



# ***The Guardian***

***The Newsletter of the New Mexico Department of Veterans Services***

[www.nmdvs.org](http://www.nmdvs.org)

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**October, 2017**

## **VA Approves Funding for Gallup Cemetery; Groundbreaking Set for Oct. 25**



A 2 p.m. Groundbreaking Ceremony is scheduled on October 25, 2017 for the proposed State Veterans Cemetery located in Gallup—which has been approved for a \$6.7 million construction grant by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

The announcement comes as the result of an application submitted by the state to the VA's Cemetery Grants Program for the construction of VA-funded but state-managed veterans' cemeteries in Gallup and three other locations in New Mexico.

That application was submitted through the State Cemetery Program Initiative launched by Governor Susana Martinez in 2013 to build veterans cemeteries in rural areas located too far from the state's two existing national cemeteries in Santa Fe and Ft. Bayard.

The initiative, said New Mexico Department of Veterans' Services (DVS) Secretary Jack Fox, was proposed by the Governor to provide a more accessible final resting place for rural-area veterans.

"Veterans deserve to be laid to rest in a place befitting those who have sacrificed to serve and protect our country," said Secretary Fox. "We are extremely pleased with this announcement—and felt all along that the state made a strong case when it submitted the application to the VA. The Gallup Veterans Cemetery will make it easier for families of deceased veterans in western New Mexico to visit the gravesites of their departed loved ones."

In addition to Gallup, applications were also submitted for cemeteries to be built in Carlsbad, Angel Fire—and Ft. Stanton in southeastern New Mexico. Funding was approved by the VA for the Ft. Stanton cemetery two years ago. That cemetery is near completion, with a grand opening set for November 6. White Sands Construction, Inc., of Alamogordo has been selected as the lead construction firm to build the State Veteran Cemetery in Gallup, which will feature 443 in-ground crypts, 140 in-ground cremains gravesites, and 400 columbarium niches.

More than 15,000 veterans live in the four-county area surrounding Gallup. Families in the Gallup area who wish to bury a deceased veteran and/or a spouse must travel 200 miles to the Santa Fe National Cemetery in northern New Mexico, or nearly 270 miles to the Ft. Bayard National Cemetery in the southwestern part of the state.

New Mexico's veteran population is currently served by VA National cemeteries located at Fort Bayard and Santa Fe. Nearly 170,000 veterans live in New Mexico—with more than half living in rural areas far from the two existing national cemeteries.

## Ft. Stanton State Veterans Cemetery to Open Nov. 6

The Fort Stanton State Veterans Cemetery--New Mexico's first state-managed cemetery for honorably discharged veterans and their spouses—will have a grand opening ceremony on November 6 at 1:30pm.

The cemetery, located at 104 Kit Carson Road, features 650 in-ground crypts and 480 columbarium niches for cremated remains. It was built through an application sent by the state to the VA's Cemetery Grants Program which provides funding for VA-funded but state-managed cemeteries for rural areas. That application was submitted as the result of the State Cemetery Program Initiative launched by Governor Susana Martinez in 2013 to build veterans cemeteries in rural New Mexico which are located too far from the state's two existing national cemeteries in Santa Fe and Ft. Bayard in southwestern part of the state.



The new cemetery was built according to standards set by the VA for its 135 national cemeteries and—as with all four state veterans' cemeteries— will be managed by the New Mexico Department of Veterans Services. It is on land adjoining the existing Ft. Stanton Merchant Marine and Military Cemetery on the grounds of historic Ft. Stanton—which opened in 1855 as a territorial outpost of the U.S. Army.

## City of Carlsbad Transfers Land to the State of NM for the Carlsbad State Veterans Cemetery

Land for the proposed State Veterans Cemetery located in Carlsbad was officially transferred by the city of Carlsbad to the state of New Mexico—paving the way for planning and construction phases to proceed.

The 3.2-acre parcel is located in the undeveloped northeast corner of the Sunset Gardens Memorial Park. It will feature an estimated 300 in-ground crypts, 100 in-ground cremains gravesites, and 400 columbarium niches for cremains.

In 2014, the Governor announced that the first phase of the initiative would build cemeteries in Carlsbad, Ft. Stanton, Gallup, and Angel Fire. In 2015, the VA accepted all four applications for future funding—with Ft. Stanton, Gallup, and Angel Fire given a higher priority because land had already been transferred to the state. More than 13,000 veterans live in the three-county area surrounding Carlsbad. Currently families in Carlsbad who wish to bury a deceased veteran and/or a spouse must travel 275 miles to the Santa Fe National Cemetery or more than 300 miles to the Ft. Bayard National Cemetery.

With the completion of the four State Veteran Cemeteries along with the two VA National Cemeteries,

# Cremated Remains of Ten Veterans Laid to Rest at Forgotten Heroes Funeral



Governor Susana Martinez delivered the Eulogy ([left photo](#)) at a special Forgotten Heroes Funeral on September 22 at the Santa Fe National Cemetery for ten military veterans whose bodies, upon their deaths, were unclaimed by family members.

The nine men and one woman—from Bernalillo and Santa Fe Counties—received a formal military funeral through the Forgotten Heroes Burial Program. This unique program is a collaborative effort between the state and all thirty-three counties to provide a military funeral at the cemetery for any honorably discharged deceased veteran whose body goes unclaimed. Those

in attendance serve as the “family.”

“Today’s Forgotten Heroes Funeral ensures that these ten fallen veterans are NOT alone at the end” said Governor Martinez. “They are receiving the Final Salute befitting their status as a military veteran who served and protected us.”

The cremated remains of the following nine veterans from Bernalillo County were interred with full military honors: U.S. Navy AR Richard Brummett, U.S. Navy FR Edward Elspas, Navy SA Evelyn Moak, Army PV2 Ronald Norman, Army PFC Scott Palmer, Army PVT Richard Theado, Jr., Navy veteran (rank unknown), David Tidwell, Army PV1 Eddie K. Tunner, and Army veteran (rank unknown) Ray F. Wylie, Jr.

Also laid to rest was Army SGT Gordon Kurtz from Santa Fe County.



At the funeral, Albuquerque Raymond G. Murphy VA Medical Center Chaplain Matthew Cassady delivered a 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 U.S. Army veteran Orlando Montoya of Santa Fe.



General Nava presented Governor Martinez with the folded American Flag used in the funeral to cover the urns. The Governor gratefully accepted it on behalf of the citizens of New Mexico ([left photo](#)).

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.



## Active Duty, Veterans Enjoy Free Admission on Military & Veterans Day at the State Fair



Military veterans, Guard/Reserve and active-duty personnel enjoyed a free admission day on *Military and Veterans Appreciation Day at the New Mexico State Fair* on September 12.

The annual day at the fair is presented by the New Mexico Department of Veterans Services (DVS), the New Mexico National Guard, and the New Mexico State Fair to honor and thank the men and women of the United States Armed Forces for their service to our country. All current and former military personnel showing their DD-214, VA Health Card, veterans

designation driver's license, retiree ID card, or active-duty DoD card received free admission to the fair.

Nearly three dozen veterans' service agencies and organizations set up informational and interactive exhibits along "Main Street" for the veterans, their families and all fairgoers to stop by to gather information or get a "hands on" military experience.

At the annual 11am ceremony on the main stage, DVS Deputy Secretary Alan Martinez thanked veterans, and active duty service men and women for serving our country, saying "without your sacrifice, we would not be able to enjoy this day at the fair—or any of our freedoms we enjoy as Americans."



*Ninety-seven year old former Bataan Prisoner-of-War Bill Overmeier is escorted to his seat at the ceremony by New Mexico Army National Guard COL Steven Garcia. Mr. Overmeier—a 1937 graduate of Albuquerque High School—spent more than three brutal years imprisoned on Corregidor Island, Formosa, and Japan. He had joined the NM National Guard to help pay for his studies at the University of New Mexico.*

The ceremony also commemorated the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the beginning of the Bataan Death March. On April 9, 1942, 75,000 American & Filipino soldiers surrendered to Japanese forces which invaded the Philippines in a surprise attack four months earlier. The American servicemen—including 1,800 members of the New Mexico National Guard--had been in the Philippines for a training exercise. The 75,000 prisoners either kept in nearby brutal prison camps or were forced to march 60 torture-filled miles through the Bataan Peninsula to other brutal prison camps. Only half of the New Mexican prisoners-of-war were alive by the time Japan surrendered in September of 1945.

The ceremony concluded with a reading by members of the American Gold Star Mothers, Inc./New Mexico Chapter of the names of the 87 New Mexican service members killed in action since the Global War on Terror commenced shortly after the 2001 9/11 Terrorist Attacks.

# Ceremony Set to Transfer Management of the State Veterans Home from Dept. of Health to DVS

The transfer of the State Veterans Home in Truth or Consequences to the New Mexico Department of Veterans Services (DVS) will be celebrated at a special Veterans Day Ceremony.

The 11am ceremony on November 11 will mark the transfer of management to DVS from the New Mexico Department of Health (DOH), which had managed the facility since it became the state's first and only state veterans home in 1985. The home originally opened in 1937 as the Carrie Tingley Hospital for Crippled Children before closing in 1981 due to the opening of the current Carrie Tingley Hospital in Albuquerque.



The public is invited to attend the ceremony, which will also serve as the grand opening of a new \$23 million, 59-bed Alzheimer's & Long Term Assisted Care wing (*above photo*). The 68,000 square foot state-of-the-art facility features a 39-bed Alzheimer's unit, a 20-bed skilled nursing unit, a new rehabilitation section for inpatient and outpatient services, and a new pool heated by water supplied from a naturally occurring thermal spring.

Transition of management of the state veterans home was the result of a mutually agreed upon decision by DVS and DOH to help align state and federal resources and streamline the assistance process for veterans and their families. A bill authorizing the transfer passed unanimously in this year's legislative session and was signed into law by Governor Susana Martinez.

The transfer will make it easier for DVS to utilize its connections with the U.S Department of Veterans Affairs, the New Mexico VA Health Care System (NMVAHCS), the Albuquerque VA regional benefits office, and other federal, state, and local organizations to assist with care for residents. The transition also brings New Mexico in line with the model used by most states in the nation of management of state veterans' homes by state veterans' departments instead of state health departments.



**LEFT PHOTO:** On September 27, members of the Legislative Finance Committee took a tour of the State Veterans Home in Truth or Consequences.

*In this photo, State Rep. Patricia Lundstrom (D-McKinley & San Juan), the Committee Chair (far right, in black slacks), and State Sen. John Arthur Smith (D-Dona Ana, Luna, Hidalgo, & Sierra) (behind counter, in blue shirt), listen as Veterans Home Administrator Colleen Rundell (second from right, in white blouse) shows committee members a new kitchen in a "neighborhood" of the new Alzheimer's wing. Under supervision, able-bodied residents can do their own cooking, or participate with others in making a meal or snack.*



# Free Business Training Program in Roswell for Entrepreneurial-Minded Veterans & Spouses



Entrepreneurial-minded military veterans, National Guard/Reserve members, and their spouses are invited to attend a free *Boots to Business: Reboot* training program on November 2 in Roswell from 8am-3pm at the New Mexico Military Institute (NMMI), room DLC200.

This intensive two-step program provides veterans with an overview of business ownership as a career vocation, an outline and knowledge on the components of a business plan, a practical exercise in opportunity recognition, and an introduction to available public and private sector resources.

The Roswell Boots to Business: Reboot training program is presented through a cooperative effort by the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA), the New Mexico Veterans Business Outreach Center (VBOC), The Small Business Development Center (SBDC), SCORE, the Association of Women's Business Centers, Syracuse University's Institute for Veterans and Military Families, Cornell University, and Mississippi State University.

Step One is this Introduction to Entrepreneurship program taught by business advisors from the SBA and its partners.

Step Two is an online follow-up course taught by a consortium of professors and skilled business advisors from the SBA and its network of partners.

Though the seminar is free, pre-registration is required and can be done online at <https://sbavets.force.com/>. If you've already taken a Boots-to-Business course and would like to enroll in the Step Two online program, contact the SBA at [boot-to-business@sba.gov](mailto:boot-to-business@sba.gov).

For more information, contact Roswell-based VBOC Veterans Business Advisor Jim Cassidy at [jamesm.cassidy@state.nm.us](mailto:jamesm.cassidy@state.nm.us) or (575) 624-6002.

## **The New Mexico Veterans' Business Outreach Center**

The New Mexico Veterans' Business Outreach Center (VBOC) was created by the New Mexico Department of Veterans Services to help entrepreneurial-minded veterans or their spouses with their business development needs. It is funded by a grant from the U.S. Small Business Administration and was the first such state-funded center in the nation created specifically to help veterans.

New Mexico's VBOC is located in DVS Albuquerque Northeast Heights office, but provides service to any veteran statewide. For more information, contact VBOC Director Rich Coffel at (505) 383-2401 or [rich-ardl.coffel@state.nm.us](mailto:rich-ardl.coffel@state.nm.us) or go to [www.nmvboc.org](http://www.nmvboc.org).



**VBOC/DVS**  
**Albuquerque NE Heights Office**  
 5201 Eagle Rock Ave. NE  
 2nd Floor/Suite 2A  
 (505) 383-2401

## Stand Downs For Homeless Veterans to be Hosted in Five New Mexico Communities

Homeless and near-homeless veterans can get free clothing, backpacks, blankets, meals, health screening, and help from numerous services agencies at "Stand Downs" for homeless veterans this month in New Mexico. New Mexico Department of Veterans Services representatives will be at the following Stand Downs to provide assistance with filing for VA or state veterans' benefits:

<b>Farmington</b>	<b>Oct. 13</b>	San Juan College Health & Human Performance Center (4601 College Blvd.) <i>More info: DVS Veterans Service Officer Beverly Charley (505) 327-2861</i>	8am-2:30pm
<b>Albuquerque</b>	<b>Oct. 26</b> <b>Oct. 27</b>	The Rock at Noonday (2400 2 <sup>nd</sup> Ave. NE) " " <i>More Info: Elinor Reiners (505) 265-0512</i>	9am-2pm *9am-Noon <i>*(non-veterans welcome)</i>
<b>Las Cruces</b>	<b>Oct. 27</b>	American Legion Post 10 (1185 E. Madrid Ave.) <i>More Info: Andrea Sandoval (575) 642-1872</i>	8am-2pm
<b>Santa Fe</b>	<b>Nov. 3-4</b>	Rancho Viejo Church (62 Avan Nu Po Rd.) <i>More Info: Phillip Chavez (505) 988-6562</i>	8am-3pm both days

## DVS Fills Field Operations Director Vacancy



Larry Campos has been named Field Services Director for the New Mexico Department of Veterans Services. He will supervise the agency's twelve field offices throughout the state. He comes to DVS from the New Mexico Department of Workforce Solutions, where he served the past six years as the Area Director for the Northern Area NM Workforce Connection, overseeing administration of a Workforce Connection Youth Career Center program at local high schools to provide youth opportunities to develop into productive citizens.

He previously served as the DWS State Veteran's Coordinator, and as the Local Veterans Employment Representative (LVER) and the Workforce Investment Act Coordinator at the Artesia and Carlsbad One Stop Career Centers. As the State Veterans Coordinator, he managed eighteen Local Veterans Employment Representatives (LVER), and nine Disabled Veterans Outreach Program (DVOP) specialists. The native of Artesia is a 1975 graduate of the New Mexico Military Institute. Commissioned a Second Lieutenant in the Army Reserves, he was soon activated and served as a commissioned officer in various assignments which included Platoon Leader, Company Executive Officer, Company Commander, Squadron Commander, Research and Development Officer, and Military Intelligence Officer, before retiring from the Army as a Major on September 1, 1994.

Mr. Campos has an Associate's Degree from the New Mexico Military Institute, a Bachelor's Degree in Organizational Management from Southwest Texas State University, and a Master's Degree in Social Work from New Mexico Highlands University. He is also a graduate of the U.S. Army's Command and General Staff College. Mr. Campos is based in the DVS Albuquerque Northeast Heights Office and can be contacted at [larry.campos@state.nm](mailto:larry.campos@state.nm) or (505) 383-2417.

## American Legion, DAV Both Elect First-Ever Woman National Commanders



*Denise Rohan addresses American Legion members for the first time after she was elected national commander of the organization on August 24 in Reno, NV. (NIKKI WENTLING/STARS AND STRIPES)*

*(story courtesy of Stars and Stripes)*

Hundreds of veterans paraded through a large convention hall in Reno, NV on August 24 to Sister Sledge's *We are Family*--arms wrapped around one another--as the American Legion, a 99-year-old organization representing two million veterans, elected its first female national commander at the conclusion of its annual convention.

Denise Rohan, an Army veteran living in Wisconsin, now leads what President Donald Trump just called "a very powerful organization." She will represent the Legion for one year, traveling the country to visit posts and testifying before Congress.

"When our organization was started back in 1919, our founders said, 'A veteran is a veteran,'" Commander Rohan

said. "So ever since then, women have been part of our organization. Women could vote for national commander of the American Legion before they could vote for president of the United States, and there are females leading this organization across the nation. I just happen to be the lucky one that gets to do this."

Disabled American Veterans elected its first female commander, Army veteran Delphine Metcalf-Foster, on August 1. Before this month, the only other female commander of a major national veterans organization was Mary Stout, who led Vietnam Veterans of America in 1987 when the organization had about 30,000 members.

Together, Commanders Rohan and Metcalf-Foster represent 3.3 million veterans nationwide.

### **First denied, now in charge**

In 1980, an American Legion recruiter knocked on Mrs. Rohan's door to ask her husband, Mike, to join the local post. The couple met while serving in the Army. When she asked to join the post, she was told to instead join the American Legion Auxiliary--the Legion's group for veterans' spouses. She told that story before the thousands of veterans gathered for the Legion's annual convention with the message to not exclude female veterans.

"Here I am today, the newly elected national commander of the largest veterans service organization in this nation," Commander Rohan said. "And that post that denied me membership 37 years ago? Well, they have a picture of me up in their post with a sign under it that says, 'She could have been a member here.' Remember: Women are veterans too."

Commander Rohan, 61, joined the American Legion in Sun Prairie, WI in 1984 and held leadership positions there and in nearby Verona. During her nomination process, hundreds of Wisconsin veterans held onto fans bearing her photo and waved them wildly each time a state's delegation voted for her. As national commander, she sets the theme for the year--choosing *Family First*, with a renewed focus on supporting families of deployed service members.

*(continued)*





**Delphine Metcalf-Foster**  
*DAV National Commander*

“The American Legion needs to step up, find out who those families are, and make sure we’re there for them,” she said. “It’s a matter of national security.”

Commander Rohan talked about some of the Legion’s success this year, including advocacy for legislation that President Trump signed onstage at the Reno convention which aims to shorten the amount of time veterans wait to hear decisions on their claims for Department of Veterans Affairs benefits and health care. *(details on next page)*

She also praised the new “Forever GI Bill,” signed earlier this month, which eliminates a 15-year cap on veterans to tap into their education benefits. The American Legion was one of a handful of veterans organizations that championed the measure. By the time Commander Rohan herself was ready to go back to school after her military service, she had only one month remaining of GI Bill eligibility.

“I love the fact that just got passed,” Rohan said. “I can appreciate that.”

### **DAV Commander Metcalf-Foster: “Expanding Services for Women”**

DAV Commander Metcalf-Foster, 74, remembers sitting on her father’s lap at their home in Vallejo, CA, as a young child while he showed off photos of his experience as a Buffalo soldier in the Spanish-American War. Though her father was 70 when she was born and died when she was 7, Commander Metcalf-Foster said she can still recall the pride he showed while telling her about his time in the military. She said it’s a reason she became a nurse, and then joined the Army at 34, when she was married with children.

“My father was so proud of me,” she said. “He’d always tell me, ‘You have to do something to help people.’ I remembered that as I got older.”

Commander Metcalf-Foster served in the Army for 21 years. In 1991, a nerve was cut in her leg while she was in Saudi Arabia as part of Desert Storm/Desert Shield. She joined Disabled American Veterans when she was discharged in 1992, after a DAV member approached her unit to tell the service members about the group.

In 2004, Commander Metcalf-Foster was elected the first female state commander of the DAV in California. As the first female national commander, she wants to bring attention to issues specific to women at the VA—and she’s already had some success. Years ago, when she went to the VA for a knee replacement, she asked her doctor if they had a gender-specific knee replacement implant.

“The surgeon looked at me and said, ‘Excuse me?’” recalled Commander Metcalf-Foster. “I took this issue up with my Washington, D.C., staff, and they jumped right on it. We got resolutions and worked with the VA to ensure there are gender-specific prosthetics.”

The DAV will advocate for an expansion of obstetrics and gynecology services at the VA, said Commander Metcalf-Foster. A major focus for the organization over the past year has been to extend VA caregiver benefits to veterans injured before the 9/11 Terrorist Attacks. The VA currently offers compensation and other support services to caregivers of post-9/11 veterans. The Commander said this advocacy will continue.

“We’re fighting to get that changed,” she said. “The groundwork has been laid. I’m just continuing what our great organization has done.”

## President Trump Signs Bill to Overhaul Process for Denied VA Claims Appeals



**VA Secretary  
Dr. David Shulkin**

**For more news from the VA  
and for benefits  
information, visit  
[www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov)**

**The VA has a Regional  
Benefits Office in  
Albuquerque.  
For more information:  
[www.benefits.va.gov/  
albuquerque](http://www.benefits.va.gov/albuquerque)**

**For information about VA  
health care, visit the  
website of the New  
Mexico VA Health Care  
System at:  
[www.albuquerque.va.gov](http://www.albuquerque.va.gov)**

President Donald Trump signed a bill which will provide veterans more options to appeal denied claims for Department of Veterans Affairs benefits.

The President signed the *Veterans Appeals Improvement and Modernization Act* during his appearance at the annual National American Legion Conference on August 23. Currently, the appeals process can leave veterans waiting for an average of five years for a decision. The Legion was one of the groups that supported the overhaul.

During a speech before the signing, the President touted the legislation as “historic.”

“Veterans will receive timely updates, and they will get decisions much more quickly in a fraction of the time,” said President Trump.

The bill creates three paths for veterans to appeal their claims:

- Take their appeal directly to the Board of Veterans’ Appeals.
- Request a higher-level VA adjudicator to decide the case.
- Appeal, with new information, to the same adjudicator who denied their claim.

VA officials said it would take 18 months to establish the new system.

The bill also directs the VA be more transparent with veterans about the status of their appeals. Some veterans have criticized the VA for going years without giving them an update.

VA Secretary Dr. David Shulkin listed appeals reform as one of his top priorities. At his confirmation hearing in February, he called the current system “broken.” In previous years, former VA Secretary Bob McDonald lobbied for the reform, but it never gained traction in Congress.

The legislation does not address the backlog of appeals.

As the VA attempts to work through pending and backlogged claims more quickly, the number of appeals is expected to increase. About 12 percent of benefits decisions are appealed, according to the VA.

The VA now has nearly 340,000 pending claims for benefits, and 83,000 backlogged, meaning veterans have been waiting for decisions for longer than 125 days.

Secretary Shulkin teased Wednesday that he would announce details of a new program next month called “decision-ready claims,” which comes with the promise of deciding claims within 30 days of filing.

# VA Unveils Claims Submission Option That Promises to Complete Claims within 30 Days



The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has unveiled its *Decision Ready Claims (DRC)* initiative--a disability claims submission option with accredited Veterans Service Organizations (VSO) that promises to deliver faster claims decisions to veterans and their families.

Veterans who choose to submit their claim under DRC can expect to receive a decision within 30 days from the time VA receives the claim. VSOs will ensure all supporting evidence — such as medical exams, military service records, etc. — is included with the claim submission. This advance preparation by the VSOs allows claims to be assigned immediately to claims processors for a quick decision.

The VA will work closely with participating VSOs to make sure they are properly trained in this new process and given the tools they need to participate successfully in the program. While DRC is currently limited to claims for increased compensation (commonly known as claims for increase) and requires veterans to work with VSO's, the goal is to expand the types of claims accepted under the initiative and allow veterans other options to submit their claim under DRC.

## VA to Make Beds Available to Non-Veteran Nursing Home Residents Displaced by Hurricane Irma

VA Secretary Dr. David J. Shulkin announced that VA is making beds available, where possible, to non-Veteran nursing home residents affected by Hurricane Irma, which ravaged most of the state of Florida when it made landfall on September 10.

The VA has the ability to make its facilities available to non-veterans as part of its “fourth mission” to support national, state and local emergency management, public health, safety and homeland security efforts, and also through a mission assignment under the *Stafford Act*. The Stafford Act is a 1988 amended version of the Disaster Relief Act of 1974 designed to bring an orderly and systemic means of federal natural disaster assistance for state and local governments in carrying out their responsibilities to aid citizens.



Secretary Shulkin agreed, where practical, to make beds that are not being used by veterans available to non-veteran nursing home residents as needed, while ensuring VA continues its primary mission of providing health care to veterans. The VA is also working closely with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), and state and local partners on the overall response to Irma, in addition to this specific issue.

“We will continue to look for ways to relieve the hardship this powerful storm has caused,” Secretary Shulkin said. “Much of the heavy lifting to recover from the hurricane is still to come, and our staff is determined to find as many ways as we can for VA to help .”

More information on the VA's response to Hurricanes Irma and Harvey can be found at <https://www.va.gov/>.



# NMDVS Monthly Health/Safety Tip: Fall Safety Tips

*Courtesy of Quicken Loans Zing Blog-Victoria Araj*



Fall is officially here! The crisp weather and color-changing leaves make it a great time to spruce up your home, go for a drive, walk your pets or cozy up indoors. But with all those things comes the potential for danger. It's important to be aware of your surroundings whether you live in the country or the city.

Here are some autumn safety tips for your family, home, car, and pets, to insure you have a safe and enjoyable fall season.

## **Personal Tips**

- Get a flu shot. Even though you could still get sick after getting the shot, the vaccine can provide protection against severe complications from the flu.
- Wash your hands. One of the best ways to avoid getting sick is to wash them regularly and thoroughly. Use hot water, plenty of soap, and wash for at least 30 seconds.
- If you're a workaholic and get sick, avoid going to work and spreading it to your team. Your boss and coworkers will thank you because group productivity won't be at risk. It's easier to deal with one person away from the office than several, all because you coughed on them.
- When you're outside and it's chilly, wear a jacket. It sounds pretty basic, but you'd be surprised how many people think they're "tough guys" walking around in a t-shirt when it's 40 degrees out.
- Raking leaves? Prevent back injuries by standing upright while raking and pull from your arms and legs. Don't overfill leaf bags, and when picking them up, bend at the knee and use your legs, not your back, for support.
- If you use a leaf blower, shield yourself. Wear appropriate clothing, eye protection, and work boots to prevent injury.
- Do not allow children to play in leaf piles near the curb. The piles can obstruct the view of drivers and put your child at risk for getting hit, especially since it gets dark outside earlier.

## **Home Safety**

- Every month should be fire prevention month, but we tend to plug in a lot more devices in the fall and winter. It's important to test all smoke alarms and have a family fire drill. Remember to replace used and expired fire extinguishers as well.
- Turn your heater on before the temperatures really plummet so you can ensure it works. Contact a technician to inspect that it's operating properly if you suspect it needs servicing.
- Keep all flammable materials away from your furnace. This includes clothing, paint products, toxic materials, cardboard and more.
- If you use a portable or space heater, keep it away from clothing, bedding, drapery and furniture. Remember to shut them off if you leave the house and don't leave them unattended if you have children or pets.
- Do not use your space heater as a dryer for hats, gloves and other articles of clothing.
- If you have a fireplace, inspect the chimney to confirm it is free of debris, creosote buildup, and is unobstructed so combustibles can vent. Make sure the bricks, mortar and liner are in good condition.
- Do not warm your kitchen with a gas range or an open oven door, as this can lead to toxic air that is not safe to breathe.

*(continued)*

- Keep matches, lighters and candles out of the reach of children and pets.
- When burning a candle, don't leave them unattended, burning near other flammable items or on an unsteady surface.
- Doing laundry? Avoid fires by cleaning filters after each load of wash and removing lint that collects in dryer vents.
- Do a quick check for areas that may need repair before extreme weather hits: Unsteady roof shingles, warped windowsills and concrete that might be sloping toward the house.
- Check all outdoor lighting fixtures to make sure they are working properly. This can safeguard you against falls and neighborhood crime.
- Clean your gutters by removing all debris and leaves.
- Before burning leaves, check your city's regulations, as it may be illegal where you live. If you burn them, do so away from the house and use proper containers.

### **Car/Driving Safety Tips**

- With fewer hours of daylight, it can be difficult to see pedestrians or cyclists clearly, so if you don't have automatic headlights, make sure they are on at the onset of dusk.
- In the mornings, the sun can be extremely bright, making it difficult to see brake lights ahead. Keep a pair of sunglasses in your car to reduce glare and protect your vision.
- Temperatures can also affect driving performance. Clear your windshield of frost before beginning your journey and turn on your defogger if necessary. Frost can also form on the road surface without being visible, so be cautious in wooded areas, bridges and overpasses, where ice can quickly develop. Remember, leaves + rain can also make for a very slippery surface!
- Keep an emergency kit in your trunk. Some can be found in stores already pre-made for convenience, but if you want to create your own, be sure to include a flashlight, first-aid kit, jumper cables, windshield washer fluid and basic tools. You might even consider purchasing a car battery charger if you have a long commute each day.
- There's a popular saying: "Don't veer for deer"--meaning, don't suddenly swerve. You could lose control of the car quickly, especially if you are on a curve or narrow road with little to no shoulder. Instead, brake firmly with both hands on the wheel to come to a controlled stop.

### **Pets**

- If your pets spend a lot of time outdoors or live outside, make sure that they are fed more often during cooler weather to help them retain body heat. If you live in a more rural area, and own farm animals like horses, have a place where non-frozen water is accessible to them.
- While many mushrooms are non-toxic, some are poisonous for dogs and it's difficult to tell the difference. To avoid mushroom poisoning, walk them in areas that do not have fungi growing, and if you see your pet ingest one, call your local animal poison control center or ASPCA immediately.
- It's apple-picking season! Thinking of bringing your pets to the cider mill? Watch that they don't eat apple stems, leaves or seeds, as they can cause vomiting, diarrhea, respiratory problems, coma and possibly death, if too much is consumed.
- Since pests tend to seek shelter from the cold indoors, you may decide to use some type of pest control chemical to keep them at bay. If you use them, particularly ones to kill rodents (rodenticides), keep them away from your pets, as even a small dose can be fatal, especially for dogs, if not treated immediately.

Make the fall season a happy and safe one by being prepared, having a high level of awareness and knowing the right resources to contact if you're in doubt of what to do.

# NMDVS FIELD OFFICES

There are New Mexico Department of Veterans Services (DVS) field 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 their veterans benefits needs

Below are the DVS field offices (LISTED IN ALL CAPITAL LETTER HEADINGS) and outreach locations (*shown in italicized headings with an asterisk*). Please contact your nearest office to set up an appointment.

ALAMOGORDO	ALBUQUERQUE #1	ALBUQUERQUE #2
(vacant) For assistance, call the NMDVS Las Cruces office at (575) 524-6220 or 6124	<b>Theresa Zuni</b> 500 Gold Ave. SW (505) 346-4810 <a href="mailto:theresa.zuni@state.nm.us">theresa.zuni@state.nm.us</a>	<b>Gordon Schei</b> 5201 Eagle Rock Ave. NE (505) 383-2404 <a href="mailto:gordon.schei@state.nm.us">gordon.schei@state.nm.us</a>
<i>Anthony*</i>	<i>Artesia*</i>	<i>Aztec*</i>
(Las Cruces Office Outreach) <b>George Vargas</b> (575) 524-6124 <a href="mailto:george.vargas@state.nm.us">george.vargas@state.nm.us</a>	(Carlsbad Office Outreach) <b>Dagmar Youngberg</b> (575) 885-4939 <a href="mailto:dagmar.youngberg@state.nm.us">dagmar.youngberg@state.nm.us</a>	(Farmington Office Outreach) <b>Beverly Charley</b> (505) 327-2861 <a href="mailto:beverly.charley@state.nm.us">beverly.charley@state.nm.us</a>
CARLSBAD	<i>Clayton*</i>	CLOVIS
<b>Dagmar Youngberg</b> 101 N. Halagueno (575) 885-4939 <a href="mailto:dagmar.youngberg@state.nm.us">dagmar.youngberg@state.nm.us</a>	(Raton Office Outreach) <b>Gary Fresquez</b> (575) 445-8282 <a href="mailto:gary.fresquez@state.nm.us">gary.fresquez@state.nm.us</a>	<b>Matthew Barela</b> 904 W. 6th Street (575) 762-6185 <a href="mailto:matthew.barela@state.nm.us">matthew.barela@state.nm.us</a>
<i>Cuba*</i>	<i>Deming*</i>	<i>Española*</i>
(Albuquerque Office Outreach) <b>Gordon Schei</b> (505) 383-2409 <a href="mailto:gordon.schei@state.nm.us">gordon.schei@state.nm.us</a>	(Santa Clara Office Outreach) <b>Bradley Brock</b> (575) 912-3166 <a href="mailto:bradleya.brock@state.nm.us">bradleya.brock@state.nm.us</a>	Outreach temporarily halted due to Taos office vacancy. For help, please call the main Santa Fe office toll-free @ 1-(866) 433-8387
FARMINGTON	GALLUP	GRANTS
<b>Beverly Charley</b> 101 West Animas/Room 104 (505) 327-2861 <a href="mailto:beverly.charley@state.nm.us">beverly.charley@state.nm.us</a>	(vacant) For assistance, call the NMDVS Grants office at (505) 287-8387	<b>Tyrre Saavedra</b> 515 East High St.. (505) 287-8387 <a href="mailto:tyrre.saavedra@state.nm.us">tyrre.saavedra@state.nm.us</a>
HOBBS	<i>Holloman AFB*</i>	LAS CRUCES #1
Dalton Boyd 2120 N. Alto Street (575) 397-5290 <a href="mailto:dalton.boyd@state.nm.us">dalton.boyd@state.nm.us</a>	For assistance, call the NMDVS Las Cruces office at (575) 524-6220 or 6124	J.R. Turner 2024 E. Griggs Ave. (575) 524-6220 <a href="mailto:jr.turner@state.nm.us">jr.turner@state.nm.us</a>



<b>LAS CRUCES #2</b>	<b>LAS VEGAS (NM)</b>	<b>Lordsburg*</b>
<b>George Vargas</b> 2024 E. Griggs Ave. (575) 524-6124 <a href="mailto:george.vargas@state.nm.us">george.vargas@state.nm.us</a>	<b>Karen Abeyta</b> 917 Douglas Avenue (505) 454-0068 <a href="mailto:karen.abeyta@state.nm.us">karen.abeyta@state.nm.us</a>	(Santa Clara Office Outreach) <b>Bradley Brock</b> (575) 912-3166 <a href="mailto:bradleya.brock@state.nm.us">bradleya.brock@state.nm.us</a>
<b>Los Lunas*</b>	<b>Mora*</b>	<b>Quemado*</b>
(Albuquerque #1 Office Outreach) <b>Theresa Zuni</b> (505) 346-4810 <a href="mailto:theresa.zuni@state.nm.us">theresa.zuni@state.nm.us</a>	(Las Vegas, NM Office Outreach) <b>Karen Abeyta</b> (505) 454-0068 <a href="mailto:karen.abeyta@state.nm.us">karen.abeyta@state.nm.us</a>	(Santa Clara Office Outreach) <b>Bradley Brock</b> (575) 912-3166 <a href="mailto:bradleya.brock@state.nm.us">bradleya.brock@state.nm.us</a>
<b>RATON</b>	<b>Reserve*</b>	<b>ROSWELL</b>
<b>Gary Fresquez</b> 200 N. 3rd St. (575) 445-8282 <a href="mailto:gary.fresquez@state.nm.us">gary.fresquez@state.nm.us</a>	(Santa Clara Office Outreach) <b>Bradley Brock</b> (575) 912-3166 <a href="mailto:bradleya.brock@state.nm.us">bradleya.brock@state.nm.us</a>	(vacant) For assistance, call the NMDVS Carlsbad office at (575) 885-4939
<b>Ruidoso*</b>	<b>SANTA CLARA (Grant County)</b>	<b>Santa Rosa*</b>
For assistance, call the NMDVS Las Cruces office at (575) 524-6220 or 6124	<b>Bradley Brock</b> 11990 U.S. Hwy 180 East (575) 912-3166 <a href="mailto:bradleya.brock@state.nm.us">bradleya.brock@state.nm.us</a>	(Las Vegas, NM Office Outreach) <b>Karen Abeyta</b> (505) 454-0068 <a href="mailto:karen.abeyta@state.nm.us">karen.abeyta@state.nm.us</a>
<b>SANTA FE</b>	<b>Socorro*</b>	<b>Sunland Park*</b>
<b>Jeff George</b> 301 W. DeVargas St/Suite 2A (505) 476-7903 <a href="mailto:jeff.george@state.nm.us">jeff.george@state.nm.us</a>	(ABQ #1 Office Outreach) <b>Theresa Zuni</b> (505) 841-5346 <a href="mailto:theresa.zuni@state.nm.us">theresa.zuni@state.nm.us</a>	(Las Cruces Office Outreach) <b>George Vargas</b> (575) 524-6124 <a href="mailto:george.vargas@state.nm.us">george.vargas@state.nm.us</a>
<b>TAOS</b>	<b>Truth or Consequences*</b>	<b>Tucumcari*</b>
(vacant) For assistance, call the NMDVS Las Vegas office at (505) 454-0068 or Raton at (575) 445-8282	(Las Cruces Office Outreach) <b>JR Turner</b> (575) 524-6220 <a href="mailto:jr.turner@state.nm.us">jr.turner@state.nm.us</a>	(Las Vegas, NM Office Outreach) <b>Karen Abeyta</b> (505) 454-0068 <a href="mailto:karen.abeyta@state.nm.us">karen.abeyta@state.nm.us</a>