federal, state, and local veterans benefits and programs in the eastern Navajo Nation region. In addition to the partnering agencies, representatives from the NMDVS Rural Veterans

Coordination Program, the Department of Navajo Veterans Affairs, the Navajo Nation Department of Behavioral Health Services, the Navajo Nation Judicial Branch, the Navajo Nation, United Health Care, Molina Health Care, Women Veterans of New Mexico, and other veterans service organizations were also there to present information about VA and non-VA veterans' health care, mental health counseling, suicide prevention programs, employment assistance, housing assistance, education/the GI Bill, judicial/legal help for veterans, and many more benefits and programs available for Navajo Nation veterans and their families.

NMDVS Dedicates Rural Outreach Office in Four Corners Region



(from L to R) Navajo Nation Office of the President/Vice President Veterans Liaison Jamescita Peshlakai, State Senator John Pinto, RVCP Northwest Region Coordinator Robertson Yazzie, and NMDVS Secretary Jack Fox cut a ribbon to officially dedicate the NMDVS RVCP office in Shiprock.

The New Mexico Department of Veterans' Services officially dedicated its Rural Veterans Coordination Program (RVCP) office in the Four Corners area on March 1.

NMDVS Secretary Jack Fox was joined by State Senator John Pinto, Navajo Nation Office of the President/Vice President Veterans' Liaison Jamescita Peshlakai, and other dignitaries and guests for a ribbon cutting at the office, located in the Northern Navajo Veterans Association Office in Shiprock.

"This office will help us achieve the mandate of this new program: Finding rural-area veterans and getting them registered with the VA and other agencies to get the benefits they have earned," said Secretary Fox at the ceremony. "We believe there are thousands of veterans throughout the state who are not registered with the VA and are not getting any benefits."

The NMDVS was only one of five recipients of a special RVCP grant issued by the VA to help service our nation's rural-area veterans. The agency's new program features RVCP offices created in five regions of the state: Southwest (Santa Clara), southeast (Roswell), central (Albuquerque), northeast (Las Vegas, NM)-- and the northwest office in Shiprock, which is managed by U.S. Army veteran Robertson Yazzie, who was introduced at the ceremony.

Each region's coordinator will actively go out in their areas to find veterans who have not enrolled with the VA. Though the focus of the grant is to find and assist veterans from the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and other recent global hot-spots, all veterans encountered by the coordinators will receive assistance. The coordinators will help guide veterans to the nearest NMDVS Veterans' Service Officer or appropriate local, state or federal agency according to the veterans' needs.



The latest VA data shows nearly 171,000 veterans in New Mexico--- with more than 9,500 veterans living in San Juan County, and just over 9,000 Native-American veterans living in the state.

NMDVS Attends Signing Ceremony for Navajo Veterans Act

New Mexico Department of Veterans' Services Secretary Jack Fox was among the dignitaries invited by the Navajo Nation Office of the President and Vice President to witness the signing of the **Navajo Veterans Act** at a special ceremony on February 13 at the Twin Arrows Casino & Resort in Flagstaff, AZ.

Navajo Nation President Russell Begaye and Vice President Jonathan Nez signed the legislation which establishes a revamped Navajo Veterans Administration and placing it under the direction of the Office of the President and Vice President.

The move will enhance the Navajo VA's outreach, services, and benefits to Navajo veterans. It also establishes a Veterans Advisory Council to provide direct veteran input and policy advice to the President.

The ceremony was one of five scheduled throughout the sprawling Navajo nation—which covers more than 27,400 square miles in parts of northeastern Arizona, northwestern New Mexico and southeastern Utah. On February 14, NMDVS Farmington-based **Veterans' Service Officer Beverly Charley** was invited to a signing ceremony in Crownpoint, NM.



New Mexico Department of Veterans' Services Secretary Jack Fox (back row, sixth from right) was among a handful of dignitaries invited by Navajo Nation President Russell Begaye (seated at far left) and Vice President Jonathan Nez (seated, second from left) for the signing of the Navajo Veterans Act on February 13 at the Twin Arrows Casino & Resort in Flagstaff, AZ.



New Mexico Department of Veterans' Services Veterans Service Officer Beverly Charley met Navajo Nation President Russel Begay (left picture) while representing the NMDVS at the February 14 signing of the Navajo Veterans Act in Crownpoint.

She was also busy assisting veterans (bottom photos) with their benefits concerns at an NDVS outreach table.



Governor Martinez Signs Five Veteran-Related Bills into State Law



Governor Susana Martinez, flanked by NMDVS Secretary Jack Fox (seated at right), New Mexico National Guard LTC Ken Nava (seated at left), and State Representative David Adkins (standing in gray suit) signs Senate Bill 153 into state law. The bill, which sought to make it easier for veterans to earn college credit for skills and training accumulated during military service, was one of five veteran-related bills signed into state law on March 26.

Governor Susana Martinez signed five veteran-related bills into state law at a special bill-signing ceremony on February 26 at American Legion Post 49 in Albuquerque.

The bills were sent to her desk after passing in the 2016 State Legislature which adjourned a week earlier.

House Bill 185, sponsored by State Representative David Adkins (R-Albuquerque), **will help fund local veterans' cemeteries** throughout the state by allowing taxpayers to voluntarily donate some or all of their state income tax refund into a fund that will help pay for rural veterans cemeteries.

"In a state as large and rural as ours, we need to ensure that more of our veterans can be laid to rest closer to home," Governor Martinez said. "New Mexicans have always stood ready to answer the call to serve our state and nation in the U.S. Armed Forces, and signing this bill will help provide more special final resting places befitting our veterans and their sacrifices."

Senate Bill 153, sponsored by State Senator Craig Brandt (R-Rio Rancho), will make it easier for veterans and service members to earn college credit for the skills and training they received in the military. The bill directs the Higher **Education Department to work with New Mexico's colleges** and universities to establish uniform standards for awarding college credit for military service.

House Bill 93, sponsored by State Representative Bob Wooley (R-Roswell), will improve the veteran procurement **preference for New Mexico's veteran-owned** small businesses that seek to secure state contracts.



House Bill 17, sponsored by State Representatives Stephanie Garcia Richard (D-Los Alamos), helps ensure veterans and their dependents qualify for **in-state tuition. The bill clarifies the word "veteran"** as any New Mexico resident who was enlisted, drafted, inducted or commissioned in the United States military.

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House Bill 156, sponsored by State Representative John Zimmerman (R-Las Cruces), establishes new awards to recognize the accomplishments of those who have served in the New Mexico National Guard or State Defense Force.

“I’m proud to sign these bills into law today because they will help us continue to do all we can to support our veterans and military service members,” Governor Martinez concluded. “These bills will help make New Mexico an even better place for veterans to live, work, raise a family, start a business, or get an education.”

Each of these bills passed both houses of the New Mexico Legislature with broad bipartisan support.



Governor Susana Martinez welcomes the crowd and the media at the February 26 bill-signing ceremony at American Legion Post 49 in Albuquerque.



Moments after signing HB-185 into state law—which creates a “check-off” box on state income tax refund forms for taxpayers to donate their refunds to the state veterans cemetery program—Governor Susana Martinez presented pens used to sign the legislation to NMDVS Deputy Secretary Alan Martinez (standing/accepting pen from the Governor) and NMDVS Secretary Jack Fox (seated at right). The Governor presented the pens as a token of her appreciation for the agency’s work on guiding the bill through the legislature.



Governor Susana Martinez beams while holding up the signed HB-185 legislation paperwork—saying “this will help provide more special final resting places befitting our veterans and their sacrifices.”



Governor Susana Martinez stayed for more than a half-hour to greet and chat with veterans at the February 26 bill-signing ceremony.

Veterans, NM National Guard Honored at 2016 New Mexico Legislature



New Mexico's military community was honored on *Military and Veterans Day at the Legislature* on February 15 at the New Mexico Legislature.

Lieutenant Governor John Sanchez joined New Mexico **Department of Veterans' Services Secretary Jack Fox** and New Mexico Adjutant General Andrew Salas at the annual ceremony in the Capitol Rotunda during the Legislature which honors the men and women of New Mexico who have served in the military.

He used his keynote address to thank all service members—past and present—for risking their lives when they enlist for military service.

“Every man and woman knows this risk exists when they raise their right hand to swear to serve and protect us when they enlist in the Armed Forces,” said Lt. Governor Sanchez. “Americans are forever grateful for these brave men and women who sign up and assume this risk. We know we would not be where we are today—the greatest country in the world--if not for generations of service by our service members.”

He also congratulated the New Mexico National Guard on the 100th anniversary of its first-ever federal activation. It was in March of 1916, said the Lt. Governor, when President Woodrow Wilson activated the New Mexico National Guard to help the U.S. Army pursue Mexican Revolutionary leader Pancho Villa and his men—who had just raided the town of Columbus and other towns in the area.

The Lt. Governor praised our state's first “citizen soldiers” for responding to that and other subsequent calls to action—through World War I to present-day Iraq and Afghanistan.

“To the men and women of the New Mexico National Guard, thank you for always standing ready to assist when called,” said the Lt. Governor. “It comforts me to know that we have men and women in a highly-trained, highly-professional military force—who might just be my neighbor, local business owner, teacher--ready to spring into action when called by our Governor or President.”

NMDVS Secretary Fox and NM Adjutant General Salas also outlined the history of service by The Guard—which he said actually traces back hundreds of year before New Mexico became our nation's 47th state just four years prior to this first federal activation.

“This sense of duty to our state actually traces back to our original native people—indigenous tribal warriors who resisted European advancement in this area,” said Secretary Fox in his remarks following the Lt. Governor. “Military service is a part of the fabric of what makes us New Mexicans. We're very proud of this.”

Adjutant General Salas praised the service of the Guard in more recent times—from World War II, to the more than 6,000 active-duty deployments made by New Mexico National Guard men and women since the Gulf War.

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“Many of our soldiers and airmen have served two...three...four...five or more deployments. The New Mexico National Guard has played an integral role in the Global War on Terror,” said General Salas. “It’s what we do. It’s what we are trained for. Our ‘citizen-soldiers’ will always be ready to serve at a moment’s notice.”

New Mexico Military & Veterans Day at the Legislature is the annual day during the legislature presented by the New Mexico Department of Veterans’ Services and the New Mexico Department of Military Affairs to honor military veterans and active-duty service members. Legislators who are also military veterans are also honored for their military service. There are currently sixteen veteran legislators: Twelve in the House of Representatives; four in the Senate. Each year during the ceremony, the two departments also shine the spotlight on a particular segment of the military community. This year’s honored segment was the New Mexico National Guard.



NMDVS Cabinet Secretary Jack Fox talks about the history of the New Mexico National Guard following the Keynote Address given by Lt. Governor John Sanchez. Secretary Fox outlined the history and accomplishments of the pre-colonial era until the end of WWI. New Mexico Adjutant General Andrew Salas followed Secretary Fox by highlighting the WWII-to-present accomplishments of the Guard.



Lt. Governor John Sanchez mingled with the crowd before delivering the Keynote Address at the annual Military & Veterans Day at the Legislature Ceremony on February 15.



Former “Philippine Scout” and Bataan Death March Survivor Atilano David (standing at left, in brown jacket) is acknowledged at the February 15 “Military & Veterans Day at the Legislature” ceremony.



More than thirty service organizations had informational booths in the east and west wings of the Capitol Rotunda.

Decorated WWII/Korean War Veteran Honored in His Hometown of Las Vegas



*Lt. Col. Miguel Encinias
(USAF/Retired)*

New Mexico Department of Veterans' Services Secretary Jack Fox was among the dignitaries celebrating the life at a public memorial service on March 7 in Las Vegas, N.M., for former U.S. Air Force Lt. Col. Miguel Encinias, who died on February 20 at the age of 92.

Lt. Col. Encinias was one of New Mexico's most highly decorated and accomplished veterans. The Las Vegas native was awarded three Distinguished Flying Crosses, 14 Air Medals, and two Purple Heart awards during his service as a fighter pilot in World War II and the Korean War.

Before his Korean War service and after retiring for good from the Air Force in 1968, he earned a Master's Degree in French from the Sorbonne in Paris, France...as well as two PhD's in Education and Hispanic Literature from the University of New Mexico. Dr. Encinias also taught French at the U.S. Air Force Academy and other colleges & universities here in New Mexico. He also helped

develop bilingual education programs and authored several books on New Mexico's history.

"Dr. Encinias had a tremendous career in the military—and an equally tremendous post-military career in the academic world," said Secretary Fox during the memorial ceremony. **"But above all, he will be remembered as a loving husband to his wife of 52-years--Jeanine—their adult children, step-children, and grandchildren. As with any great military veteran—as in any great man—THIS is his most important and lasting legacy."**



New Mexico Department of Veterans' Services Secretary Jack Fox presents a folded New Mexico flag to Jeannine Encinias, widow of retired U.S. Air Force Lt. Col. Miguel Encinias, at a March 7 memorial in observance of the passing of her husband.



Family members, friends, veterans, and citizens of Las Vegas, NM, attended a March 7 memorial for retired U.S. Air Force Lt. Col. Miguel Encinias. The highly-decorated former fighter pilot who served in WWII and the Korean War was buried with military honors at the Santa Fe National Cemetery.

NMDVS Hosts Veterans Town Hall Meetings in Ft. Stanton and Gallup

The New Mexico Department of Veterans' Services hosted veterans' cemetery town hall meetings in Gallup April 6 and Ft. Stanton on March 30 to provide status updates on efforts to build veterans' cemeteries in the two communities..

At the Ft. Stanton meeting, NMDVS Secretary Jack Fox was joined by NMDVS State Veterans Cemetery Program Director Tom Wagner and New Mexico General Services Department (GSD) Facilities Management Division Director George Morgan answered questions from the crowd gathered at the historic Ft. Stanton site.

Mr. Morgan told the audience the cemetery is on target for a March 15 completion date. He said that grading has already begun, and that construction of the administration building will soon begin. The projected completion date is the Spring of 2017.

Secretary Fox said the project will create 1,500 in-ground and columbarium burial spaces—and that there is more than enough adjoining land for future expansion. As for the existing Veterans & Merchant Marine cemetery, he also reassured the crowd that it will not go neglected.

“The old existing cemetery is very important to us. We will commit to maintain it,” said Secretary Fox. “We want to make it a continued place of honor and respect. I want to assure everyone it will remain a place worthy of those who served our country and are already buried there.”

The Ft. Stanton State Veterans Cemetery would be the first cemetery built under the State Veterans Cemetery Program, which was launched in 2013 by Governor Susana Martinez to build veterans cemeteries in rural areas of New Mexico.



NMDVS Cemetery Program Director Tom Wagner (standing, far left) NM General Services Department Facilities Management Division Director George Morgan (standing, center) and NMDVS Secretary Jack Fox (standing, far right) address the crowd at the March 30 Ft. Stanton Cemetery Town Hall Meeting.



Gallup Town Hall Meeting (Apr. 6)

The three officials also provided a status update for the proposed Gallup veterans cemetery at an April 6 meeting in Gallup at the El Morro Theater Annex.

When the VA approved funding for the Ft. Stanton cemetery, it also notified the state that an application for the Gallup cemetery was included in its list of approved-but-not-yet-funded cemetery sites.

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“Last December, the state acquired the property. This was an important first step,” said GSD Facilities Management Division Director George Morgan. “The next phase is to identify and acquire architectural and engineering firms to start the actual design steps. We are now in the (Request for Proposal) process.”

“You all have to understand—this is a long and detailed process to get a cemetery approved and then built by the VA,” said NMDVS Cemetery Program Director Tom Wagner. “We are proceeding now as planned, and are confident that this development process will continue to move forward.”

Once this process is complete, the next steps would be the awarding of the grant funding by the VA, and then the actual groundbreaking and construction phase. The projected completion date is November, 2018.



LEFT PHOTO: NMDVS Field Operations Director Ken Adair (far left, in brown coat), NMDVS Secretary Jack Fox (center, in red tie), NMDVS Rural Veterans Coordination Program Director Ed Mendez (to the left of Secretary Fox), GSD Facilities Management Division Director George Morgan (center-right, in dark suit), and NMDVS Deputy Secretary Alan Martinez (second from right, in lower-right corner) answered questions following the conclusion of the April 6 Gallup Veterans Cemetery Town Hall meeting.

RIGHT PHOTO: NMDVS Cemetery Program Director Tom Wagner also stayed after the meeting to answer questions from veterans.

DVS Dedicates New Gallup Field Office



The New Mexico Department of Veterans' Services formally dedicated the opening of its new field office in Gallup during an April 6 ribbon-cutting ceremony. The office is in the Ford Canyon Senior Center, located at 908 East Buena Vista Avenue.

On hand to cut the ribbon were *(from L to R)*: Albuquerque VA Native American Veterans Coordinator Jim Toya, NMDVS Secretary Jack Fox, State Senator Benny Shendo, Jr. (D-Jemez Pueblo), State Representative Patricia Lundstrom (D-Gallup), Gallup Mayor Jackie McKinney, NMDVS Veterans' Service Officer Tyrra Saavedra, NMDVS Field Operations Director Ken Adair, State Senator George Muñoz (D-Gallup), and Veterans Advisory Board Member Michael Kozeliski.

NMDVS Veterans' Service Officer Tyrra Saavedra is available on a limited schedule to help veterans and can be contacted for more information at tyrra.saavedra@state.nm.us or (505) 863-7457.

Retired Marine Sworn in As American Citizen; Also Honored for His Service in Vietnam

New Mexico Department of Veterans' Services Secretary Jack Fox was a guest speaker at the American Citizenship Ceremony of U.S. Marine Corps U.S. Master Sergeant Fofo Tulifua Tuitele on March 1 at the New Mexico Veterans Memorial in Albuquerque.

MSgt Tuitele was born in American Samoa before he and his family moved to California as a child. He enlisted with the Marine Corps shortly after graduating from high school, and served 22-years—including seeing combat action during the Vietnam War—before working for twenty years with the U.S Postal Service.

In addition to congratulating the 68-year old Rio Rancho resident on achieving his American citizenship, Secretary Fox also thanked him for his military service—and said he wanted to make up for the lack of appreciation for this service that MSgt. Tuitele had once mentioned to family and friends that he felt upon coming home from Vietnam.

“I would also like to now take this moment to correct a “wrong”...an injustice suffered by Master Sgt. Tuitele and hundreds of thousands of men who returned home from serving in Vietnam,” said Secretary Fox. “. Instead of returning to heartfelt thanks and appreciation for their service and sacrifice, our Vietnam Veterans were often greeted with scorn, ridicule and outright hostility. Master Sergeant Tuitele—today I say Thank You for your service and sacrifice...and Welcome Home.”



Retired U.S. Marine Corps MSgt Fofo Tulifua Tuitele (above photo, at right) was sworn in by Robert B. Looney of the Albuquerque Regional Office of U.S. Immigration Center on March 4 at the New Mexico Veterans Memorial in Albuquerque.



Retired U.S. Marine Corps MSgt Fofo Tulifua Tuitele was presented with a display box containing the awards and service medals he earned during his 20-years of service with the Marines.



New Mexico Department of Veterans' Services Secretary Jack Fox (right) congratulates retired U.S. Marine Corps MSgt Fofo Tulifua Tuitele moments after he was officially sworn in as an American citizen.

Vietnam Veterans Day Observed in New Mexico



Vietnam Veterans Day was observed in ceremonies in throughout New Mexico last month to commemorate 43rd anniversary of the pullout of the last American troops from the Vietnam War on March 29, 1973.

In Albuquerque, the day was remembered at a March 29 morning ceremony at the Raymond G. Murphy VA Medical Center auditorium (*left photo*). New Mexico **Department of Veterans' Services Secretary Jack Fox** had the honor of reading the official Vietnam Veterans Day Proclamation from Governor Susana Martinez, which thanked the service of the more than nine million Americans who served in the war, as well as remembering the 58,000 who lost their lives—including 399 from New Mexico.

The Keynote Speaker was Thomas Baca, a retired U.S. Army veteran Thomas Baca, who flew numerous helicopter missions during the war. As an added attraction, a restored Huey helicopter from the **Bernalillo County Sheriff's Department** was parked on the medical center's parade field—giving attendees a “hand-on” look at the aircraft that became famous as the workhorse of the war.

Later that day, NMDVS Secretary Fox read the Proclamation at a rededication ceremony of PNM's Veterans Memorial at its northeast heights office complex (*bottom two photos*). The Memorial, which was relocated from PNM's downtown complex a year ago, honors all men and women who have served in our nation's military—in all eras.

In Las Cruces, Vietnam Veterans Day was celebrated with a March 26 rededication ceremony of the **Vietnam War Memorial at the city's Veterans Memorial Park**. The memorial, which was dedicated last year, was finally completed a few weeks ago with the placement of a Huey helicopter as the finishing touch. Secretary Fox also had the honor of reading the Governor's Proclamation at the ceremony.





TOP PHOTO: NMDVS Secretary Jack Fox reads the Vietnam Veterans Day Proclamation from Governor Susana Martinez at the March 26 Vietnam Veterans Day ceremony in Las Cruces on March 26.

BOTTOM PHOTOS: The March 26 Vietnam Veterans Day rededication ceremony in Las Cruces marked the official unveiling of a restored “Huey” helicopter which was placed two weeks earlier atop the Vietnam War Memorial.



NMDVS FIELD OFFICES

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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